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**An international education in dance: Personal narratives of seven  
women from the southern Mediterranean region**

Rosemary Martin

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Dance Studies, The University of Auckland, 2012.

## **Abstract**

This research critically reflects on international education in dance, specifically focusing on the personal narratives and journeys of seven female contemporary dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean region. These women, from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Malta, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Syria, all trained in contemporary dance in Western cultural contexts and then returned home to teach, perform or create dance in various ways. The key question prompting this research is: how has the experience of training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context affected the dance practices of seven female dancers from the southern Mediterranean? From this starting point further questions are also explored, such as: why did these dance practitioners train in contemporary dance abroad, where did they go and what influenced their decisions? Conversely, why did they return home and what influenced this decision? What were their experiences of receiving contemporary dance training in a different cultural context and how were their experiences similar or diverse? How has the experience of international education in dance affected their notions of identity, place and home? How do they approach dance in their home environments once they return? This multi-sited ethnographic research was gathered over a year long period that I, the researcher, spent travelling across the southern Mediterranean region. Through in-depth personal narratives and detailed observations diverse experiences of dance learning are shared, illuminating how an international education in dance can foster feelings of alienation as well as transformation. The women's experiences highlight how artistic practices can be affected by learning in Western cultural contexts in assorted ways, and reveal approaches that express cultural hegemony, counter-hegemony and anti-hegemony within pedagogic, choreographic and creative, and somatic practices. This research provides an articulation and critical reflection of the attitudes and experiences of the seven female dance practitioners, contributing to the knowledge and understandings of international education in dance, and dance within the southern Mediterranean region.

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## **Images**

Image 1: Dalia El Abd

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\*All images have been generously given for publication in this thesis by the participants involved in this research.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Walking into the dance studio at the Cairo Opera House for the first time, I was struck by how similar it was to every other dance studio I had ever been to during my dancing life. The cool air-conditioning contrasted with the dry and dusty afternoon heat outside. The dancers lounged casually at the periphery of the space wearing an assortment of dance attire, some chatted to each other while stretching out muscles, others talked on their mobile phones or listened to their iPods, some lay on the studio floor, eyes closed for a brief moment of rest. When the class started, I sat to one side of the studio, trying to remain as inconspicuous as possible. As the teacher began to take the group through a series of exercises based on Graham technique,<sup>1</sup> I thought back to my own dance training in New Zealand where I too performed similar routines. It was when the teacher suggested to the class “pretend you are in New York”, perhaps to encourage or motivate another ounce of enthusiasm from the students, that I was led to wonder about dance learning between locations. Cairo and New York seemed to me to be very different cultural contexts, yet for the duration of this dance class I felt like there was nothing, besides the smattering of Arabic words shared between the dancers, which indicated that we were in Cairo.

At the end of the class the teacher and I spoke briefly. She told me that she spent several years training and performing in New York before returning home to Cairo. I was intrigued. I wondered what it had been like for her to go from Cairo to New York to train. Had she always wanted to go to New York? And if so, why? What had it been like for her to then return home? Had it been by choice, or would she rather have stayed in New York? Is this why she teaches Graham technique here? Does she teach any other sort of dance? How has her home environment accommodated, adapted or rejected her dance practices? How had the interchange between cultures and environments affected her self-identity, and the way she teaches, performs or creates dance? I hurriedly scribbled down questions in my notebook, hoping that I could soon find out more.

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<sup>1</sup> *Graham technique* is a codified dance vocabulary developed by American dancer, choreographer and teacher Martha Graham. This technique focuses on concepts such as release, contraction, fall and recovery in movement. Graham technique is considered by some to have revolutionized Western modern dance practices (Bannerman, 1999).

## **1.1 The research question**

This research critically reflects on international education in dance, specifically focusing on the personal narratives and journeys of seven female dance practitioners in the southern Mediterranean region. The key question motivating this research is: how has the experience of training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context affected the dance practices of seven female dancers from the southern Mediterranean region?

This starting point has unavoidably raised further questions, such as, why did these dance practitioners leave their home countries to train in contemporary dance abroad? Where did they go and what influenced their decisions? Conversely, why did they return to their home environment and what influenced their decision to return? What were their experiences of receiving contemporary dance training in a different cultural context and how were their experiences similar or diverse from each other? How do they approach dance in their home environments once they return? How do these dance practitioners who have spent significant periods of time between locations, cultures and contexts view their dance practices ‘fitting’ within their home environment? Do they feel the need to be cultural or social ambassadors when abroad (Jeyasingh, 1998)? Do they feel a social responsibility to develop dance in their home locations? How does the socio-cultural context in which they are working in impact on their dance practices and experiences? How does the experience of international education in dance affect their self-identities, and how does it affect the ways they teach, perform or create dance?

While the notional questions presented in the opening of this thesis have directed my research inquiry, the study has been further stimulated by my own experience as a dancer and teacher working in diverse cultural contexts, in both my home environment and abroad. It has also been influenced by my time teaching and researching dance in the southern Mediterranean region, where I have been fortunate enough to be immersed within the dancing lives of the seven dance practitioners who have shared their journeys with me.

### *1.1.1 Why seven women’s narratives?*

This study explores the research questions through a comprehensive investigation and

examination of the experiences of seven female dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean region – from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Malta, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Syria – who have received their formative training in contemporary dance abroad – in England, Germany, France and the United States of America – and then returned home to perform, teach and create dance. Choosing to focus only on female dance practitioners’ experiences was a conscious decision made early within the research process, in part to provide parameters for the study. Women were also selected as the participants in this investigation because as a female researcher I felt that it could be simpler to meet and develop relationships that might be viewed as more culturally acceptable.<sup>2</sup>

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 southern Mediterranean region. Frequently portraying women in this region as passive victims, there has often been a desire from Western media sources, scholars, anthropologists and writers to ‘liberate’ these women. This research intends to circumvent falling into a narrow viewpoint, such as “‘misery research’ and ‘dignity research’” (Tohidi, 1998, p.277), while also taking care to avoid moving too far in the opposite direction, where a one-sided understanding is over compensated and generalizations are made. Recent scholarship (Boxberger, 1998; Hoodfar, 2001; Tohidi, 1998) has provided refreshing and more nuanced understandings of the issues women in contemporary southern Mediterranean societies are contending with. In selecting to focus this research specifically on the experiences of seven female dance practitioners I have not sought to take an overtly feminist perspective or theoretical foundation, rather choosing where and when such perspectives are applicable or where issues that might be specific to women are required to be discussed.

Prior to embarking on this research I had never met the seven women who became the key research participants within this study and I had heard little about their work. However, I quickly discovered that they each have a substantial role within dance communities, locally and internationally, as dancers, teachers and choreographers. The seven women – Mey, Dalia,

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<sup>2</sup> Several scholars document the challenges of negotiating gender in the field, and specifically issues pertinent to female researchers conducting fieldwork in the southern Mediterranean (for example: Bolak, 1996; Lengel, 1998; Sherif, 2001). This issue is further explored in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Nesrine, Rebecca, Nada, Noora and Meryem – who have shared their narratives and opened up their dance practices to scrutiny in this research, have all had diverse dance experiences taking place in varying locations, with a chronology spanning over the past three decades. This thesis focuses on the stories that these seven women chose to reveal when speaking with me. Their experiences are told, as much as possible, in their words; and the multiple interviews have been developed into narratives to illuminate their experiences of international education in dance.

Contributing to my fieldwork and meetings with the seven dance practitioners was a project I was simultaneously working on as a researcher and co-editor. This project was a book titled *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* (Martin, Rowe & Buck, in press). For this particular research project I interviewed approximately 80 dance practitioners across the southern Mediterranean region between January and December 2010, gathering stories about learning, performing, teaching and creating dance in various settings. While this thesis is an independent project from the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* book and has specifically focused on the narratives of the seven female dance practitioners, it has also been informed by and overlaps with the voices of other dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean who shared their experiences as part of the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* research. Occasionally, where relevant, these thoughts and perspectives are included in this thesis.

After conducting several interviews for the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* book in early 2010, the theme of training abroad emerged strongly, nagging at me to be pursued. This, coupled with the observations I was making as I became more involved in local dance communities of the southern Mediterranean, led me to seek out the narratives of dancers who had participated in international dance learning experiences. I became particularly interested in the themes of isolation and alienation that many of the dance practitioners I met shared with me. The idea of doing the artistic practice of dance in isolation from the wider surrounding cultural environment became a key selection criteria when choosing research participants for this study, not that they were ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’, but rather that they were located in places somewhat suspicious of dance (Karayanni, 2004, 2009; Shay, 1994, 1999a, 2002, 2006, 2008; Suweileh, 2011).

### *1.1.2 Why international education in dance?*

Within the processes of globalization and the increasing connections developing between diverse locations and cultures it could be viewed that contemporary practices of education and educational institutions have become more internationalized (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Khem & Teichler, 2007; Knight, 2006). Many scholars have documented this impact of globalization on educational processes and pedagogical practices (for examples see: Apple, Kenway & Singh, 2005; Cullingford & Gunn, 2005; Currie & Newson, 1998), and it could be said that dance education is not excluded from this international development and exchange. While there has been much investigation of international education and the experiences of international students, there is limited documentation exploring international education in dance and the experiences of international students training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context. This research hopes to go some way towards providing insight and understanding of the international education in dance experience, and the repercussions that this experience might have on dance practitioners' work when they return to their home environment. This research also aims to illuminate particular issues that dance practitioners from this region of the world may face when engaging with contemporary dance training in a Western cultural context, revealing new knowledge and insights from such experiences.

While the seven narratives presented within this thesis relate to the translocation of dance pedagogy and seven dance practitioners' experiences of this, it is hoped that the myriad of issues, challenges and approaches to dance that are shared and the discussions raised may also be relevant in some way for dancers, arts educators and institutions situated in various cultural contexts. The critical analysis and discussion of such experiences might assist in the development of arts education models and arts funding policies in the region and abroad where cultural interventions, transmission and exchange are apparent. Issues raised in this thesis might also offer dance educators and providers with the opportunity to reflect on the various needs of international students and consider the complex socio-cultural issues pertaining to teaching dance in an internationalized learning environment. This research may also further illuminate the significance of the use of the narrative when investigating the complexity of personal

experiences.

### *1.1.3 Why the southern Mediterranean?*

The seven women who are the research participants in this study are from the southern Mediterranean region. The area of the southern Mediterranean has been selected for this study in part to provide parameters for the research. It has also been chosen as there is limited documented research investigating contemporary practices of dance or women dancing in this region of the world, and few accounts of personal stories and narratives from those dancing within this particular geographical location. While this geographical area incorporates vast diversity and in no way can be considered homogenous, it has also been selected for the somewhat common cultural, linguistic and historical understandings.

It is also of relevance to highlight the relationship between the geographical location this research focuses on and the emerging discourses surrounding the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings of 2011 and 2012.<sup>3</sup> These uprisings have taken place across the southern Mediterranean region, stimulating issues regarding East/West relations, the exchange of diverse knowledges and the role of the “native intellectual” (Fanon, 1961/1967b, p.35) within a post-colonial society. The Arab Spring is seen by some as a revolutionary wave initiated by the youth of the southern Mediterranean. Dance does not often feature in current, dominant accounts of the uprisings, yet dance and dancers in the region are inevitably affected by these events and ideas. For example, Rana Moussaoui (2011) explains that the medium of contemporary dance within the southern Mediterranean is significant in enabling performers to echo through their creative work issues that are pertinent to the political uprisings of those in the region. These issues might be the articulation of freedom (social, political and artistic) within society<sup>4</sup> or questioning notions of self or national identity.<sup>5</sup> While this research was predominantly conducted prior to the uprisings

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<sup>3</sup> The Arab Spring has occurred across the southern Mediterranean/Gulf region during 2011 and 2012. To date, there have been revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt; civil war in Libya resulting in the fall of its government; civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, the latter resulting in the resignation of the Yemeni prime minister; major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman; and minor protests in Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Western Sahara (Fakhoury, 2011). Clashes at the borders of Israel in May 2011 and the Palestine 194 movement (a diplomatic campaign by the Palestinian National Authority to gain membership for the State of Palestine in the United Nations at its 66<sup>th</sup> Session in September 2011) are also said to be inspired by the regional Arab Spring (Deitch, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> An example of this could be seen in Mohammad Shafiq’s (2011) performance *The smell of the city*.

<sup>5</sup> For example Toufiq Izzediou’s (2011) performance *Aleef*, or the El-Funon, Le Grand Cru and Al-Balad Theatre’s (2009) co-production of *Waiting forbidden*.

occurring, it does touch on issues related to governments and subsequent rebellions that could be platforms for future studies focusing on dance and the Arab Spring to be propelled from and offers further contextualization for the realities of artists' lives under autocratic regimes.

While the seven women who share their stories in this thesis are from the southern Mediterranean region, this research is not specifically investigating the dance practices or situations of this location. Rather it focuses on the individual experiences of seven dance practitioners who are from and currently work within the region. While the core focus of this study is on individual dancers' experiences, it is hoped that it can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of dance and specifically women dancing within the southern Mediterranean. Representations of women dancing in the southern Mediterranean have been subjected to much misinterpretation within literature, and neglect by dance scholars, often succumbing to distorted, romanticized, exoticized perceptions, understandings and images when being investigated or presented (Shay & Sellers-Young, 2003). Some accounts of dance in the southern Mediterranean region tend to reiterate Orientalistic stereotypes of both the dance practices occurring in the region and also the generalizations about women dancing in the region (for examples see: Al-Faruqi, 1978; Buonaventura, 1983, 2004, 2010; Helland, 2001). While there are some valuable resources on dance practices and experiences in the southern Mediterranean (Karayanni, 2004, 2009; Kaschl, 2003; Rowe, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010; Shay, 1994, 1999a, 2002, 2006, 2008; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995, 2001a, 2001b), and noteworthy studies investigating international arts education (Sovic, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), none of these investigations focus *specifically* on the international dance learning experience of training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context, nor do they examine the consequences such experiences might have on the dance practices of dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean. This provides this research with a justification to address such potential gaps within the literature.

## **1.2 Dancing around definitions**

Words, phrases or ideas may be comprehended in various ways. Within the following paragraphs I define the key terms used within this research and rationalize why I have taken a particular view or understanding within the context of this investigation.



### 1.2.1 *International education*

The concept of *international education* has a multiplicity of meanings and contexts. The term encompasses institutions such as international schools, the efforts within educational paradigms to produce ‘global citizens’, as well as research investigating the internationalization of curriculums, the privatization and marketization of education globally and the experiences of international students (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). For the purpose of this research the term international education refers specifically to the experience of international students and the situations and challenges faced by these students who are moving between cultures and locations for the intention of education. To provide further parameters within this thesis the research is focusing on individuals who as international students received international education in dance at a tertiary level within a Western cultural context. Therefore, the terms *dance education* or *international education in dance* will be used frequently throughout this thesis, with *training* or *dance training* also being used as an alternative term for this experience.

### 1.2.2 *Contemporary dance*

This research focuses on experiences of training, performing, teaching and creating *contemporary dance*. Some of the training that the dance practitioners within this research have received can be considered to be ‘Western’ contemporary dance practices (derived from Western cultural contexts, such as Graham technique or release-based techniques). A focus on contemporary dance (rather than another form such as folkloric, belly dance or ballet or a combination of these practices) has primarily been selected to provide parameters for this study to take place within. It has also been selected as there is limited documentation concerning the application of Western contemporary dance practices in the region of the southern Mediterranean.

In defining a term such as *contemporary* it is important to recognize that it is a term that may hold a multiplicity of meanings across cultures and practices. In dance the term is adopted broadly and often, and is commonly used to describe innovative dance practices within a variety of cultures (Dils & Albright, 2001). However, Western notions of ‘contemporary dance’ tend to

dominate perceptions of what is innovative or modern in current dance paradigms, often with the expectation that dancers, teachers and choreographers outside of Western cultural dance structures will submit “to foreign cultural influences” (Rowe, 2009, p.57). Whilst the dancers within this research have engaged with what can be considered Western contemporary dance when training abroad, this understanding of ‘contemporary dance’ might not then be the same in their home environment. Therefore, the term ‘contemporary dance’ in relation to this research aims to focus on “what dance is ‘now’” (Rowe, 2007b, p.9) in an assortment of cultural settings, rather than conforming to a particular understanding of what contemporary dance ‘is’ according to a particular culture’s understanding of it. Looking at contemporary dance in a way that allows for a variety of interpretations, even contradictory interpretations of what is ‘innovative’ and ‘new’, can consist of dance that is creating “a break from the past, a deconstruction of the past, a fusion with the past, an autonomous fusion with foreign cultural forms, and an undesired submission to foreign cultural influences” (Rowe, 2009, p.57). Within this thesis, when referring to contemporary dance practices learnt in a Western cultural context and grounded in Western cultural paradigms, the term *Western contemporary dance* will be used. Having defined the term ‘contemporary dance’, it can also be helpful to clarify that the focus in this research will be on contemporary dance performed as a theatre art, rather than dance performed in a social setting or as a social activity.

### *1.2.3 Defining the region: The southern Mediterranean*

The region of the world geographically situated to the South and East of the Mediterranean Sea has been given numerous names, many of which are highly contested (Davison, 1960). Possible descriptions include: ‘Middle East’, ‘Arab World’, ‘Near Orient’, ‘Near East’, ‘North Africa’, ‘Southwest Asia’, ‘Maghreb’, ‘Levant’. However, several of these terms are politically charged; they are often Eurocentrically loaded in nature, lingering as a result of colonial interventions across the region, and descriptive of the region only in its relation to Europe or the West (Said, 1978). Alternatively, a term such as ‘southern and eastern Mediterranean’ is perhaps too longwinded and cumbersome. Therefore, the *southern Mediterranean* is a term that I propose for the purpose of this research to describe the geographical region stretching across North Africa and the Levant, with narratives drawn from Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon

and Malta. It may seem that selecting Malta to be included in this research is an oddity; however, it is situated within the southern Mediterranean region and despite recently joining the European Union (in 2004) it has many connections with the other countries involved in the southern Mediterranean region (Hull, 1993; Mitchell, 2003). It is to be acknowledged that the complexity of the southern Mediterranean region is profound, and the current states in the contemporary southern Mediterranean region are somewhat recent creations (Hall, 1992; Said, 1978). It can also be noted that the boundaries and borders of these states have often been a result of colonial intervention (Milton-Edwards, 2006).

Investigating this region of the world, and outlining the selected geographical locations where the research has been conducted, it could be asked why Israel and Israelis were not included in the study, since this region and population are also situated in the southern Mediterranean. From the outset of this study it is to be clarified that by excluding Israel I am not intending to make an overt political statement or bringing a political agenda to the research. The political issues and instability surrounding the region, and the conflicts between various groups in the area has been documented and debated for a number of years and cannot be denied (Milton-Edwards, 2006; Morris, 2001; Pappé, 2005). However, this thesis is not the place for such political debates to be further battled. I also intended to avoid the dualist dichotomy of ‘this’ compared to ‘that’, which potentially can arise when gathering distinctly diverse groups together in the same research process. This could be of benefit if the purpose of the research was to establish the differences or similarities between Israeli and Arab dance practices or the experiences of Israeli dancers training abroad compared to Arab dancers training abroad;<sup>6</sup> however, my intention has been to solely focus on the experiences of seven female dance practitioners who have trained abroad in Western contemporary dance and then returned to their home environments, illuminating how this experience has affected their dance practices when working in societies that are often viewed to be somewhat antagonistic towards dance.

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Elke Kaschl’s (2003) comparative study of dance in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

### **1.3 The journey: An overview of the thesis**

To provide clarity and focus throughout the reading of this thesis, it might be of assistance to summarize the structure of the thesis through a succinct overview of each chapter that will be presented.

It is hoped through discussing the site of research, the relevant literature and the research methods utilized within this research (chapters 2-3) a robust foundation for this study will be established. Within chapter two the review of the literature is presented, introducing key themes for discussion and identifying pertinent research related to this study while also highlighting key gaps within the literature that this research aims to address. Through a comprehensive exploration of the literature, several central arguments and theories relevant to the critical examination of international education in dance and the exploration of the research question are raised. Issues applicable to internationalized teaching and learning, experiences of training abroad along with dance education and the diversity of dance learning environments are explored. This is followed by an examination of post-colonial perspectives of dance in relation to the research question and notions of the themes of identity, place and home. This final section of the chapter provides an overview of dance within different locations of the southern Mediterranean region, with a particular emphasis on contemporary dance practices and a focus on the locations where the participants for this research are from and currently working in.

Chapter three presents the research methods used in this study. The methodological approach and the research aims and theory are rationalized. The mode of multi-sited ethnography is discussed, followed by articulating my position as the researcher. The modes of data collection are investigated, clarifying how the review of the literature, forums and meetings, observations, interviews and ethics have all informed the data collection process. The process of analysis and the problems and limitations that emerged through the research process are then shared.

Chapter four forms the essence of this thesis. Within this chapter the journeys of the seven dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean region who have experienced contemporary dance training in a Western cultural context are presented. These narratives have emerged from formal

interviews and informal conversations, as well as my own reflections of observing and sometimes being actively involved in the seven women's artistic and teaching practices. This chapter intends to provide a picture of how the dance practitioners have experienced learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context and how this learning has affected the dance practices they have pursued when they return home. Each dancer's journey is presented individually, documenting their experiences prior to training abroad, of learning dance in a Western cultural context, their return to their home environment and the artistic practices and decisions that they have engaged in once returning home.

Following chapter four, the subsequent chapters of this thesis (chapters 5-8) further illuminate the women's journeys through a critical analysis and discussion. This discussion engages with relevant literature and theory, whilst illuminating the key concepts that have been raised through the dance practitioners' lived experiences. Chapter five investigates the motivating factors and considerations that influenced the women's choices of location and dance institution at which to train. The notion that such decisions are often based on pragmatic issues and realities such as finances, travel restrictions and politics, cultural familiarity or chance opportunities rather than artistic or aesthetic ideals is also identified.

Within chapter six the experiences of training in a Western cultural context is presented. This chapter focuses on alienating and transformative experiences relating to engagement with somatic practice, creative practice and dance pedagogy, which in turn may have impacted on the dance practitioners' subsequent dance practices. These alienating and transformative experiences are also analyzed and examined in relation to the literature pertaining to dance education, somatic and creative practices and international students' learning experiences.

This is followed by chapter seven, where the various circumstances surrounding when and why the women returned home is analyzed as well as their experience adapting to their home environment. The reasons that influenced their decisions to return home are considered, reflecting that for some returning home was not something they felt they had a choice about, but rather something that was expected or decided by others with issues such as family situations,

visas and finances, homesickness, new artistic opportunities and social responsibility. The alienation and isolation felt by some of the dance practitioners when they returned home will also be illuminated.

Chapter eight investigates how the seven women have approached dance in their home environments since returning from abroad. Their narratives reveal the various ways they have engaged with dance teaching, learning and performing at home. The women's approaches towards pedagogical, choreographic and creative, and somatic practice are examined, analyzing the motivations and potential repercussions for these differing approaches and attitudes.

Finally, chapter nine presents the conclusions of this thesis. Important research findings are articulated, highlighting the key contributions that this thesis offers. This is followed by a discussion of ramifications and repercussions the findings of this investigation might have for various groups such as dancers, cultural environments and artistic scenes, and international education in dance. Recommendations regarding emerging questions and future research are provided, disseminating how information from this research might be relevant for various groups of people such as dancers, teachers, funders and institutions.

As a qualitative, post-positivist study drawing on post-colonial perspectives, this research does not attempt to reveal one specific reality or prove a certain premise. Rather, it intends to construct a "layered account" (Clair, 2003, p.56) of seven dance practitioners' journeys, their experiences of learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context and how such an experience may have affected their subsequent dance practices when returning to their home environment. It is hoped that this research will provide an articulation of the attitudes and feelings of the seven women who have shared their experiences for this research, contributing to the knowledge and understandings of international education in dance and dance within the southern Mediterranean region.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the literature**

This chapter explores the literature, presenting several central arguments and theories pertinent to the critical examination of international education in dance and the exploration of the research question: how has the experience of training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context affected the dance practices of seven female dancers from the southern Mediterranean region?

The first section of this chapter examines international tertiary education, disentangling the various histories, understandings and motives of internationalized education, and looking at how these concepts may have shifted over time. Within this dialogue the influence of colonial education practices and policies are explored along with concepts of cultural hegemony, where possible presenting these notions in relation to dance education. The impact of globalization and the marketization of internationalized tertiary education is then investigated, looking at the rise of globalization and the impact this may have on student mobility and increased demand for international education as well as the possible economic agendas tertiary education providers may have in developing their teaching and learning for an international market.

The second section of this chapter investigates learning in foreign contexts. The issues regarding teaching and learning in different cultural contexts are considered, raising the crucial dilemmas that are applicable to those both receiving and providing international tertiary education. Issues specific to the creative arts and dance are then presented, along with four individuals' (from China, India and Egypt) experiences of learning contemporary dance in different cultural contexts and the impact that these individuals feel it has had on their careers as dancers. Within the four individuals' experiences, concepts such as cultural transmission of dance, diverse approaches to dance teaching and learning, social responsibility, alienation, expectations of creative work and the notions of the native intellectual (Fanon, 1952/1967a, 1961/1967b) and the organic intellectual (Gramsci, 1929-1935/1971) are articulated. This thesis by no means professes to give a comprehensive account of Fanon or Gramsci's work. However, in drawing on key themes from these authors' writings, there is the possibility to apply them as starting points for rethinking international education in dance and how such experiences might have rippling

repercussions on dance practitioners' dance practices.

In the third section of this chapter, the diversity of contemporary dance learning environments and teaching methods are explored. This includes a discussion of liberal arts, conservatory and workshop models of dance education. This is followed by ideas surrounding the modes of teaching contemporary dance for performance. Specifically, the discussion focuses on teaching and learning dance techniques and the possible power/knowledge concerns this might provoke, while research regarding holistic and somatic approaches to dance teaching is also shared.

The fourth section of this chapter probes the multiple meanings and interpretations of identity, and the relation this might have on dancers receiving their dance education in different cultural contexts and subsequently returning to their home environments to continue their dance career. Perspectives of identity and its formation are presented through theories from scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1990a, 1994), Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Roland Barthes (1982). The possibility of identities shifting and transforming between cultural contexts will be related to the discussions provided by Edward Said and Bonnie Marranca (1991) and Farah Ghannam (2009), among others, on the subject.

Building on the dialogue of identity in relation to this thesis, the fifth section of this chapter explores notions of place and home. Drawing on notions of our interactions with our varying environments, diverse philosophical perspectives regarding the sense of place and how this is entwined with the concept of identity are presented. A discussion of place and placelessness (Relph, 1976) is then linked to the question: what is home? How might dance practitioners who learn contemporary dance in a different cultural context and then return to their home environment understand the concept of home?

Finally, the chapter concludes with a contextual overview of dance within the southern Mediterranean, summarizing various traces of dance histories and engaging with key scholarly works investigating various dance practices across the region. The intention of this section is not to provide an exhaustive critical analysis of the dance history or dance practices within the



southern Mediterranean, but to provide an overview of the dance histories and lineages and contemporary dance practices taking place in the region. It is hoped that this helps contextualize the seven women's experiences in the reading of the results, analysis and discussion sections of this thesis.

## **2.1 Dancing away: Internationalized learning, training abroad and dance education**

A significant body of research has begun to investigate the challenges and issues facing those involved in providing international education, and those teaching and learning within foreign contexts. Scholars such as Philip Altbach (2001, 2004a, 2004b), John Biggs (1996, 2001), Meeri Hellstén (2002), Betty Leask (1999, 2000, 2001, 2005) and Ulrich Teichler (1996, 1998, 1999, 2004, 2008) have made noteworthy contributions to the discourse. While there is a rich body of scholarly work, coming from a variety of disciplines and perspectives investigating internationalized education and learning in foreign contexts, there is limited documentation focused on teaching or learning dance within these contexts. Therefore, this provides further justification for this research as it aims to contribute to this particular area of investigation. However, due to the lack of dance specific literature, significant studies from broader fields have been applied where required to this research to offer additional contextual understanding.

### *2.1.1 Internationalized tertiary education*

Through the processes of globalization and the increasing connections between various groups in the world it could be viewed that contemporary practices of education and educational institutions have become more internationalized (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Khem & Teichler, 2007; Knight, 2006), with many scholars documenting the impacts of globalization on tertiary institutions (for examples see: Apple, Kenway & Singh, 2005; Cullingford & Gunn, 2005; Currie & Newson, 1998; Walker & Nixon, 2004). Looking at the histories of international education practices it could be asked, how might they have shifted over time?

While some claim that the impact of globalization is creating a new atmosphere for internationalized tertiary education, others have raised the point that for hundreds of years universities have been international in both their structure and ideologies (Altbach, 2004b;

Healy, 2008; Williams, 2011). As Philip Altbach (2004b) explains, students have often travelled abroad to study and scholars have often worked outside their home environments. Further to this “universities represented global institutions” (Altbach, 2004b, p.4) during the Middle Ages, where Latin was the common language and the cohort was made up of teachers and students from various locations. Similarly, Elspeth Jones and Sally Brown (2007) explain that the recruitment of international students is nothing new and has been occurring for centuries. Or as explained by Nigel Healy (2008), institutions such as universities have always been internationalized environments where knowledge is shared across global borders “ensuring that both research and teaching conforms to the present knowledge base as it is internationally understood” (p.334).

The argument presented previously by Philip Altbach (2004b) is that institutions such as universities have always been globalized; nevertheless, it could be asked if they have always been globalized in the same way and how the modes and motives for this ‘globalization’ of learning environments might have shifted. Christian Gilde (2007) writes that academies in Europe during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century were focused on seeking knowledge, and that individuals, students and teachers alike shifted between locations to develop this knowledge. Gilde explains that this continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century until a perceived transfer from “knowledge seekers into profit seekers” (p.22) occurred. However, Gilde omits the issue of international education occurring through the process of colonization during the first wave of European colonization around the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Cohen, 1994). A number of scholars have also documented a development over the past century towards internationalized higher education that is stimulated by economics, competition between education providers, privatization and the marketization of higher education (Jongbloed, 2003). Others have commented that university degrees are presently viewed to be vital for social mobility (Altbach, 2004a, 2004b). This combined with the increasing accessibility to higher education programmes and the shift from ‘aid to trade’ in higher education (Collins, 2006), contributes to a more socially diverse student population (Carroll & Ryan, 2005), with many explaining that it is this factor currently motivating the development of higher education (Altbach, 2004a).

Where does dance education fit within international education? While there appears to be little documentation regarding the history of international education in dance, those who have trained to become professional performers have often travelled abroad to receive higher dance education and performing opportunities. This can be seen through the experiences of dancers during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century who left their home environments to receive dance training opportunities abroad. Examples include dancers and choreographers such as Alicia Markova, Michel Fokine, Tamara Toumanova, Pina Bausch and Rudolf Laban, and specifically from the southern Mediterranean region dance theatre pioneers from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s such as Wadea Jarrar Haddad from Lebanon, Abdel-Halim Caracalla from Lebanon and Beyhan Murphy from Turkey (Rowe, 2010, 2011). International education in dance has also been encouraged by various scholarship programmes, funding agencies, competitions and institutions (for example: DanceWEB Scholarships; Prix de Lausanne; Royal Academy of Dance; Young Achievers Awards New Zealand; Youth America Grand Prix). One example is the scholarship programme offered by the Royal Academy of Dance where young ballet dancers from Commonwealth countries have the opportunity to receive their formative training in London. This is a scholarship programme established in the 1930s that still runs today; however, students receiving these scholarships now have the choice about the location where they receive further dance education and have the option to continue in their home environment.

Within the discussion of internationalized education and a globalized world, some scholars have brought up the question: is globalization of tertiary education merely re-colonization of tertiary education (Chan, 2009)? However, it could be argued that the concept of current international tertiary education is actually much more complex. From the various histories and motives for internationalized education, it appears that there has been a shift from cultural and political agendas to economic and financial agendas. To further understand the role of internationalized tertiary education within a contemporary globalized world, it may be of assistance to unpack some of these agendas, investigating their impact and influence within current international educational practices.

In the past international education has, at times, been used as a platform for various cultural

agendas. In some instances these cultural agendas have been part of the colonization process, where exerting cultural hegemony in education has been a way to assert Eurocentric paradigms, thus reinforcing foreign power (Chalmers, 1999). For the colonizer the intention has not necessarily been to seek knowledge in these new environments but rather to exercise power and control over local populations, while maintaining and developing political agendas.

Simultaneously, peoples from colonized indigenous populations have also travelled to colonizing countries to receive higher education, again a situation that can be seen as part of the cultural hegemony where the colonizing power exerts control over the colonized. In relation to teaching and learning, it could be viewed that many education systems are dominated by Eurocentric paradigms (Dei & Simmons, 2010), where Western modes of pedagogy are viewed to be 'enlightened' and 'refined' and are assimilated in the colonial context. It can be observed that the domination of particular Eurocentric modes of pedagogy and practice may continue even after a country has gained formal independence from colonial control, as independence does not necessarily mean decolonization has been achieved or that hegemony has evaporated. Within this perspective it could be understood that colonial traces might still be evident and such ideas may linger within locations such as schools, universities and other educational settings.

International education has also been motivated by international security priorities, although these agendas have often been preconceived as 'aid' from Western countries to 'assist' non-Western countries. An example can be seen within the scholarship programme developed out of the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and South East Asia (1950), where the intention was not only to offer good will and humanitarian aid, but also to counter potential communist expansion in Asia and to transmit Western values. British Commonwealth countries established the programme with the assistance of the United States of America, and the initial recipients of scholarships to receive education abroad were from Ceylon, India and Pakistan (Oakman, 2010). A number of intellectuals have criticized the role the Colombo Plan has played within tertiary education, particularly within an Australian context (Auletta, 2000; Oakman, 2010). As Alex Auletta explains,

The establishment of the Colombo Plan has more to do with the containment of communism and the countering of criticism of racist policies in Australia, and the development of trade and future markets in the region, than any of its publically avowed aims (p.57).

The Colombo Plan scholarship programme, along with others such as the Ford Foundation, Rhodes Scholarships and Goethe Institute Scholarships, continues to provoke questions. It could be asked, what is the current role and effects of such arrangements? Here the theories of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and theorist of critical pedagogy, could be applied. Freire (1970) explains that education is a political act and that politics cannot be separated from pedagogy. This theory is articulated particularly in Freire's seminal text *Pedagogy of the oppressed* where he reprises Frantz Fanon's oppressors-oppressed division, advocating that education should encourage the oppressed to reclaim their humanity and rise above their condition as oppressed people. Freire explains his philosophy of education further in the following assertion:

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own programme but must search for this programme dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate (p.105).

However, as Freire acknowledges in the above statement, it is to be understood that in order for this 'liberation' to occur, the oppressed have to play a part in their own emancipation:

[...] no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (p.36)

Within Freire's work it could be perceived that he denounces oppressive structures in education with the aim of encouraging 'humanization' or to "be more fully human" (Freire, 1970, p.29) in learning environments. However, he also simultaneously calls for the development of educational environments that struggle against social oppressions and injustices, creating public spaces for liberation (Giroux, 2010; Kincheloe, 2007).

Freire's concepts have been borrowed widely in dance education scholarship as a way of further understanding dance pedagogy within a variety of settings (for example: Anntila, 2003, 2004; Banks, 2007, 2009, 2010; Marques, 1995, 1998; Ottey, 1996; Shapiro, 1998, 2008; Stinson,

1984, 1993). Dance scholar Ojeya Cruz Banks (2009) applies Freire's notion of the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' as a framework to further understand dance as an "expression of critical consciousness for addressing cultural injustices and mobilizing social action for decolonizing education" (p.356). Banks, also draws on Frantz Fanon's broader understandings of colonization and anti-colonization, and investigates how diverse post-colonial contexts of dance education influence not only individual's minds but also their bodies, highlighting moments where post-colonial action is transmitted through dance, addressing "dance as an epistemological resource and tool of self-determination" (p.357).

Similarly, Becky Dyer's (2009) investigation of Western dance pedagogy illuminates how Western dance teaching methods have been perceived as superior, often being inextricably linked to authoritarian teaching approaches, which until recently have tended to be supposed as superior to more student-centred methodologies. However, Dyer (2009) explains that some dance educators are moving towards more democratic teaching approaches. Questioning why some dance forms or modes of teaching are given more value than others is what Sherry Shapiro (2008) calls the "vital first step as we seek to seriously encounter the meaning of the arts within the context of a global society" (p.255). While Shapiro does not focus on investigating either teaching or learning contemporary dance technique for performance specifically, the viewpoint she shares of the connection between individual life experiences and dance is of value to consider across a variety of dance education environments. Shapiro explains, "giving voice to their own life experiences is pedagogically valuable [...] a way to deepen their understanding of who they are" (p.272), concluding that dance learning can be viewed as a transformative experience for both teacher and student.

The ideas articulated within the discussion of cultural hegemony and the effects of colonization on dance education could also be viewed through Frantz Fanon's writings and philosophies of the impact of colonization on an indigenous population and the development of the "native intellectual" (Fanon, 1961/1967b, p.35). The term *native intellectual* could be understood as a way of describing the displaced or non-placed colonial subject, where behaving like the 'Other' can give one 'worth', and the mind and body becomes colonized through Western education

(often in European institutions) (Fanon, 1952/1967a, 1961/1967b). Through returning this knowledge to one's home environment colonial power hierarchies and structures are reinforced. Fanon claims that 'intellectuals' or 'bourgeoisie' can become disengaged and alienated within their own communities:

The native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon Western culture. Like adopted children who only stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallizes in their psyche, the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own. He will not be content to get to know Rabelais and Diderot, Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe; he will bind them to his intelligence as closely as possible (1961/1967b, p.176).

Fanon's concepts can also be investigated in relation to dance. Dance scholar Ojeya Cruz Banks (2010) applies Fanon's (1952/1967a) concept of *internalized racism* in her investigation of disassociation from dance heritage. Within Bank's study of African-American dance students it can be seen that rather than indigenous knowledge being articulated through their dance and pedagogical practices, many of the students were culturally detached from their heritage. Extending from Bank's research it could be seen that Sherry Shapiro's (2008) argument regarding the notion of global aesthetics could also be relevant to the discussion. Shapiro critiques the underlying assumptions and dispositions that Western dance forms are typically 'superior' modes of dance; it could also be perceived that Western forms of teaching dance are also considered by some as 'superior'. Further explanation and examples of this idea are also provided by Joann Keali'inohomoku (1970), Adrienne Kaepler (1971) and Nicholas Rowe (2008).

Dance anthropologist and educator Joann Keali'inohomoku (1970), discusses the perceived 'superiority' of ballet. Keali'inohomoku's deconstruction of Western dance scholarships perception of 'ethnic' dance forms and analysis of ballet as an 'ethnic' dance form in itself has facilitated an alternative perspective of such a form and culture of dance to be perceived. Ballet may be viewed as transnational, while also often perceived as universal, despite the fact that it can be contextualized within a European socio-historical framework. Building on this concept dance anthropologist Adrienne Kaepler (1971) has noted the following:

Ways of thinking about the arts, including the standards by which they are judged, are largely determined by the cultural traditions of which they are a part. Each

society has standards for the production and performance of cultural forms. These standards, whether they are overt and articulated, or merely covert, can be said to constitute an aesthetic for that society. An individual cannot be said to properly understand the aesthetic principles of an alien culture unless he can anticipate indigenous evaluations of artistic performances or products (p.175).

Such aesthetic influences and perceptions are documented within the research of Nicholas Rowe (2008), where he notes that dance groups in the Occupied Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip are drawing on other dance styles such as Graham, Cunningham, ballet and release techniques in various ways. Rowe observes that these techniques are becoming incorporated into new choreographic works, creating dances that have a basis in the familiar folklore but with innovative new steps and choreographic contexts, while also consciously challenging what could be considered 'traditional' gender stereotypes. Rowe explains that new dance works being created in Palestine have a Palestinian 'identity', regardless of whether Western or traditional music, movements or techniques are being used. However, despite this development Rowe notes that in the context of Palestinian dance there is still, to some extent, an emphasis on the value of foreign experiences, teaching methods or techniques, with aspects of Western dance education and techniques not only being deliberately incorporated and fused with local practice, but also being insidiously incorporated, subtly permeating dance practices in a less obvious manner.

From examining various cultural agendas evolving from processes of colonization and subsequent political concerns, the question could be raised: are cultural agendas that have emerged out of these hegemonic structures still currently occurring in international education in dance? A possible answer might be: not deliberately. For example, it is unlikely the dance programmes offered by dance institutions such as Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Mark Morris Dance School or the London Contemporary Dance School are deliberately wanting to maintain 'power' over particular countries' dance practices and cultural value systems through the specific artistic ideas and techniques they teach. Rather the lineages of Western contemporary dance and Western locations in which these dance institutions are coming from may unconsciously carry cultural agendas that influence and infiltrate the local cultural environments where they are re-presented by local dancers who have trained abroad or by visiting dancers, teachers or choreographers who introduce these ideas to local dance



communities.

From this understanding it could then be asked, if cultural agendas are not primarily directing international tertiary education then what is the motivating force behind international tertiary education today? Through surveying current perspectives it appears that agendas based on economics, massification and marketization of higher education may be the stimulus in the development of contemporary practices of internationalized tertiary education (Furedi, 2011). These motivations can be viewed within current statistics, recruiting procedures and policy rationales of various education institutions providing international education. It has been noted that an expansion of higher education has occurred dramatically over the past 20 to 25 years (Brown, 2011; Furedi, 2011), with the academic landscape becoming “transformed by the institutionalization of the policies of marketization” (Furedi, 2011, p.1). It could be viewed that at present there is not one sole higher education market, but rather a variety of markets. Potential markets include students, staff, donations, funding and scholarships, graduates and researchers (Jorgbloed, 2003). It could also be said that dance institutions are not in any way immune to the increasing expansion and marketization of learning, teaching and research but can be considered active participants in internationalized learning processes.

A number of investigations have discussed how as higher education becomes more marketized, international students are increasingly becoming valuable commodities to tertiary institutions (Adair, Adair & Tuck, 2009; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). It has been documented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Institute for Statistics that in 2011 there were approximately 3.36 million students worldwide studying outside of their home environments (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011). Further to this it has been noted that this number may potentially increase to approximately 8 million by the year 2025 (Altbach, 2004a).

For this research, numbers of international students studying at three selected contemporary dance institutions were gathered. Within the Trinity Laban Conservatoire Dance programme in London, in their 2010/2011 intake of students in both undergraduate and postgraduate

programmes, there were approximately 212 students from the United Kingdom (51.7%, of the total cohort), 124 students enrolled from the European Union (30.2%, of the total cohort), and 74 students from elsewhere (18.1%, of the total cohort), who were paying international tuition fees (Mark Tyler, personal communication, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011). At the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Frankfurt, the undergraduate dance programme had a total of 37 students enrolled for 2010/2011, 17 of the 37 students were international students (45.9% of the total cohort), who were paying international tuition fees (Carolin Stahlhofen, personal communication, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011). London Contemporary Dance School had approximately 120 students enrolled in their undergraduate programme, of which 60 were considered to be international students (50% of total student cohort). However, as Simon O'Shea, Head of Student Support Services at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) explained, of those 60 students approximately 25 were from non-EU countries and were paying international fees (20.8% of the total cohort), while the remaining 35 international students (29.2% of the total cohort) were from various locations within the European Union and therefore paid the same tuition fees as domestic students (Simon O'Shea, personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011). While the worldwide number of dance students studying outside of their home environment is unknown, it can be considered that some experiences of students studying dance abroad might overlap with those studying other disciplines.

There has been debate surrounding the rapid rate at which various countries have increased international student numbers, with some scholars questioning the entrance standards and the undemanding endorsement of qualifications, and the consequential perception that countries such as Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and the United Kingdom are becoming suppliers of inexpensive readily available rather than quality programmes (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Slattery, 2008). It has been noted that by increasing the number of international students the financial returns to universities is significant, with The University of Melbourne earning over a quarter of a billion dollars from international students every year (Slattery, 2008). Australia has been described as “an especially aggressive recruiter of foreign students, with Britain and New Zealand not far behind” (Altbach, 2004a, p.5). Altbach states that these countries see international students “as major sources of revenue” (2004a, p.6), and it appears that within such

environments students are viewed as clients or consumers and universities perceive themselves as businesses (Chan, 2009).

Within the research by Chris Bolsmann and Henry Miller (2008) the policy rationales for the recruitment of international students to English universities are explored. From Bolsmann and Miller's research three key discourses applicable to the recruitment of international students emerge, with these being "academic internationalism, economic competition and developmental" (p.75). However, they state that "the dominant rationale is primarily economic competition and this is expressed within the discourse of globalization" (p.75). In discussion with Simon O'Shea (Head of Student Support Services at LCDS), he noted that at the LCDS the "number of overseas students has increased over time as a result of the fact that the talent pool in the UK population is gradually decreasing" (personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2011). O'Shea elaborates on this statement:

[...] it's not for lack of applicants, this year (2011) we have 1800 applicants and 45 places... I would say over time the international student cohort has risen steadily [...] there are a lot of recent changes to visa regulations; the burden is now on students to demonstrate that they have £22,000.00 before they apply. That means that our overseas students are of a much higher level of privilege than before (personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011).

Through the examination of some historical and current practices within international education it can be seen that the motives for internationalization of higher education has shifted from cultural to more economic agendas. Acknowledging this shift, is cultural colonization a by-product of the economic, market driven agendas education providers might hold? What impact would this consequently have when receiving tertiary dance education in a different cultural context? This is something this research hopes to reveal through illuminating the participants' experiences of training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context and the impact that this may have on their dance practices.

### *2.1.2 Learning in a foreign context*

Through exploring the literature regarding internationalized tertiary education, it appears that attention has been focused on certain issues that have emerged from the discourses surrounding

learning within a foreign context and providing education for an international student cohort (for example see: Leask, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2005; Prescott & Hellstén, 2005; Ryan & Hellmundt, 2005). International education scholars Anne Prescott and Meeri Hellstén (2005) explain that the experiences of students studying abroad are diverse; however, there are some key issues that can be acknowledged. Such issues include the struggle and confusion of a new environment, trouble negotiating foreign languages and cultural customs, isolation and lack of support from peers and the surrounding academic community. Prescott and Hellstén also note that students studying abroad may find teaching and assessment styles to be different and need time to become accustomed to new modes of learning. It is also revealed that their involvement in learning situations might include hesitation and guessing of material (Prescott & Hellstén, 2005). Regarding the issues for those providing internationalized higher education, the discussion and debate has been centred on educating educators, encouraging teachers to reassess how they view international students as learners and to develop “a meta-cultural sensitivity” (Kam, 2005, p.17). There has also been debate surrounding institutions’ expectations for the students to adapt versus the need for the institutions to adapt to the students. Within tertiary dance education this could be viewed within the institutions’ or teachers’ acceptance of the students’ prior dance knowledge they bring with them to their new dance learning location. Is this knowledge embraced and incorporated or is it ignored and rejected by the teachers and education providers?

It also appears that there are certain cross-cultural dilemmas experienced by those involved in international education; for those providing it and those receiving it. Those providing international education face a dilemma in catering to the needs of international students, specifically in bridging the gap between the curriculum being taught and the curriculum that is relevant to the student and the cultural context in which they will be returning to. Those receiving it face a dilemma when they are abroad and also when they return home. For students learning in different cultural contexts the dilemma experienced abroad is presented in experiences such as culture and language shock, isolation and alienation. Within this section of the review of the literature the emphasis is focused on the learning experience in a foreign context, rather than the dilemmas and concerns that institutions might have regarding international education policies and procedures. However, this by no means discounts the issues

institutions may be facing, with these concerns being of interest for future investigations of internationalized dance teaching and learning.

Numerous studies investigating the experiences of students studying abroad note the experience of culture shock and the impact that it may have on the students' learning experience (McInnes, 2001; Prescott & Hellstén, 2005). The term *culture shock* (Oberg, 1960) has been described in multiple ways, with Kalvero Oberg, an anthropologist who coined the term stating that "culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (1960, p.1). Further suggestions have been made regarding how the term culture shock could be defined. Rachel Irwin (2007) expands Oberg's definition by explaining culture shock as "anxiety and emotional disturbance experienced by people when two sets of realities and conceptualisations meet" (p.1). This definition, however, makes the assumption that there are only two sets of realities involved in creating the experience, when there could be more. Alternatively, culture shock could be explained as an experience where the symbols and markers used to describe and conceptualise one's world are unfamiliar, leading to feelings of isolation or even loss of identity (Furnham, 2004; Miller, 2008).

Particular aspects of culture shock may be more prominent in an individual's own experience. For example, an individual might experience *language shock* (Fan, 2010). This could be understood as the immersion in an environment where one is unable to communicate with ease due to not knowing the local language (Fan, 2010). Such a notion supports the literature that suggests that some international students are reluctant to speak in class when they are either unfamiliar or not particularly confident with the working language (Burns, 1991; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Sovic, 2008a, 2008b). Alternatively, the experience of *study shock*<sup>7</sup> (Sovic, 2008a) might also be present within the experience of learning in a foreign environment in an unfamiliar way. Study shock could be present when the mode in which learning takes place, the student/teacher interactions and the teaching environment itself is unusual, confusing and potentially disconcerting for the student.

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<sup>7</sup> *Study shock* is also termed *academic culture shock* (Goodwin, 2009) or *education shock* (Hoff, 1979).

The experiences of culture and language shock, isolation and alienation may potentially be exacerbated by the frequent treatment of international students as a homogeneous group, rather than looking deeper into an individual's own history and personality to assist them to feel more comfortable in their learning environment. Frequently, assumptions are made about international students, their personalities and learning and communication styles. An example of this can be seen in the writing of educator Jan Guidry Lacina (2002), who states that "overall, international students have very different backgrounds from their American peers" (p.22). Guidry Lacina's comment makes the assumption not only that all international students are the same but also that all American students have a similar background too.

Within the creative arts there are also more specific issues and dilemmas relating to students' learning in different cultural contexts. This is extensively examined within the research of Silvia Sovic (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Sovic's work explores the experiences of international students in the creative arts, specifically art and design. Within Sovic's (2008b) report *Lost in transition? The international students' experience project* for The University of the Arts London she aims to illuminate how the "experience of higher education in the UK, and of art and design in particular is perceived by international students" (p.3). Sovic explains that language is the most obvious difficulty for many of the students, as is negotiating the new academic atmosphere. It emerges through Sovic's study that the experience of studying abroad is often simultaneously stressful and exciting. Sovic also identifies specific issues pertinent to students in the creative arts. Within her study these issues included firstly, the emphasis being placed on process rather than product of art forms, which tended to be confusing for some international students. Secondly, the integration of theory with practice, which often left students from foreign contexts feeling concerned that they were not gaining enough practical skills. In contrast to this, Sovic also mentions that there was a sense of scepticism that some students felt over the 'academic freedom' they were given to make creative work. Sovic (2008b) explains that while there are numerous studies exploring teaching and learning within the context of international education, the investigation of teaching and learning in the creative practices such as visual art, design, music and dance is still a topic requiring further attention, a sentiment reiterated also by Anne Campbell (2000) and Glauco De Vita (2001).

While Silvia Sovic's research is valuable when beginning to explore experiences of international students studying within the creative arts, there is much scope for future investigations into not only creative arts students' experiences whilst studying abroad, but also their experiences prior to leaving their home environment and also their experiences once their studies conclude. There could also be areas worthy of examination regarding the influence that learning in foreign environments might have on creative practices and artistic values. Also, looking at some individual's experiences of learning dance in different cultural contexts the issues might be more complex than those presented by Sovic (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). This can be seen in the following experiences shared by Xiong Xi, Royona Mitra, Shobana Jeyasingh and Karima Mansour, four dance practitioners who have discussed their experiences of learning dance in different cultural contexts and the impact this has on their dance practices.

Through sharing her autobiographical narrative, dancer and teacher Xiong Xi (2009) examines herself as the research subject, investigating how her meanings of dance education have been built and shifted through learning dance firstly in China in a conservatoire situation and then in New Zealand within a liberal arts framework. Xi's study offers a glimpse of what international dance students may face when transitioning between locations and dance learning contexts. Xi's experience reveals specific pedagogic issues, such as confusion over the modes of teaching and expectations of dance in different learning environments, as well as philosophical differences regarding the teaching, practice and performance of dance. Xi explains the contrasting pedagogies she experienced in Auckland, New Zealand and Beijing, China, evoked "confusion and struggle" (p.viii), further explaining that "all of my experience in learning dance in China seemed irrelevant when I became an international dance student in The University of Auckland, New Zealand" (p.132). Xi notes that the decision to go to New Zealand to further her dance education was made by her father who had visited the country previously. Xi explains how she "had never noticed there was a tiny country lower than Australia" (p.86) and was confused about why she was leaving to go so far away to continue her dance training. Xi's research concludes with two key issues that emerged from her study: "philosophical differences about dance education and dance pedagogical styles" (p.123). Whilst Xi alludes to why these differences may

exist and various possibilities as to how these differences may be bridged, a deeper and broader exploration could develop within future research projects. Xi's ideas provide a platform for this research to extend upon and to develop further understandings regarding the experiences of training in different cultural contexts.

Royona Mitra's (2005) experience of moving from India to England to pursue dance training also illuminates conflicts and challenges of dancing between locations. However, contrasting Xi's (2009) experience where challenging pedagogical situations dominated, Mitra identified issues related to somatic<sup>8</sup> experiences and understandings to be most confronting. She explains, "[d]uring my physical theatre training, I was hit hard by the cultural context of the West that was so diametrically opposite to my own reality" (2005, p.9). The notion of a "translocated performing body" (Mitra, 2005, p.4) is expressed within her account of her dance learning journey, highlighting particular issues she faced surrounding notions of the female body, sexuality and physical contact within Western dance practices. Mitra explains this further in the following statement:

It seemed inappropriate to share physical contact with another body, to feel someone's breath on my skin, to experience intimately other bodies in my personal space. Suddenly, I could no longer extend my arms and safely define my personal space like I could within the safe confines of *Kathak's* codification. I struggled. I found myself avoiding physical contact, and would often try to sustain the use of my formulaic physical vocabulary to express myself in this new context. Inevitably, my Indian physicality did not translate into the Western context (p.10).

Mitra's (2005) experience also highlights possible frustrations of East/West collaborations in dance. Similar issues are expressed by Shobana Jeyasingh (1998). Jeyasingh discusses being a choreographer of Indian heritage who is now living and creating work in the United Kingdom. She shares how in her experience these collaborations describe a stagnant view of each culture, due to the uneven power relationship that still exists between East and West, or as Jeyasingh states "the 'colonized' and the 'colonizer'" (1998, p.46). Diana Taylor (1991) explains that often

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<sup>8</sup> Somatic practices within this thesis will refer to Thomas Hanna's (1986) definition where it is explained that "somatics is the field which studies the *soma*: namely, the *body* as perceived from within by first-person perception" (p.3). Specifically in relation to dance this notion can be applied to dance movements, pedagogical strategies and choreographic practices as well as the practice and incorporation of particular techniques such as Body-Mind Centering, Laban Movement Analysis, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Alexander technique, Feldenkrais technique and Skinner Releasing technique (Eddy, 2002; Fortin, 2002).



for those in Western dance contexts there is a particular amount of selectivity and creativity that they can assert over practices of cultural borrowing that are often denied to those outside of such a context. The motivations behind the borrowings or appropriations in such situations are “fundamentally socio-political rather than aesthetic” (p.101).

The experiences shared by Xi (2009), Jeyasingh (1998) and Mitra (2005) raise issues of cultural redistribution and transmission in dance. It has been discussed by Andre Grau (1992), that when Western artists choose to borrow from other dance forms they are often perceived to be creative or innovative. This is a view Michael Seaver (2008) shares, explaining how Western dance constantly looks to ‘other’ non-Western dance cultures to enrich its language, and that cultural ‘borrowing’ in dance is now seen to be a norm and is somewhat expected, often blending traditional dance with contemporary movement. Alternatively, when non-Western artists choose to borrow from Western techniques they are more likely to be viewed as “corrupting their art form” (Grau, 1992, p.24). Within this view, the processes and effects of colonization, cultural trauma and foreign cultural hegemony may also have a significant impact on the dance practices from within cultures. Some artists may feel the need to ‘preserve’ their cultural identity through maintaining cultural practices and traditions unique to their community rather than diluting or diminishing them with alternative cultural practices and influences. Here Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1988) use of the term *subaltern* could be applied.<sup>9</sup> Spivak (1988) suggests that the subaltern must always be caught in translation, between ‘Western’ concepts and language and their own. Similarly, this understanding could be applied to dance where, as seen through the views shared by Seaver (2008) and Grau (1992, 2008), there is negotiation between Western dance language and concepts when used by a non-Western artist. It can also be perceived that the implementation of foreign dance practices threaten rather than extend local cultural practices, with this process occurring either deliberately or insidiously (Rowe, 2007a). It can occur deliberately through the process of making the dance practice, choreography or teaching less familiar and more ‘exotic’, through the use of foreign techniques, or such process can occur insidiously, where hegemonic influences of foreign dance processes continue to exert power

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<sup>9</sup> *Subaltern* is a term frequently used to refer to someone socially, politically and physically outside of a hegemonic power structure (De Kock, 1992).

through the process of cultural education and performance, this in turn dictating cultural actions and development (Freire, 1970).

While the experiences shared by Xi (2009), Jeyasingh (1998) and Mitra (2005) offer insight of the experience of transitioning between dance learning environments, it could also be helpful to explore students' experiences of returning home after their training abroad has finished. It has been noted within some studies that "a significant number of international students go abroad to study with the aim of staying in the host country to work and make a career" (Altbach, 2004a, p.4). Alternatively, Toby Volkman, Joan Dassin and Mary Zurbuchen (2009) explain that "the choice to remain abroad often begins after postgraduate study, when successful graduates, especially those in technical fields, decide to stay in their host countries" (p.26). As investigations specific to dancers seem to be absent from the discussions surrounding this issue, it could be asked if dancers who received their formative training abroad also intended to stay abroad after they finished their studies. If so, why might this be? Was it a choice they made before embarking on their studies abroad or something that emerged from their experiences abroad and the opportunities that were presented?

An experience shared by Karima Mansour, arguably Egypt's most well known contemporary dancer and choreographer, illuminates some of the challenges that arise when returning home after training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context. In an interview with Yasmine El-Rashidi, Mansour (2002) discusses her experiences of growing up in Beirut, Kuwait and Cairo, her training abroad at the London Contemporary Dance School, performing in Europe and then her subsequent return back to Egypt. She explains the circumstances for her return to Cairo: "I have an Egyptian passport [...] I realized that I was going to have to pack my bags and come home [...] after spending seven years dancing six hours a day I felt I had suddenly stopped" (p.5).

It appears that the journey between locations, cultures and contexts has not been easy for Mansour, raising questions over identity, family support and personal motivations in relation to dance. She explained how upon returning to Egypt she was continually negotiating societal

perceptions and structures to continue her dance practices as a full-time profession. In more recent interviews with Ismail Fayed (Fayed, 2011a, 2011b), Mansour shares her experiences of working in Egypt and abroad and the presumptions that accompany the complex situation of being a dancer and choreographer from the “Middle East” (Fayed, 2011a). Mansour explains that she perceives there to be particular expectations of her work, specifically by those observing her work outside of the southern Mediterranean region, where there is an assumption that her creative work should draw on specific themes such as belly dance, folklore, Sufism or Zar. She explains, “my inspiration from my ‘culture’ is subtler, I don’t need to have a label or flag on my work” (Fayed, 2011a, p.3). It can also be seen that there are also expectations within her home environment, and Mansour hints that her work is not appreciated in the same way in Egypt as it is abroad (El-Rashidi, 2002). Mansour explains how, when working in Egypt, she finds the context and environment predominantly values artists that are either “old or foreign” (2002, p.6). This could possibly be a very challenging notion for an artist, who is not considered to be ‘old’ nor foreign, and who wishes to pursue creative practices that are seen to be valued in her home environment. It could be seen that the experiences shared by Mansour reveal issues surrounding alienation, confusion over place, home, location, pressure on creative work and expectations of her work inside and outside of her home environment.

Mansour’s experience can be viewed in relation to scholar Kariamuwelsh-Asante’s (1990) perspective. Welsh-Asante claims that the African choreographer returning home is viewed as a stranger. Welsh-Asante’s exploration of the views of Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon in conjunction with the “philosophy and dance in Africa” (p.224) raises interesting thoughts regarding dancers experiences of spending time abroad and then returning home. One example of this is in Welsh-Asante’s statement, “the danger is that the African choreographer or dancer who returns to the people may be viewed as a stranger by them” (p.230). This comment could be of relevance to this thesis, with the question being raised, do the dancers interviewed for this research feel that they are ‘strangers’ in their home environments, and if so why? The notion of being a stranger at home could connect to Frantz Fanon’s (1952/1967a, 1961/1967b) concept of the native intellectual and contrasted with Antonio Gramsci’s (1929-1935/1971) theory of the “organic intellectual”, a concept drawn from his 1929-1935 prison writings. When applying

Fanon's theory of the native intellectual, with the understanding that it is a person that has become colonized in both body and mind through Western education (Fanon, 1952/1967a, 1961/1967b), dancers who train abroad in Western contemporary dance institutions and then return home to continue to perform, teach or create this same form of Western contemporary dance could be considered native intellectuals. However, contrasting the notion of the native intellectual is Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual. Antonio Gramsci's (1929-1935/1971) theory of the organic intellectual is different from the description of a native intellectual in the sense that although the organic intellectual is still considered to be a bourgeois scholar, they are concerned with maintaining connections with social issues and struggles of their community. The organic intellectual uses their position to cultivate strategies for developing their community without perpetuating or reinforcing colonial values and ideals, rather purposefully resisting them (Fischman & McLaren, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, 1995). Through the application of Gramsci's notion it is possible to look at the experiences of dancers, teachers and choreographers who have trained abroad in contemporary dance and then returned to their home environment asking, are some of these dance practitioners organic intellectuals? If so, how are they using their position to cultivate ideas and approaches for developing their communities?

From examining the experiences of Xiong Xi, Royona Mitra, Shobana Jeyasingh and Karima Mansour it could be asked if the issues raised by these dance practitioners are also relevant for other dancers, teachers and choreographers receiving their dance training in a different cultural context. Have the dance practitioners in this research experienced specific pedagogic challenges when learning dance in a Western cultural context? Or have they experienced somatic challenges? Are they approaching dance in their home environment negotiating East/West divides, or are they developing alternative approaches to dance at home?

### *2.1.3 The diversity of dance learning environments and teaching methods*

Contemporary dance for performance is taught in a variety of settings. These locations include, but are not restricted to, dance conservatories, schools, universities, arts organizations and groups. It could be of assistance to further contextualize the environments where contemporary dance for performance can be learnt, to investigate the diversity of the programmes and also

explore the various philosophies of what different educational environments might offer dance students.

Liberal arts education intends to teach a general knowledge to students, while broadly contributing to their intellectual development (Blaich, Bost, Chan & Lynch, 2004; Glycer & Weeks, 2008). It has been noted by Charles Blaich, Anne Bost, Ed Chan and Richard Lynch (2004) that within a liberal arts education there is “an institutional ethos and tradition that place a greater value on developing a set of intellectual arts than on developing professional or vocational skills” (p.12). Dance is offered as a study option in many liberal arts colleges, with the number of liberal art dance programmes (that are offering both a major and minor in dance) in American universities tripling since the mid-1980s (Bonbright, 2002). The dance programmes at Princeton University, Rutgers University, The University of Auckland and The University of Roehampton can be seen as examples of liberal arts dance programmes. However, as Doug Risner (2010) observes, there are often “limited views and misconceptions of liberal arts degree programmes in dance and dance education” (p.126). Risner states that for those with a direct interest in these programmes, such as deans, students, prospective students and parents, “the viability and practicalities of these programmes remain ambiguous” (p.126). An alternative option in a university context is a fine arts programme, which could be seen to be similar to a liberal arts programme, however, with more practical studio or performance focuses (Tisch School of the Arts at New York University for example). Some higher education institutions offer both a fine arts degree in dance (e.g. Bachelor of Fine Arts) and a liberal arts degree in dance (e.g. Bachelor of Arts) (York University Department of Dance for example).

Conservatoire education intends to provide instruction in one particular discipline where the focus is on training for performance to a professional level for the purposes of gaining a career as a professional performer (Davidson & Smith, 1997; Renshaw, 1992). Conservatoire education may combine aspects of a broad discipline (such music, dance or drama) or may focus solely on one particular style within a discipline (for example majoring in contemporary dance within a conservatory dance context). Conservatoire dance environments may be affiliated with professional dance companies, and may offer degree (undergraduate and postgraduate level),

diploma or certificate programmes, which could be between one and three years of full-time study. Examples can be seen in institutions such as Ecole Superieure de Danse de Cannes Rosella Hightower, Centre National de la Danse, Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Royal Academy of Dance and London School of Contemporary Dance.

Workshop programmes also provide dance education. These vary in location and duration, with different aims and objectives. Some workshop programmes are more regional in nature where most students are from the local area where the workshop is being hosted. Examples of this can be seen at the Cairo Contemporary Dance Workshop Programme which runs month long workshops three or four times per year in Cairo or the Takween Collective: Beirut Contemporary Dance School that runs workshop intensives between October and December every year (however, it can be noted that in recent workshops the Takween Collective have sought to include students from outside the southern Mediterranean region). Other workshop programmes such as DanceWeb (held from July to August in Vienna as part of the ImPulsTanz Festival) could be considered more ‘international’, hosting students from around the world. Alternatively, a number of institutions provide annual summer schools (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance Summer School or the Paul Taylor Summer Intensive for example), which could also be part of a contemporary dance education.

In outlining these modes of contemporary dance education it is important to note that some of these models are not always clearly defined, with some settings described above merging together. Liora Bresler (2007) explains that cross-fertilization in tertiary arts education is not a new occurrence, as “in the past, arts educators reached out to other scholarly disciplines, initially to legitimize and strengthen their position in the school curriculum” (p.xviii). This can be seen where liberal or fine arts programmes have joined with conservatoire institutions. Dawn Bennett (2009) explains this further:

The rise in university-based practical training in the arts has resulted in a staggering array of performance-based undergraduate and graduate qualifications for careers in which qualifications are not required and practical experience is highly valued. Contributing factors include the trend towards amalgamating academic and vocational training and a general move towards larger, more

competitive training institutions (p.310).

These different settings for dance education elicit different modes of teaching, however, when investigating contemporary dance for performance there may be pedagogical practices that are more common than others and issues pertaining to the particular environments in which dance for performance is taught. It could be viewed that the pedagogical practices required and implemented when teaching dance for performance may be different in some ways from the pedagogical practices when teaching dance in recreational or general educational contexts.

Dance technique might be something that is emphasized in some environments when learning contemporary dance for performance. This issue has raised much discourse and debate in dance scholarship, particularly around the importance of technical dance classes (Barr, 2009). As the dance educator Elizabeth Hayes (1964) expressed in her influential text *An introduction to the teaching of dance*, technique is merely “the means to an end and that end is dancing” (p.17). Essentially, dance technique can provide a common vocabulary and codified system for a particular dance form to adhere to, along with traditions, rules and regulations that accompany the particular technique. More recent research has begun to observe some issues that may occur when teaching and learning dance technique, and how this technique might then be applied in choreographic situations (Fortin 1995; Fortin, Long & Lord, 2002; Rowe & Zeitner-Smith, 2011). Some issues that have been investigated include the study of behaviour, learning and teaching processes in the dance class, the implementation of somatic practice, dance science and its implementation in dance practice and performance. There has also been some discussion regarding developing a student’s adaptability between techniques and creative practices, something that Nicholas Rowe and David Zeitner-Smith (2011) describe as “creative dexterity” (p.42). This concept entails encouraging students to develop a readiness to adapt to diverse creative tasks and approaches within choreographic processes, rather than the assumption that it might be an already existing skill that dance students arrive at an institution with. Across dance education institutions, how these issues and developments of dance pedagogy have been incorporated have varied substantially. In many institutions there are differences in course design and the goal of the dance training, often depending on the philosophies on which they base their institution around. As discussed by Tanja Råman (2009), these differences often seem to relate to

“whether the institution emphasizes the importance of the learner’s technical skill acquisition or whether it provides the learner with a wider experience of dance as an art form” (p.76).

Furthermore, it has been noted that within some arts learning environments there is a particular power structure between the student and teacher, where the teacher is considered an authority and provider of knowledge and the student being the vessel gathering this knowledge (Fortin, 1995). Drawing on Michel Foucault’s (1977) theory of power/knowledge, it is understood that the goals of knowledge and the goals of power cannot be separated; both are used to control what we know and how we know it (Hall, 2001). This theory of power/knowledge could be applicable to aspects of this research, since it is viewed to be in everything we learn, teach, respond to and position ourselves within. An example could be how a dancer’s body is trained and shaped in a Graham technique class or a classical ballet class. In Foucault’s perspective power is also perceived as a guide to the behaviour of particular groups; this power transmits knowledge that enables individuals to govern themselves (Martin, 2008).

Conversely, some studies demonstrate that students’ and teachers’ experiences of power/knowledge within the dance learning environment are diverse (Bracey, 2004; Long, 2002). Lauren Bracey’s (2004) research focuses on the dance technique class experiences of female students in a university dance programme. Working within a post-positivist methodological framework, Bracey compared and contrasted the women’s stories with each other and her own. Bracey states that a key finding from the research is that “through studying dance, these women were at times able to find voice and identity” (p.7). Whilst this study begins to explore women’s experiences in dance, it is confined to investigating a small number of dancers who experienced dance in a Western tertiary dance setting with an emphasis on the experience of a dance technique class. Similar to Bracey’s research is Warwick Long’s (2002) investigation of university dance programmes. However, Long describes the experiences of students and teachers of the integration of somatic practices and contemporary dance technique training. Long collects students’ experiences of learning, asking students to describe their experiences of learning movement and provides a valuable discussion of somatic practices and their place within the tertiary dance training environment.



It is also observed that contemporary dance technique and performance and artistic skills are often passed down through generations of dancers, meaning teachers are often replicating how and what they were taught, resulting in teaching methods which could remain static or ‘old-fashioned’ at times, often in an attempt to preserve history and tradition of the art form (Rist, 1994; Salosaari, 2001). However, there seems to be change occurring. Referring to the work of Råman (2009) and Kimmerle and Côté-Laurence (2003), it can be seen that the training of contemporary dance artists for performance is progressively becoming more eclectic, students are being offered a variety of dance styles and techniques, complementary movement forms such as Pilates and yoga and dance theory lessons alongside practical classes. This could be partly due to the diversification of the dance student population, which might be due to the expansion of dance studies to include aspects of dance medicine and science, politics, technology and media (Kimmerle & Côté-Laurence, 2003; Råman, 2009). It could also be in response to the changes and development within the dance industry itself where broader understandings of assorted dance techniques and performance styles potentially could assist dancers to be more employable.

The inclusion of somatic practices and holistic modes of teaching contemporary dance technique and methods also seems to be influencing the power/knowledge structures within the dance teaching and learning environment, with methods being applied that empower both the student and the teacher in the learning environment (Fortin, 1998). Sylvie Fortin (1998) provides three in-depth case studies of three female modern dance teachers and presents the narratives of the women with a specific focus on the influence of somatic practices on their teaching. Fortin looks at how these practices empower the teacher and the student, in contrast to the “often hierarchical and disempowering structure found in many dance technique classes” (p.49). The three dance teachers all share detailed histories of their teaching practices, with the understanding emerging from the collected narratives that personal knowledge and history are valuable sources of experience in the dance studio. Personal history and the female narrative in dance are central to Sondra Sluder’s (1998) research and documentation of her choreographic, learning and performing experiences. Sluder imparts her own life story, expressing that she feels dance to be a process rather than a product, while also being “a place of liberation” (p.121) for women.

However, it could be of interest to ask how the women interviewed for this research feel about this statement. Do they feel more or less liberated when dancing in certain environments, institutions or situations?

## **2.2 Post-colonial perspectives of identity, place and dance**

As this research is investigating and critically reflecting upon experiences of international education in dance through a post-colonial lens it could be considered to be helpful to discuss the concepts of identity and place in relation to dance, further adding context to experiences the dance practitioners within this research may share. Identity could be linked to dance in the sense that dance may inform self-identity, and self-identity may inform an individual's experience of training in a different cultural context, their creative work and artistic directions. The notion of place could be seen to be building from identity, that place may inform one's identity and thus in turn affect dance practitioners' experiences, particularly when dancing between locations, learning in a different cultural context where the sense of place or home may not be so uncomplicated.

### *2.2.1 Identity: A multiplicity of meanings*

The term 'identity' has many interpretations and meanings (Castells, 2004). Broadly speaking, identities are often anchored in relation to gender, age, sexuality, occupation, locality, religion, ethnicity or nationality (Connolly, 1991; Hooper, 2007; Walby, 2006). However, within a postmodern paradigm such categories are not so easily or clearly defined and distinguished, and it is through the individual's own subjective experiences that identities are created, incorporating a plurality of meanings, interpretations and understandings. Identity can be described as "people's source of meaning and experience" (Castells, 2004, p.6), with identity being something that is never static, but rather constantly shifting and evolving (Elliot & Du Gay, 2009). Homi Bhabha (1994) explains this concept further in the following statement:

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or

processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences (p.2).

In Bhabha's view the articulation of identities, and within that cultural difference, is something that is produced in what he describes as "in-between" spaces of definitions and identity (1994, p.2). It is within such in-between spaces that there is the opportunity for "strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha, 1994, p.2). Due to the varying nature of identity, individual and collective identities inform and influence each other, with the collective identity possibly offering a form of self-reassurance for one's own individual identity, whilst also potentially offering a process of functionality and habituation (Connolly, 1991). Consequently, within this research it is to be acknowledged that collective identities merge in and out of each other in different ways and the complexity of identities means they are somewhat fragmented. As Stuart Hall (1996) explains, collective identities are "multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (p.4). In relation to Hall's notion of collective identities, how are the dance practitioners within this research navigating the diverse collective identities they might be finding themselves a part of, from those experienced in their home environments to those experienced in Western cultural contexts?

One element of identity formation is described in Homi Bhabha's notion of the *Other* (1990a, 1994). Bhabha views identity as something that evokes the Other, drawing on the idea that identity is found through difference. In Bhabha's words the Other is something that "emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (Bhabha, 1990a, p.4), and that "identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty" (Connolly, 1991, p.64). Bhabha's notion of the Other could be seen as a relevant intersection with the discussion of identity and cultural constructs, perhaps raising an interesting framework to view international education in dance and the challenges that may accompany such experiences.

Bhabha is not the only scholar to use the term 'Other' in relation to identity construction, with detailed descriptions also being used by Roland Barthes (1982) and Edward Said (1978), among

others (for further examples see: Chin, 1989; Hall, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). A particularly coherent example is given by Barthes (1982), who provides an astute articulation of the Other in his work *The Empire of Signs*, where he discusses Japanese culture in terms of its Otherness. Barthes explains that for a Japanese person living in Japan the culture is not Other, but rather it is the dominant culture and not a cultural construct intended to entice the Western fantasy and ideality of what Japanese culture is (Barthes, 1982). It could be viewed that the notions of the self and Other are not such distinct binary opposites, rather positions that can shift and morph, creating a fluidity of identities. It is perhaps this flux of self and Other and the inability to clearly define the terms that could cause confusion for the dance practitioner who is dancing between locations, continually negotiating self and Other.

Contrasting to the notion of the Other is Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*. Habitus can be viewed as a sphere or system where over time groups and individuals learn and develop various cultural attitudes and dispositions, thus in turn creating and forming self and collective identity. Bourdieu comprehends that such attitudes and dispositions are not consistently pursued; rather, they are exercised uniquely in relation to particular contexts. Through Bourdieu's framework, embodied cultural capital is developed through both consciously acquired and passively inherited properties, offering a means of communication and self-presentation by an individual's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). It could be viewed that if one's embodied cultural capital holds little value in a colonized environment where the surrounding culture offers different knowledge, language, education, tradition and beliefs, a sense of isolation or displacement may be felt. However, this "system of acquired dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.13) and cultural capital as Bourdieu describes it does not necessarily take into account the way cultures may be permeated by the processes of globalization.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus can be seen in Gwenaëlle Chabaud's (2010) investigation of dance students studying Western contemporary dance in Damascus, where she examines the relationship these students have between their bodies and learning Western forms of contemporary dance in a non-Western location. Chabaud claims that the practice of Western contemporary dance in a Syrian context has the potential to create a dual body habitus for those

participating in the practice of contemporary dance, while also revealing that the dancers felt there were political and sexual messages that accompanied the dance practice they were engaging with. Chabaud's study provides an interesting platform for the investigation of dance and habitus in the southern Mediterranean to develop from, with salient points being raised about transculturation of the body through dance.

Some personal accounts of identity reveal that moving between locations and cultures can shift one's identity (El-Sadaawi, 1997; Khalaf & Saad Khalaf, 2009; Said & Murrana, 1991). For some there may be an experience of "suspended betweenness" (Saad Khalaf, 2009, p.111) where they feel torn or confused over identities, locations and environments. Acknowledging that there might be key components in the construction of identity, it is of importance to recognize that it is possible a person could identify with multiple personal, collective, shared or cultural identities. Some of these identities may be influenced by spending time away from one's home environment and immersed in a different socio-cultural environment. Within the work of Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf (2009) it has been noted that there might be a need to re-define and re-evaluate one's own identity when situated in a new environment with different customs, traditions and language, and that the construction of identities are often created through the transcultural hybridization emerging from a globalized world. Khalaf and Saad Khalaf's notion seems to assume that local identities are morphing with foreign identities, reducing the significance of local identities and creating new 'hybridized' identities. However, an alternative perspective is offered by Farha Ghannam (2009) who explains "the local is not passive and local cultural identities are not waiting to be wiped out by globalization as some authors suggest" (p.367).

In relation to the experiences of negotiating the influences of identity, Edward Said discusses with Bonnie Murrana how a multiplicity of identities are "the polyphony of many voices playing off against each other, without [...] the need to reconcile them, just to hold them together" (Said & Murrana, 1991, p.26). Said (1998) explains the difficulty he experienced negotiating the disparity between his acquired 'Western' identity and the 'Arab' identity in which he was born into and subsequently removed from. In trying to reconcile the diversity of

identity influences he explains how he felt the need for continuous self-inventing. Like Said, Roseanne Saad Khalaf (2009) shares similar perspectives when recalling the experience of being away from Lebanon for 10 years and then returning, describing how she felt positioned at the crossroads of cultures, living between two worlds simultaneously. In relation to this research, how do the dance practitioners interviewed feel? Do they feel a sense of suspended betweenness of culture and identity? Exploring various writings surrounding identity and location it can be seen that each individual has unique perspectives, reiterating the subjective nature of identity and the multiple influences and changes that impact on the construction of one's self-identity. Therefore, it could be viewed that learning and performing dance in different cultural contexts for various periods of time might shift and/or influence identity in numerous ways. Examples of this can be seen in the experiences shared earlier by Xiong Xi, Karima Mansour, Royona Mitra and Shobana Jeyasingh (see section 2.1.2).

### *2.2.2 Notions of place and home*

Through the previous section it can be seen that concepts such as place and home are related to identity construction. To further develop the understandings of how identity may be influenced and shaped in relation to the experience of training abroad and then returning to one's home environment it could be of assistance to explore these notions, of place and home, in more detail.

Martin Heidegger's text *Being and time* (1973) can be seen as a useful theoretical framework to address peoples' interactions within various environments. Through discussing and questioning Being, and the relationship Being has with location and time, the concept of place and 'sense of place' can emerge. 'Sense of place', drawing on Heideggerian perspectives, gained prominence in the field of geography during the early 1970s (Cresswell, 1996; Easthope, 2004). Hazel Easthope (2004) explains that "notions of place are important in all aspects of life" (p.128) with ideas of what place might be intertwining with "ideas of community, collective memory, group (and individual) identity, political organization and capital flows" (p.128). Despite the 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 and that 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 community.

The term 'place' is often used in conjunction with the term 'rootedness' (Tuan, 1980); however, the distinction between these terms can be noted, as mentioned in the writings of the humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977, 1980). Tuan (1980) explains, "rootedness implies being at home in an unselfconscious way. Sense of place, on the other hand, implies a certain distance between self and place, which allows for the self to appreciate a place" (p.4). Through this understanding it could be implied that sense of place forms out of feeling that one belongs in a particular place, that it is "part of how you define yourself" (Rose, 1995, p.85); however, as Easthope (2004) explains, "people also identify against places, establishing their own sense of place by contrasting themselves with different places and the people in them" (p.130). Edward Said (1978) also raises this argument when exploring the connections between places and people, particularly highlighting the relationship between home and conflicts.

Contrasting to the concept of feeling connected to a 'place' there is also the experience of placelessness. Geographer Edward Relph (1976) explains that placelessness can create feelings of alienation (Duncan & Duncan, 2001). Relph (1976) coined the term 'placelessness' when he wrote *Place and placelessness*, arguing that places were becoming placeless, attributing this to processes of globalization and particularly the greater mobility of people within contemporary society. While Relph's concept provides a platform for the notion of placelessness and the relationship this may have with individual or collective identities, Relph's term tends to refer to the place as a geographical location and the 'inauthenticity' or 'nonplace' this location may be expressing, rather than the experience of a person or an individual feeling placelessness. It could also be viewed that placelessness is connected to the previously mentioned idea of suspended betweenness, raising the question of how this might affect people moving between locations. The theory of a person being placeless or feeling that they are placeless is of potential relevance when exploring the sense of alienation dance practitioners might feel when training abroad and/or returning home.

From this, one could question the similarity of 'home' and 'place'. Multiple scholars pose the question: 'what is home?' whilst explaining that there is debate over what the term 'home' might mean and how it could be defined (Dupuis & Thorns, 1996; Easthope, 2004; Saunders & Williams, 1988). One perspective is that home could be viewed as a significant type of place, one embedded in personal meanings or a "place where one feels ontologically secure" (Easthope, 2004, p.134). Ann Dupuis and David Thorns (1996) define this further by stating that ontological security of 'home' is experienced when various conditions are met. Firstly, home is where there is constancy in a person's social and material environment. Secondly, home in itself is a spatial situation where routines are performed. Thirdly, home is a situation where people feel most in control of their lives. Finally, home is a secure base where identities are constructed. While the conditions outlined by Dupuis and Thorns may provide one understanding of what home might be, it could be asked how people who do not meet these conditions feel. Possible unmet conditions include when home environments are not secure and where individuals may not feel 'in control' of their lives due to a situation such as military occupation (for example in the Occupied Palestinian Territories) or government surveillance (for example Bashar Al-Assad's Ba'thist regime in Syria). Does it make the place they find themselves in not home, and if so, then where is home for these people?

It may be of more significance to acknowledge that the term 'home' is embedded with personal meanings, that it can mean different things to different people at different times within different contexts. The following statement by Easthope (2004) may provide further clarity on the notion of home:

One's home, then, can be understood as a particularly significant kind of place with which, and within which, we experience strong social, psychological and emotive attachments. The home is also understood as an open place, maintained and developed through the social relations that stretch beyond it (p.135-136).

Therefore, as Easthope (2004) explains, the term 'home' can be understood as a socio-spatial entity (Saunders & Williams, 1988), a psycho-social entity (Giuliani, 1991), an emotional space (Gurney, 2000) or an amalgamation of these experiences (Easthope, 2004, 2009; Somerville, 1992, 1997) that may transform or develop over time and situations.



From the analysis of meanings and interpretations of place and home one might question what the dance practitioners in this research view to be home and if they feel they have a place. How do their experiences of 'home' and 'abroad' impact on their dance practices and artistic directions? In beginning to survey the southern Mediterranean as the region of the home environments of the women within this research, the idea of what home (and in turn the idea of abroad) might be for these dance practitioners can be explored during the interview process. Questioning personal perceptions of both terms in relation to learning dance in a different cultural context might involve inquiring whether a dancer from Aleppo studying in Damascus is at home or abroad. How do we describe the location of a Bedouin dance student from a remote area of Morocco who is based in Casablanca? Is travel across oceans or thousands of kilometres of land required for dance education to be considered 'abroad'? It is possible that the answers to these questions will vary from individual to individual, with some experiencing the notion of 'being at home' or 'being abroad' very differently. Acknowledging the possible diversity in perspectives and understandings, how do the dance practitioners interviewed for this research experience their home environment? How and why might their perceptions of these environments shift over time? And do their experiences of home affect choices they make about their dance practices and artistic directions?

### **2.3 Traces of dance past to present in the southern Mediterranean region**

The history of dance in the southern Mediterranean is somewhat fragmented, with sporadic traces of dance histories and lineages across the region. Anthropologists have suggested that dance in the region was a form of ritual celebration of fertility from the time of the Upper Paleolithic age, around 30,000 BC (Adshead-Lansdale & Layson, 1994; Garfinkel, 2003). From approximately 4000 BC, early civilizations in the region incorporated dance in the worship of female deities (Sharif, 2004). From Yosef Garfinkel's (2003) work *Dancing at the dawn of agriculture*, it can be seen that the remnants of dance in archaeological records and ancient texts of the area record a diversity of dance practices. Garfinkel documents and discusses dancing scenes gathered from 170 archaeological sites from the ancient Near East, providing an analysis of the form, style and cultic nature of dance carried out by early communities in the region. The earliest evidence of dancing in the region that Garfinkel offers are from the eighth millennium

BC and come from three sites in the Levant where depictions of dancing are “carved in limestone on the Pre-Pottery Neolithic scenes from Nevali Cori, painted on plaster floor at Tell Halula, and incised on a basalt slab at Dhuweila” (p.106).

Much historical information (available in English) about dance in the southern Mediterranean also comes from the passing mention of dance in various travelogues and ethnographies. Western ethnographers and travellers to the southern Mediterranean region have witnessed and written about dance events since around the 1830s; however, the descriptions of dance that these sources offer seem to vary according to the interests and perceptions of individual authors. Notable among them is the work of Ameen Rihani (1930/1983) who wrote comprehensively about dancing in his book *Around the coasts of Arabia* and the writings of Edward Lane (1908/1973). Lane provides detailed information about his perceptions of dance in 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt in his work *Account of manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*. Lane provides the following account of dance in Egypt during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century:

The *ghawazee*<sup>10</sup> perform, unveiled in the public streets, even to amuse the rabble. Their dancing has little of elegance; its chief peculiarity being a very rapid vibrating motion of the hips from side to side (p.377).

However, there has been criticism over the representations of dance within accounts from this period, where particular practices or groups of dancers have been omitted from documentation. Such omissions may not have been conscious, rather due to the social context of the period. Egyptian scholar Noha Roushdy (2010) explains the exclusions within Edward Lane’s work, making the following comment about Lane’s writings:

Lane [...] did not regard those whom he had observed dancing in Egypt as accomplished artists or learned and skilled individuals, hence his unwillingness to identify those who dance as ‘*awalim*’<sup>11</sup> – a perception that was apparently shared by most Western writers who recorded their observations of the dance in Egypt over the course of the nineteenth century. Given that Lane would not have been permitted to attend the festivities held in the women’s quarters, moreover, his reference to the inferior class of *ghawazee* who danced may have been limited to those who performed dance before men in public and not necessarily the wider

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<sup>10</sup> *Ghawazee* are female members of one of the ‘gypsy’ tribes (*al ghagar*), believed to be from a distinct cultural background. *Ghawazee* were paid dancers and also identified as fortune-tellers and prostitutes (Von Kremer, 1864).

<sup>11</sup> In contrast to *ghawazee* ‘*awalim*’ are not associated with any particular cultural background (Karayanni, 2004). It has been argued that ‘*awalim*’ were a group of female experts in the arts of reciting poetry, singing and playing music (Lane, 1908/1973).

community of dance performers, which would have included those who would only perform dance before an audience of women (p.79-80).

Dance histories are articulated prominently within the literature tracing dance practices of belly dance or *al-raqs al baladi*<sup>12</sup> (Roushdy, 2010), frequently focusing on the location of Egypt. A broader description of dance within an Egyptian context is offered by dance anthropologist Karin Van Nieuwkerk (2001a, 2001b). The analysis of female performers offered by Van Nieuwkerk provides a detailed historical account of how the images and perceptions of women dancing in Egypt have changed over time. Van Nieuwkerk particularly emphasizes the construction of gender within the images of female dancers in Egypt, the role female belly dancers have had within society, the high esteem in which they were once held as performers and how this has altered over time.

Within Van Nieuwkerk's writings, along with others investigating similar notions (Karayanni, 2004, 2009; Shay, 1994, 1999a, 2002, 2006, 2008), it appears that there has been a shift in how dancers have been viewed by some within southern Mediterranean societies. Van Nieuwkerk (2001a) poses the question: "what are the main reasons for this drastic transformation of the image of female performers from learned women to fallen women?" (p.136). The transformation of how dancers and performers in the region have been perceived could be in response to the 19<sup>th</sup> century period of colonization that occurred throughout the southern Mediterranean. With a flood of Western tourists, adventurers and writers arriving to the region the image of the female performer became depicted in writings, travelogues and paintings as one related to prostitution and dishonour (Van Nieuwkerk, 2001a). This image has since been reiterated and reinforced over time. As Nicholas Rowe (2003) explains, for this reason along with,

[...] various other socio/cultural threats, certain elements within Islamic culture have reacted harshly. The post-colonial period has seen a growth in resistance to anything that might appear 'Western'. As such women who dance publicly within the community became shameful in many regions (para.32).

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<sup>12</sup> *Al-raqs al-baladi* is often referred to in Egypt is *al-raqs al-sharqi*, which is likely to be a translation of the French term *danse du ventre* (Shay & Sellers-Young, 2003). *Al-raqs al-baladi* is also recognised as an urban dance practice with historical lineage in Cairo (Roushdy, 2010). It involves improvised movements focusing on isolating body parts, particularly the upper body, abdominals and hips.

From such a discussion it could be asked, how might the ambivalent views of dance in the region affect the dance practitioners in the southern Mediterranean? How dance practitioners are viewed in society could also be linked to the various laws placed over them within southern Mediterranean contexts at different times to try to ‘control’ or ‘inhibit’ dance practices. Van Nieuwkerk’s (1995, 2001a, 2001b) research focuses on laws placed over dancers during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly in Cairo. She investigates the laws that have regulated entertainment locations and the moral behaviour of those in the entertainment industry, and notes that within contemporary Egyptian society “female singers working in television are highly esteemed” (p.140) whereas “dancers and folkloric dancers, even those working in theatres, may be regarded with ambivalence” (p.140). It appears that dance continued to be associated with more disreputable occupations that led to laws and restrictions over dancers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century not only in Egypt, but also throughout areas of the southern Mediterranean region. Samir Khalaf (2009) discusses how in Beirut, to combat the outbreak of venereal diseases in the early 1920s, dancers, singers and prostitutes were required to register with local police, they were required to carry identification cards specifying their profession and were subjected to weekly medical inspections.

Some scholars have moved away from historical accounts of dance in the region and have focused more on theoretical concerns. An example can be seen in Noha Roushdy’s (2009, 2010) investigations of gender and sexuality in relation to Egyptian belly dance. Roushdy’s research looks at the form of belly dance in both non-professional and professional contexts, employing Michel Foucault’s (1972) theories of historical inquiry to investigate the representation of belly dance and belly dancers as an “object of discourse” (Foucault, 1972, p.49), taking the view that belly dance has become entangled within an Orientalistic structure. Roushdy draws on Leila Ahmed (1992) and Joseph Massad’s (2007) writings to critique past and present portrayals of sexuality and gender in belly dance, looking at the paradoxical divide between professional and non-professional dancers, establishing a premise that belly dance is an embodied part of Egyptian culture. From Roushdy’s work, it could be asked, how are contemporary dance practices perceived, and how do dancers participating in contemporary dance in the region feel they are viewed? Also, how does the experience of learning, performing, creating and teaching

dance between cultures affect or influence the body habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) or embodiment of various dance practices? While this thesis is not the location to pursue such questions, they may be of relevance for future investigations of dance within the southern Mediterranean region.

Along with research emphasizing historical and contemporary practices of belly dance in the southern Mediterranean, folkloric dance is another dance genre widely documented within the region, with significant research investigating the history, authenticity and politics surround this dance practice. Folkloric dance could be considered a popular artistic form across the southern Mediterranean region, both as a social and performative practice (Shay, 1999b; Van Aken, 2006). It has been recognized within the literature that there is a strong folk dance tradition in the southern Mediterranean, going back to early civilizations in the region (Adra, 2005). Many large professional groups constructing theatrical folkloric dance performances in the region have the ability to draw large crowds, receiving national and international recognition for their work (for example: Enana Dance Group; Caracalla Dance Theatre; Reda Company of Egypt). However, the performances these companies produce have influences from a variety of dance genres and lineages, further illustrating the transcultural fusion occurring in dance in a globalized world.<sup>13</sup> It can also be observed that in many locations of the southern Mediterranean region where large, often state funded, folkloric dance companies exist there is very rarely an equivalent company (in size and popularity) for the performance and production of contemporary dance.

Research focusing on the history and practice of folkloric dance within the region has also investigated how traditional or folkloric dance might have a political agenda (for examples see: Kaschl, 2003; Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009; Shay, 1999b, 2002; Zuhur, 1998, 2001). Kaschl (2003) analyzes contemporary *dabke*<sup>14</sup> activities of three prominent dance groups in Palestine and Israel, with the intention of articulating through this analysis how the “seemingly essential difference” (p.1) between Israelis and Palestinians is constructed. Although the study creates a

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<sup>13</sup> For example, the influence of Graham technique in Caracalla Dance Theatre’s work or the Vaganova ballet technique displayed by the dancers in Enana Dance Group.

<sup>14</sup> *Dabke* is a folk dance “made up of intricate steps and stomps” (Rowe, 2011, p.364) that is popular in locations such as Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, the north of Saudi Arabia, Occupied Palestinian Territories/Israel and Yemen. The dance is often performed at weddings and celebrations; however, it is also performed in theatrical or contemporary modes. “The transliteration of this term has resulted in various spellings: in Zionist and Israeli discourse it appears as debke, debkeh, or deppka, whereas within pan-Arabist and Palestinian Nationalist discourse it appears as dabkeh, dabke, or dabka” (Rowe, 2011, p.364).

‘compare and contrast’ situation between the dance practices in Palestine and Israel, the research provides extensive historical background and a comprehensive discussion of dance in relation to national identity. Kaschl does however go beyond the binary positioning of East and West, throwing a more refined light on the dance practices of the groups researched and how their dance practice ultimately informs their identities, individually and collectively. Kaschl’s investigation is a broad platform for further research to build on and of particular relevance to this research in its use of multi-sited ethnography and the articulation of the personal narratives collected.

Amilla Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou (2009) looks at the representations of dance by the Ba’thist regime in Syria, particularly their use of folkloric dance to produce an idealistic portrayal of the country’s past. Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou analyzes the descriptions of folkloric dance performances given by The Syrian Ministry of Tourism, explaining that she perceives there to be a purposeful construction of the lineage of Syrian dance that represents the ideals and values of the Ba’thist regime (Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009). Researcher and choreographer Anthony Shay also examines the relationship between politics and folkloric dance (1999b, 2002). Shay’s investigation of state folkloric dance companies and their representations and claims of authenticity are discussed within his analysis of the social, political and financial restrictions and limitations the folkloric dance companies and choreographers face.

While the investigations provided by Shay and Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou contribute to furthering discussions surrounding dance and politics in the southern Mediterranean, the emphasis in these studies is placed on one particular dance genre (folkloric dance) without exploring more contemporary practices that companies, choreographers or dancers may be influenced by or are engaging with. Further examples of the relationship between dance and politics in the southern Mediterranean have also been gathered in discussion with Beirut based journalist Abigail Fielding-Smith, who explained her investigations of dabke groups from various Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon that are affiliated with Palestinian political parties (for example Hamas and Fatah). Fielding-Smith explained that these groups use dabke as a medium in which to deliver particular political messages and ideologies (personal

communication, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2010; also see Rowe, 2011).

Looking at investigations of contemporary dance in the region it appears that the literature is often broadly focused on the contemporary performing arts – theatre, music, fine arts as well as dance. Examples can be seen in the work of Natalie Smolenski (2007) and Laura Chakravarty Box (2008). Smolenski explores modes of self-representation among female Arab singers and dancers, explaining because “the acceptability of singing versus dancing varies historically from one location to another, it is safe to say that in general, dancing has long ranked below singing in terms of its adherence to the value of seclusion” (p.57). Smolenski goes on to state, “in general, it is far more difficult for dancers to present themselves within the trope of pious, moral women than it is for singers or other performers” (p.61-62). Smolenski’s discussion provides an interesting point about how female dancers might manage or adapt their public image to become more ‘acceptable’ within societies that may have some disdain for women performing in public. From this notion it could then be asked, how do the women who are participants within this research feel about this idea, how do they negotiate their image as dancers, teachers or choreographers in various cultural contexts and does it affect the artistic choices they make? Future research could explore why there may be negative feelings towards women in the performing arts in the region and how the various genres may elicit different responses (for example women dancing belly dance or classical ballet publicly might receive different responses to women performing dabke or salsa). This issue is briefly noted within the doctoral thesis of Maral Yessayan (2010), where various perceptions of dance in a Jordanian context are explored; however, it could be worthy of additional investigation within future research.

Building on Natalie Smolenski’s (2007) notions of representation amongst singers and dancers in the southern Mediterranean, theatre scholar, actor and dramaturge Laura Chakravarty Box (2008) investigates the broad sphere of the performing arts in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Chakravarty Box looks at notions surrounding women involved in theatre, music, cinema, dance and art performance within these locations, offering a comprehensive account of the challenges women performing in the public might face. Chakravarty Box explains that the post-independence years in these locations (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) have had a profound

impact on women in the performing arts, stating that,

The forces shaping the status of women are dynamic and unstable, productive, and in some cases, violent. They take place within larger, and equally volatile, discourses about the socio-political future of the three nation states. This atmosphere had a profound effect on the women artists who must operate within it, or from its diaspora, as they agitate to have a voice in the future of the region. When we consider their work from a remove, it is easy to forget that, in addition to facing themselves the social and political issues about which they write, film, and perform, they, like artists everywhere, grapple with the petty politics of publishing, publicity, funding, public taste, and bureaucratic policy (p.8).

Chakravarty Box (2008) articulates how female artists in this geographical location face similar dilemmas and issues that artists in other environments confront. Chakravarty Box does not isolate these artists as 'exotic' performers in a distant corner of the world; rather, she situates their practices within a location of diversity and difference. This research goes some way in describing the limited documentation of the performing arts practices in North Africa in Western scholarship, as Chakravarty Box explains,

If Francophone North Africa is a blip on the radar screen when it comes to Western scholarship written in English on the so-called Arabo-Islamic arts, then North African performance arts are an even tinier mote, and women's production of same is almost invisible (p.9).

The works of Natalie Smolenski (2007) and Laura Chakravarty Box (2008) raise themes such as gender, the body and dance. Egyptian dancer, teacher and choreographer Karima Mansour further explains the relationship between gender, dance and society. Mansour states that because she is a woman, "dance is a political statement in itself" (interview with Christine Wagner, 2009). The notion of dance being interwoven with politics raised within Mansour's statement is certainly not a recent concept (Phelan, 1993; Reed, 1998), but within various locations across the southern Mediterranean region there is discussion regarding how these two themes are entwined (as briefly mentioned previously in relation to folkloric dance).

Exploring the context and issues of contemporary dance practices in the southern Mediterranean, it could be asked, where is contemporary dance for performance currently being taught and performed in the region? There are several established, sustainable training institutions and dance companies in locations across the southern Mediterranean region that have emerged from



varied dance lineages. In Cairo the Egyptian Modern Dance Theatre Company and Cairo Contemporary Dance Centre<sup>15</sup> are state funded institutions engaged in the teaching and performance of contemporary dance. Since the Egyptian 'Arab Spring' uprising of 2011 numerous changes have occurred at these institutions, with a new artistic director taking leadership and philosophies and objectives shifting.

Like Egypt, Syria also has a state funded dance institution, The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts (HIDA) in Damascus, where dancers can receive formative training in contemporary dance as a three-year degree program. HIDA is supported by The Syrian Ministry of Culture, with the dance department currently being directed by Metaz Malatally. At this stage there is no state funded contemporary dance company for students to join upon graduation; however, independent companies such as Leish Troupe directed by Noura Murad and Tanween Contemporary Dance Company directed by Mey Sefan are producing innovative contemporary work, while the large folkloric dance company, Enana, provides employment opportunities for dancers graduating from HIDA.

In Morocco contemporary dance for performance is taught at the state funded Conservatoire National Choregraphique in Rabat, Municipal Conservatory of Casablanca and Ecole Ballet Théâtre Zinoun in Casablanca. Contemporary dance training programs and workshops are also offered by independent artists such as Khalid BENGHRIB and his Franco-Moroccan company Cie2k\_far and Brahim Sournay's company 11.org. Other independent dance practitioners influencing the teaching and performance of contemporary dance in Morocco include Taoufiq Izeddiou, Hind Benali, Bouchra Ouizguen and Said Ait El Moumen in Marrakesh and Ingrid Ober, Anne-Lise Riscalla and Meryem Jazouli in Casablanca.

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<sup>15</sup> The Egyptian Modern Dance Theatre Company and Cairo Contemporary Dance Centre (formerly called Cairo Modern Dance School) are supported by The Egyptian Ministry of Culture. Both were established and run by Walid Aouni (from 1992-2011) and a clear divide in the Cairo contemporary dance scene existed between those supported by The Egyptian Ministry of Culture (or working within one of their state funded dance institutions), and those who were working as independent artists. However, with the events of the Arab Spring, where the former Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, was removed from his position and support has diminished for those propped up by the former Mubarak regime, Aouni resigned from his position as director of these institutions and they were taken over by Karima Mansour who has been an independent Egyptian Artist, who trained and performed abroad for many years before returning home.

In Tunisia the state funded Institute of Higher Education of Dramatic Arts of Tunis offers training in contemporary dance, while the independent institution Studio Bambou, directed by Nawel Iskandarani, also offers contemporary dance training and performing opportunities. The National Theatre and Studio Dance Theatre also were locations for contemporary dance to be taught and performed in Tunis until their state funding was cut in the mid-2000s and they were forced to close.

In contrast to Egypt, Syria, Morocco and Tunisia where there are state funded institutions that offer training (and where there is a company and professional employment) in contemporary dance, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Malta have no such institutions. Rather, in these locations, for dancers to receive contemporary dance training, performing experience and professional work there is a reliance on dance institutions that are either partially subsidized by the government or foreign cultural organizations, or alternatively to attend entirely independent schools or companies.

In Lebanon, two institutions teaching contemporary dance are Caracalla Dance Theatre and Maqamat Dance Theatre. Caracalla Dance Theatre was founded in 1970 by Abdel-Halim Caracalla. The company is based in Beirut, and aims to fuse Western contemporary dance practices and local folkloric dance techniques. Maqamat Dance Theatre is currently directed solely by Omar Rajeh, and could be viewed as the dominant force within Lebanese contemporary dance, with a contemporary dance company (Maqamat Dance Theatre) and a school (Maqamat Studios) as well as the intensive training programme (Takween: Beirut Contemporary Dance School). Contemporary dance education in Lebanon is also offered at the Beirut Dance Company and Beirut Dance Studio, directed by Nada Kano, at the Al-Sarab Alternative Dance School in Jbeil, directed by Dr. Nadra Assaf, and also through the Lebanese American University where Dr. Assaf has recently established a dance studies programme.<sup>16</sup>

In the Occupied West Bank the Popular Arts Centre in Al-Bireh provides training in contemporary dance and El-Funoun Palestinian Popular Dance Troupe (currently directed by

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<sup>16</sup> The dance programme at the Lebanese American University began in the fall of 2011 and is the first Lebanese university offering a major in dance.

Khaled Qatamesh) and Sareyyet Ramallah Troupe/First Ramallah Group for Music and Dance (currently directed by Khaled Elayyan), both offer training and performing opportunities in contemporary dance practices.

In Malta contemporary dance is taught at the University of Malta at Bachelor and Master's level, or can be learnt at private training institutions such as Academy of Dance Arts. Contact Dance Company and Rubberbodies Dance Collective are two independent contemporary dance companies providing performing opportunities for contemporary dancers in Malta.

From the examination of dance histories in various regions of the southern Mediterranean, along with the explorations of research regarding more contemporary dance practices occurring, there are several investigations that have revealed some key issues applicable to dance in the southern Mediterranean. A number of these studies acknowledge the diversity in the dance practices and performances in a range of communities and dance genres in various southern Mediterranean contexts (Chabaud, 2010; Karayanni, 2004, 2009; Kaschl, 2003; Rowe, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; Shay, 1994, 1999a, 2002, 2006, 2008; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Yessayan, 2010; Zuhur, 1998, 2001). It is hoped the investigations outlined can contribute to furthering contextual understandings of the experiences the women within this research may have of dancing within the southern Mediterranean region and abroad.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter key ideas from the literature relevant to this thesis have been presented and critically examined with significant issues and questions raised that are further explored, reflected upon and critiqued during the discussion chapter of this thesis.

Firstly, concepts surrounding international education were investigated. It can be viewed that the motives for both providing and receiving international higher education may have shifted from cultural to more economic agendas. Of interest within this investigation, but also potentially within future investigations is the question: are cultural agendas that have emerged out of these hegemonic structures still currently occurring in international education in dance?

Secondly, learning in a foreign context was considered. Crucial dilemmas applicable to those both receiving and providing international tertiary education were raised, where issues specific to the learning experience within the creative arts and dance were articulated along with four individual dance practitioners' experiences of learning contemporary dance in different cultural contexts and the impact this has had on their careers as dance practitioners. It was also noted that it could be of interest to ask, might the issues raised in these four dance practitioners' experiences also be relevant for other dancers, teachers and choreographers receiving their dance training in a different cultural context?

In the third section of this chapter, the diversity of contemporary dance learning environments and teaching methods was explored. This included a discussion of various models of dance education and diverse ideas surrounding modes of teaching contemporary dance for performance. Specifically, this discussion raised possible power/knowledge concerns within dance learning environments. Research regarding holistic and somatic approaches to dance teaching was also discussed.

The fourth section of this chapter queried the multiple meanings and interpretations of identity, and the relation this could have on dance practitioners receiving their dance education in a different cultural context and subsequently returning to their home environments to continue their dance career. Perspectives of identity and its formation were presented through theories from scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1990a, 1994), Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Roland Barthes (1982). It could be seen that due to the shifting nature of identities, learning and performing dance in different cultural contexts for various periods of time might shift and/or influence one's self-identity in numerous ways.

Developing from the discourse surrounding identity, the fifth section of this chapter investigated the ideas of place and home. Through the articulation of these concepts it is hoped that further dialogue will emerge between these concepts as well as the experiences of dance practitioners interviewed within this research, and their development of identity and adaptation between

location and self. This chapter looked at diverse philosophical perspectives regarding sense of place and how this is entwined with identity. Extending on this discussion the concept of the term and meaning of home was explored, where questions relevant to this research were raised such as, what do the dance practitioners within this research view to be home and do they feel they have a place? And how do their experiences of 'home' and 'abroad' impact on their dance practices and artistic directions?

Finally, traces of dance in the southern Mediterranean were presented. Within this concise overview key works investigating various dance histories and perspectives of the southern Mediterranean were explored. It can be noted that while the number of scholarly studies investigating dance in this geographical location may not be particularly vast, the inquiries presented offer a platform for this research to build from.

I believe that the theories and questions raised throughout this chapter will not only provide a theoretical foundation for this research to build upon but will also provoke further critical reflection through the analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis.

## **Chapter 3: Research methods**

This chapter outlines and discusses the research methods utilized in this study. The first section presents the research aims and theory, with an investigation and articulation of a post-positivist paradigm and qualitative research. The second section identifies ethnographic research as the primary research method, with an exploration of multi-sited ethnography and how this has been incorporated into the study. This is followed by an analysis of my position as the researcher and the experience of being both an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ of the environment being investigated. The research design is then discussed, where the data collection methods are reviewed, with a discussion of the literature review, participant observations and interviews as modes of data collection. This is followed by a discussion of the subsequent analysis of the gathered data. Finally, the limitations and challenges of the study are presented and discussed.

### **3.1 Research aims and theory**

A post-positivist paradigm was selected to investigate the question: how has the experience of training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context affected the dance practices of seven female dancers from the southern Mediterranean region? In such a paradigm it is viewed that there are multiple constructed realities, rather than a single objective reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Borland, 1990; Philips & Burbles, 2000). While the experiences of the women participating in this research might resonate with experiences of others in a variety of settings, it was never my intention as a researcher to produce a set of standardized experiences. Rather, I was interested in how individuals experienced learning dance abroad and returning to their home environment to teach, perform and create dance. I was initially most interested to investigate whether their collective experiences shared common ground; however, as the fieldwork developed the moments of diversity and difference caught my attention, bringing these to the foreground of the investigation. It is also helpful to recognize that within post-positivist research, the inquirer and the subject of inquiry are seen to be inseparable; therefore, this research aims to offer a multiplicity of interpretations of the research findings whilst acknowledging my own position within the research process. This will be discussed further in the chapter with regards to the issues of reflexivity and subjectivity that arise when conducting such research.

Within this post-positivist paradigm, I selected to take a qualitative approach towards the research topic. Qualitative research aims to explore the meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves (Flick, 2006; Malterud, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) rather than aiming to classify features, provide statistical data and test hypotheses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Both qualitative research and a post-positivist approach are related in how they can offer multiple perspectives of the area under investigation. It has been noted that qualitative research is an appropriate methodology for uncovering the various meanings that underpin behaviours, attitudes, and feelings (Robson & Foster, 1989). While the term qualitative research can mean “many things to many people” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13), it can be seen that there are elements which make for a good qualitative research design, as discussed in the following statement by Valerie Janesick (2003): “the essence of good qualitative research design turns on the use of a set of procedures that are simultaneously open-ended and rigorous and that do justice to the complexity of the social setting under study” (p.46).

Therefore, throughout this study I have aimed to apply both openness and rigor to this research, as suggested by Janesick, to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of women training abroad and then returning to the southern Mediterranean region to teach, perform and create dance in a variety of ways.

### **3.2 Research methods: Multi-sited dance ethnography**

Within a qualitative approach to research there are numerous research methods that may be selected, all of which provide different perspectives for understanding the particular phenomena being investigated. For this study I have selected an ethnographical mode of inquiry to investigate the research topic, as ethnography involves observation, participation, interviewing and writing about a group of people, a particular culture, or environment. Ethnography as a mode of inquiry enables the researcher to investigate personal accounts, narratives and descriptions (Denzin, 1997) about their own ways of life and experiences of the world. Joan Frosch (1999) explains that “at its most basic, ethnography is ‘writing’ about people” (p.258). Writing in the practice of ethnography gives the researcher the ability to capture multiple layers of narratives

and experiences through evocative and vivid written dialogues. Frosch explains further that “descriptive in nature, ethnography pursues understanding through the layering of the specific and highly complex contexts of human experience” (p.258).

Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, ethnography aimed to define cultures, name people and tell them who they were or what they might become (Asad, 1973; Clair, 2003). Within contemporary ethnography the early beginnings of the methodology have been questioned regarding legitimacy in the discourse (Asad, 1973; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1997). Ethnography’s history, which is embedded in the practices of anthropology and sociology, has been substantially shaped by its “association with Western interest in the character of non-Western societies and the various motives underlying that interest” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2001, p.249).

Approaches to ethnography where an ‘outsider’ immersed him or herself in a culture foreign to their own, to then write ‘truths’ about that particular culture have been critiqued, with several discussions citing such approaches as ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘out-dated’ (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2001; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995). Contemporary ethnography, which has been adopted by a variety of academic fields, looks to discover the multiple truths that operate in the various social worlds we live in (Denzin, 1997). Through this investigation the post-positivist ethnographer has the possibility to explore the discontinuities, paradoxes and commonalities of a variety of cultures, groups and environments in action. It has been discussed by Karen O’Reilly (2009) that a post-positivist ethnography “evokes rather than represents” (p.187). However, ethnography’s ability to ‘evoke’ narratives and experiences of people and places is done with the intention to acknowledge the complexity of the social worlds that we are involved in, whilst also being aware of their limitations. A post-positivist perspective was selected for this research with the aim of enabling distinct versions of different experiences to be shared, and with no one voice being more valuable than another (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This offers a layered account of the experiences of women who have learnt dance abroad and then returned to their home environment in the southern Mediterranean region to teach, perform and create dance.

Ethnography in dance scholarship has become an emerging field of practice (Buckland, 1999a,



1999b, 2001, 2006; Kaeppler, 1971, 1972, 1978, 2000; Keali'inohomoku, 1970, 1976a, 1976b; Kurath, 1960; Ness, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2004, 2008; Sklar, 1991, 2000; Thomas & Ahmed, 2004). Referring to Dedrie Sklar's (1991) work, dance ethnography can be viewed as a form of "cultural knowledge" (p.7), and that when examined from an ethnographic perspective dance is given the opportunity to be documented beyond a purely somatic understanding, allowing it to become a mental and emotional experience too, one which encompasses "cultural history, beliefs, values, and feelings" (p.6). The view that from an ethnographic perspective dance and culture are intrinsically interwoven is shared by Cynthia Novack (1990):

Culture is embodied [...] movement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate. We perform movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpret it, on conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it (p.8).

The focus on the relationship between dance and culture in ethnographic research is further discussed by Anthony Shay (2008) who explains how, from his perspective, most studies in dance ethnography have focused on the culture of dance in the sense that they have looked specifically at "the dancing that natives do in their own native environments" (p.6), with the focus often being on the dance genre or form. Shay's research looks at 'exotic' dance forms being performed by individuals who would be considered 'others' or 'outsiders' from the traditional contexts or cultural situations such dances would originally be performed in. In my own research, discussion occasionally occurs regarding particular dance styles or genres in the southern Mediterranean region; however, in contrast to Shay's work, this study looks, through an ethnographic lens, at the individual experiences of those who are learning, performing, teaching and creating dance, rather than examining or critiquing particular dance styles or genres.

Ethnography often involves the researcher collecting data from the field, a practice that has its roots in the anthropological history of the method. Today, the term *field* can mean outside the settings of the academic institution, with the researcher going to the site of investigation to gather information (Hobbs & Wright, 2006). Spending time in the field is viewed as an essential part of ethnographic research, a phase of the research process where the researcher spends time with the participants and can observe, participate, interview, converse, record and document the necessary information required for the study (Hobbs & Wright, 2006). My time in the field involved

spending 11 months travelling throughout the southern Mediterranean region meeting dancers, teachers, choreographers and those within a variety of arts communities, teaching and participating in dance classes and workshops, observing performances and becoming immersed as much as possible in the diverse cultures of the region. My ‘office’ took the form of cockroach infested hotels, friends’ apartments, cafés filled with the sweet smell of shisha, local dance studios and theatres, trains, buses and airplanes, all of which contributed to my fieldwork experience.

### *3.2.1 Dancing through a multi-sited ethnography*

This research has taken what George Marcus (1995, 1998) describes as a ‘multi-sited ethnographic’ approach. This means that rather than conducting fieldwork in one location, with one particular group of people, a multi-sited approach seeks to gather information across a range of locations (Marcus, 1995, 1998). The object of investigation is viewed from a variety of settings whilst allowing for the increasing interconnections and globalization of the world to be acknowledged, and for a dialogue to emerge between the narratives of differing cultures and environments. The development of multi-sited ethnography has arisen from “anthropology’s participation in a number of interdisciplinary [...] arenas that have evolved since the 1980s” (Marcus, 1998, p.80), with a more recent utilization of the method in a variety of fields due to the desire to “demystify and ground globalization” (Freidberg, 2001, p.353). However, Marcus (1998) notes that most developments of multi-sited ethnography have taken place in Anglo-American contexts where language is straightforward for native English speakers.

The multiple sites I visited over an 11 month period to gather data were Ramallah, Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Casablanca, Malta and Cairo. Although visiting a number of locations is an essential part of what has made this ethnography multi-sited, it was intended that multi-sited ethnography would allow interesting threads, interconnections and paths to develop, with the emphasis on multiple perspectives rather than only multiple sites, therefore “invoking a sense of voyage” through the research (O’Reilly, 2009, p.146). Multi-sited research is also of importance in relation to how links and interconnections are created and to show diversity and difference between people’s experiences, in both local and global contexts. The use of a multi-sited

approach allows for national identities to be somewhat transcended, thus contributing to building regional histories of dance and dancers' experiences in the area.

### *3.2.2 The dancing narrative*

Within a multi-sited ethnographic method this research has focused on the individual narratives of seven dance practitioners. Edward Bruner (1997) notes that “ethnographies are guided by an implicit narrative structure” (p.264). With this in mind, the narratives gathered in this study have been purposefully developed to become central features within the research process. A narrative can be seen as an “oral, written, or filmed account of events told to others or oneself” (Smith, 2000, p.328), with the study of the narrative being viewed as an investigation of the multiple ways in which people experience the world (Barthes, 1966; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Richardson, 1990). Time and place become essential within a narrative, as do settings and descriptions of context (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Laurel Richardson (1990) explains the concept of the narrative in qualitative research in the following statement:

Narrative displays the goals and intentions of human actors; it makes individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs comprehensible as wholes; it humanizes time; and it allows us to contemplate the effects of our actions, and to alter the directions of our lives. Narrative is everywhere; it is present in myth, fable, short story, epic, tragedy, comedy, painting, dance, stained glass windows, cinema, social histories, fairy tales, novels, science schema, comic strips, conversation, and journal articles (p.117).

The transformation of narrative accounts into text requires complex decision-making. As Catherine Reissman (2005) explains, narratives do not speak for themselves, “they require interpretation when used as data” (p.2). The researcher’s role is to interpret the underlying themes and concepts of the interviewees’ stories (Reiley & Hawe, 2005), with these interpretations relating “to the purposes of the inquiry which, at the time of writing, may have evolved from the purposes originally conceived for the project and in terms of which much of the data was collected” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.11). Within dance research several scholars have used narratives as a means to explore the rich and complex experiences of dancers, teachers and choreographers (for example see: Bond & Deans, 1997; Fortin, Long & Lord, 2002; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). In dance educator and scholar Doug Risner’s (2000) interpretive inquiry investigating the construction of knowledge by dancers in the rehearsal process, he

draws on the dancers' narratives to reveal notions of "interpersonal construction, knowing as remembering the body, and the contextual situatedness of knowing from a particular body, place, and time" (p.155). Risner's (2000) study illuminates the ways narratives can provoke questioning: "Narrative research through particular stories, often reveals issues previously hidden and in doing so, frequently more important questions, rather than generalizable answers, arise" (p.170).

While narratives can be seen to offer meaning to experiences, it has been noted that there is a somewhat contested history of narrative inquiry and a range of approaches being drawn from diverse disciplines with "no one unifying method" (Reiley & Hawe, 2005). There has been some debate over the problematic nature of the narrative, with some scholars stating that there is the risk of writing fiction or deceiving readers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Others have shared concerns regarding speaking on behalf of a certain group, or alternatively pretending to offer an authentic voice on behalf of a particular group of people (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Reissman, 2005). Within this research I do not intend to claim the narratives shared by the seven dance practitioners are more 'authentic' than other methods of representation, nor do they sit outside of the socio-cultural contexts in which they have emerged from. Instead, they provide snapshots of memories and reflections of particular times of individuals' lives, whilst acknowledging the intersubjectivity of the inquiry and the multiple ways in which the events and experiences shared could be organized, viewed and interpreted.

### **3.3 Inside out: Position of the researcher**

When immersed in a foreign research environment for extended periods of time, the experience of culture shock is a very real possibility. Culture shock (see 2.1.2) could be understood as a form of anxiety occurring "from losing familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (Oberg, 1960, p.177). This is seen as a relatively common experience in ethnographic research, and one of the oldest themes in anthropology. It has been noted that culture shock can be minimized through gaining a general knowledge of the people, language and cultural customs prior to arriving in the field (Furnham, 2004; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Radwan, 1987).

I personally experienced immense culture shock at various times of the fieldwork process, and this was something I had to negotiate during the year I spent travelling through the southern Mediterranean region. I found not speaking Arabic particularly problematic as I was often left out of group conversations or felt that I was burdening friends who continually had to translate for me. I was constantly surprised and shocked in this new environment, and as a researcher I had to restrain my responses, attempting to live with the sharp edge of cultural relativism. My initial experiences were a mixture of extreme highs and lows and I quickly had to adapt to the environment around me. I found that it was how others perceived me, a Western woman travelling alone that initially made me feel very different in my new surroundings. I was questioned regularly by everyone from taxi drivers to bank clerks about why I was not married and did not have children. I often tried to explain my situation and work; however, education and occupation could not explain or make up for the absence of a husband or children. I found I resented being treated like a child by those around me, and my initial reaction as someone who has lived in a post-feminist environment, was indignation. However, I quickly realized that to progress with my research and to make the following months bearable I had to let my understandings and perceptions shift, and become accepting of my new 'home'. Towards the end of my time in the region I certainly felt more comfortable in my socio-cultural environment, to the point where I knew that there would be certain things I would miss about the region once I came back to New Zealand; the culture shock was now mild and I had become more adaptable.

I went into the research environment I was investigating feeling that I was both an 'insider' and 'outsider' (Mullings, 1999; Sherif, 2001). During the research process I felt that at times I was more of an outsider than an insider, and conversely there were times where I felt I was more an insider than an outsider. As I became immersed in day-to-day goings on in various dance environments and wider cultural settings, both as an observer and participant, I was able to adapt to and cope with being either an insider or an outsider with more ease, looking at situations and issues with more reflexivity and subjectivity as I became more accustomed to my surroundings.

It has been noted that particular issues may be relevant to female researchers conducting ethnographic fieldwork, as discussed in the writings of Esther Bott (2010), Jill Dubisch (1995),

Laurie Kreiger (1986), Eva Moreno (1995), Ann Radwan (1987) and Helen Sampson and Michelle Thomas (2003). Specific to the southern Mediterranean region, Ann Radwan's investigation of gender issues when carrying out academic research notes that a woman conducting studies in this part of the world may "have an advantage over their male colleagues" (p.131). Radwan explains that this might be due to the understanding in the region that women would not partake in any politically sensitive research or be "individuals wishing to foment political disturbances" (p.131). Radwan explains that this perception of female researchers may facilitate access to research groups; however, it also "creates concern that one is not taken seriously as a scholar" (p.132). Conversely, Eva Moreno (1995) shares a different perspective to the one held by Radwan:

I worked in Ethiopia with no understanding that my own gender might be an important factor in the fieldwork I did. All I had heard on the topic was my male supervisor telling me that female fieldworkers had advantages over male fieldworkers, because female anthropologists often had access to both female and male social circles. In actuality, the niches open to female fieldworkers vary from field to field, just as the backgrounds of anthropologists vary [...] what does not vary is the fact that women must always, everywhere deal with the spectre of sexual violence in a way that fundamentally differs from anything that our male colleagues have to contend with (p.247-248).

Before embarking on the fieldwork component of this research I was aware that as a female conducting research in such settings, commitment to the project, preparation, professionalism and the desire to understand and respect others' beliefs, like in any research assignment, were essential qualities to maintain. However, it could be said that maintaining such qualities is something easier said than done when one finds one's self in a difficult and foreign situation. I found that as a woman travelling alone, I felt exposed and vulnerable on many occasions. Meeting the seven women and conducting interviews was never a problem, but rather it was the day-to-day goings on, travelling to and from interviews and finding interview locations that I found myself in situations where I felt somewhat 'marked' in terms of gender. Enduring experiences such as being physically harassed in a taxi while travelling through Downtown Cairo, or rocks being thrown at me by teenage boys yelling obscenities (in English) at me in Jebel Amman often left me shaken and occasionally wary to venture outside. Sexual harassment in the field has been documented by some female researchers (Bott, 2010; Gearing, 1995;

Gurney, 1985; Moreno, 1995; Sampson & Thomas, 2003); however, it is still often undocumented or considered to be a sign of a 'weak' researcher (as explained by Irwin, 2007; Moreno, 1995).

Nevertheless, over time I began to understand these experiences more and was able to take such events less personally. I found I could adapt my behaviour, the way I dressed and also my reactions to various comments or attention to minimize negative encounters and realized that it was part of the fieldwork experience. As Helen Sampson and Michelle Thomas (2003) explain, one cannot make one's self genderless, however there are "certain strategies" (p.185) that can be useful in reducing the impact of "gender on the research process and experience" (p.185). I had never noticed gender and the implications of being female so much as I did during my time in the field. Being a female certainly enabled me to speak to women dancing with ease, and discuss particular topics (the body and sexuality for example) more openly perhaps than if I was a male conducting the same research project. It also offered me the chance to speak to women who were non-dancers about their perceptions of dance and also to participate in women's social activities that dance was a part of (wedding preparations, birthday celebrations), thus making me an insider in regards to gender.

I felt I was sometimes considered an insider within the environment I was investigating in the sense that the dance class, rehearsal and performance setting are environments well known to me, as is the experience of dancing, teaching, learning dance for performance both in my home environment and abroad. Being an insider to the dance world offers a particular understanding, empathy and commonality towards the seven women that could be seen as potentially advantageous to the study. I too had left home to study dance, albeit on a much more domestic scale, moving from my home city of Auckland to Wellington at the age of 16, and then over the next 10 years I spend many months moving between cities and countries whilst touring, travelling to locations such as France, Canada, England and Japan to further my dance training and also to engage in performing opportunities. At the same time however, there are possible negative implications of being an insider when conducting research that must be acknowledged. There is the possibility, in knowing any group, community or environment well that assumptions

are made, things may be taken for granted and personal opinions may become involved in the research. It is impossible to remove one's biography, politics and relationships from the research process entirely. Rather than allowing personal perspectives and history to become a hindrance in the research and analysis, facing, acknowledging and incorporating these aspects into the research can enhance the depth and meaning of interpretations, by adding another layer to the research.

Whilst being an insider from one perspective, I felt I was also considered an outsider from another perspective. Coming from a Western, liberal, English speaking environment and situating myself in the southern Mediterranean region where the languages, cultures, traditions and social and political environments are somewhat contrasting, I was quite obviously a foreigner. I was inevitably viewed by some as an outsider, regardless of my dance background and experience. I also felt that as someone coming from the 'West' people sometimes assumed that I had particular preconceived notions and understandings of the culture, beliefs, people, women and dance in the region. However, I found that through immersing myself thoroughly within particular environments, being extremely flexible and accommodating to my surroundings and adapting accordingly contributed to further developing my role in the research as an insider.

Reflexivity, a process of thinking about what one reads, views and writes is frequently taken for granted in postmodern ethnographies (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). It is intended that the process of reflexivity is remembered by the researcher throughout, where they acknowledge their part in the world which is being studied, and maintain awareness that reflexivity is not a single phenomenon, rather a process which "assumes a variety of forms and affects the research process throughout all its stages" (Davies, 2008, p.6). Like reflexivity, the researcher's own subjectivity is often viewed to be intrinsic in the process of the research. Within ethnography and when employing a post-positivist paradigm, subjective experiences and understandings are viewed to be insights that encourage the incorporation of different standpoints and the exposure of differing views and narratives. In this research it is of value to acknowledge that the experience of learning dance can be entirely subjective, with no two experiences being identical.



Dance ethnographer, Deidre Sklar (1991), articulates that self-reflexivity is essential to the research process, as subjectivity is central to who we are as people and therefore inevitable that it impacts on the research process. Sklar explains that “cultural background influences what one perceives and how one interprets what she perceives” (p.8). Consequently, the researcher’s own cultural knowledge is as much part of the relationship between researcher and dancer as the dancer’s own cultural knowledge. It can also be acknowledged that trust, privacy and safety are to be acknowledged by the researcher who has a responsibility to be continually aware of such issues (Bott, 2010). In the process of self-reflexivity the researcher is required to critique their own understandings of the research, the context, the experiences and the observations. Subsequently, in taking a post-positivist perspective, my own subjectivity could be seen to be inherent in the research process, with my own thoughts, experiences and opinions of dance, learning, performing and the wider cultural context being of significance to the research processes and outcomes. It could be asked what the effects of the researcher’s own history might be on the narrative being explored. Or how does one’s biography impact on how the dance practitioners’ stories might be told? Furthermore one could question, how might the experiences in the field influence how a participant’s experience or idea might be presented? Within future studies such questions could be explored within a more detailed investigation of research methods such as multi-sited ethnography or the fieldwork experience.

I have selected to include my own personal thoughts and reflections throughout the following chapters where applicable, as this research also intends to present how I have sought to relate to the women’s perceptions of the world and experiences of dancing abroad. I met many of the seven women who are participants in this research by chance, most often through a new found acquaintance, usually another dancer, who I met when conducting interviews for the *Our Dance Stories* book or when I was teaching or participating in a dance class. We would typically meet for the interviews at a dance studio, at their home or a relative’s home, a café or local restaurant. Some of the women were used to giving interviews and were articulate when discussing their experiences; however, others were surprised that I had contacted and asked to interview them. Some had rarely shared their story with anyone and it took a number of interviews for them to become comfortable to share details of their time abroad and their feelings of returning home.

The women who are participants in this research each have very different experiences of dance in their home environment and abroad, with no two experiences being exactly alike.

### **3.4 Data collection**

This research involved a review of the literature to provide context and theory to the research, and three principal methods of data collection. Firstly, participation in associated research projects, forums, meetings, and discussions with colleagues have contributed to developing and clarifying ideas that emerged throughout the research. Secondly, observations of the women in teaching, performing and choreographic environments further informed data gathering processes. Thirdly, multiple semi-structured interviews with the seven women have formed the basis and the focal point for the research.

The review of the literature offered the opportunity to source, analyze and critique studies and writings relevant to the research area, providing contextual understanding prior to gathering the data, and contributing to developing themes and knowledge during the subsequent fieldwork and writing stages of this thesis. Gathering the literature I accessed several libraries, on-line databases and archives. These include using the resources from: The University of Auckland General Library, Dance and Music Library, Fine Arts Library; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance Library; The British Library; The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; The Jordan University Library; Townhouse Gallery Library; British Council Libraries in Cairo and Amman; Abdul Hameed Shorman Public Library; Lebanese American University General Library and The American University of Beirut General Library. On-line data-bases accessed included IIPA Full Text: International Index to Performing Arts, Dance Education Literature and Research Descriptive Index, PsychINFO, Scopus, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, JSTOR and Worldcat, while also drawing on the on-line archives of Agence France-Presse, Al-Ahram Weekly, Al-Masry Al-Youm, Baladna Syrian Daily Newspaper, Ballettanz, Counterpoint, Dance Europe Magazine, Egypt Daily News, El-Funoun Popular Dance Group, Jordan Times, Malta News, The Daily Star, The Guardian, The Independent, The Times of Malta, This Week in Palestine, TimeOut Beirut, Syria Forward Magazine and Viva Magazine Jordan. It can be noted that all literature was searched for in

English, highlighting a limitation of the research. In the review of the literature relevant to this research, I have drawn on discourses surrounding international education, learning in different cultural contexts, dance teaching and learning, dance in the southern Mediterranean region and post-colonial theories of identity, place and home.

#### *3.4.1 Forums/meetings with research partners, Our Dance Stories and Dance Refl-Action*

Forums, meetings, and formal and informal discussions with research colleagues assisted to develop ideas, clarify issues and understand the context of the research further. Whilst conducting the fieldwork for this research I was simultaneously working on two other research projects, *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* and *Dance Refl-Action: Contemporary Dance Pedagogy in Arabic Speaking Countries*.

*Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* (in press) is part of the *Our Dance Stories* book series developed by The University of Auckland. The series collects diverse perspectives of dance in regions of the world where there is limited documentation of dance practitioners' voices. Working as a researcher and co-editor for the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* book allowed me the opportunity to travel extensively across the region meeting dancers from a variety of environments – children dancing dabke in community centres to adults learning tango in a suburban dance studio in the evening. I spent hours observing dance in different settings, ranging from refugee camps to ballet schools, universities to private homes. For this research I conducted 75 interviews over an 11 month period, and I met many of the women who are the participants in this thesis through the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* interviews. Participating in this project offered time and financial support to conduct my doctoral research and also allowed me to expand my understandings of dance in the region and engage on a personal level with those participating in diverse dance environments.

The *Dance Refl-Action: Contemporary Dance Pedagogy in Arabic Speaking Countries* project has also contributed to developing my research. A collaborative research project between The Arab Theatre Training Center, Dancing on the Edge Festival (Netherlands), Carovana (Italy), HaRaKa (Egypt), Studio Emad Eddin S.E.E Foundation (Egypt), Al Balad Theatre (Jordan), The

Arab Education Forum (Jordan), The University of Auckland (New Zealand), The Dance Basin Mediterranean (Portugal), and Le Grand Cru (Netherlands), *Dance Refl-Action* commenced in January 2010 to investigate contemporary dance education in the southern Mediterranean. As with many collaborative research projects it has taken much time and perseverance to find a common ground between all research partners; however, several researchers involved in this project have a vast knowledge of dance practices in the region and have been valuable sources to provide insight on many subjects. Forums such as *The Symposium on Dance Pedagogy in Arabic Speaking Countries* held in Bodrum in July 2010, and *The Arab Dance Platform* held in Beirut as part of the *Beirut International Platform of Dance* in April 2011 offered opportunities for further information to be collected and for my doctoral research to be disseminated and critiqued.

While the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* book, the *Dance Refl-Action* project and this doctoral thesis gathered disparate dance experiences, it can be noted that many dance practitioners involved in contemporary dance in the southern Mediterranean region were not included as partners or interviewees in these studies. This is in part due to practicalities such as time and finances, but also because whilst being wide in scope these research projects never sought to be a comprehensive mapping of dance in the region.

### 3.4.2 Observation

Observations of dance classes, performance settings and rehearsals provided a further mode of data collection for this research, while also developing additional contextual understanding. Observation could be seen as a traditional data collection method in ethnography, connected to the research mode's colonial past. There has been the sentiment that historically such ethnographical practices have encouraged a hostile gaze (Scheper-Hughes, 1995), where the subjects of the research are reduced to objects rather than people, with this outmoded form of observation implying that there is a detachment from the group being researched (Tedlock, 2003). In contemporary understandings of observation it has been argued that "in a sense *all* social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being part of it" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1994, p.249).

In contemporary ethnography, the practice of observation may serve as one of many components of the research design. The observations for this research involved spending many hours viewing classes and rehearsals, allowing the observations to contribute to further developing my understanding of the participants' environment and experiences. I also became a participant observer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1994) in various dance environments across the region. This participation is seen to be valuable within an ethnographic framework (O'Reilly, 2009), providing situational practice and knowledge only accessible through such experiences while fostering relationships between the researcher and participants. The experiences and knowledge I feel I gained through the observations often influenced the interviews I conducted and assisted in developing my understandings of dance in the region.

### *3.4.3 Interviews*

Interviews form the focal point of this research, illuminating the dance practitioners' experiences of travelling abroad to learn contemporary dance for performance and then returning to the southern Mediterranean region to perform, teach and create dance. Within these accounts, reflections on learning in a different cultural context, the experience of returning home, and the feelings the women have about how international education in dance might have affected their dance practices were the focus of the discussions. This information was collected through individual semi-structured and conversational interviews. The dance practitioners invited to take part in the research were from across the southern Mediterranean region. These women were identified to take part in this research as they are all dance practitioners who received formative contemporary dance training abroad and then returned to their home environment to perform, teach and create dance. I met some through colleagues in the region, others I met when attending local dance performances, seminars and workshops.

Seven women were identified as participants for this research. They were selected to allow depth rather than breadth of experiences to be shared, permitting the research process and subsequent analysis to be manageable given the timeframe allowed for the study. The seven women were situated in Lebanon, Syria, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Malta. I had anticipated visiting Libya and Algeria, however, due to visa restrictions and the

difficulties making dance contacts in these locations I was unable to travel to these sites to conduct research. I had also wished to include a participant from Jordan. I had made contact with a potential participant; however, after two semi-structured interviews and several informal conversations the participant chose to withdraw from the research citing fears over the impact that participating in a research project may have on her career and family. Jordan has an extremely small contemporary dance community and finding another female dancer who had trained abroad in contemporary dance for performance and who was willing to participate in the research proved to be unattainable.

It has been discussed how ethnographic interviews differ from other styles of interviews, and questions have been raised over what exactly makes an interview 'ethnographic' (Heyl, 2001; O'Reilly, 2009). As Barbara Sherman Heyl (2001) explains ethnographic interviews take place in a research situation where,

Researchers have established respectful on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on the events in their worlds (p.369).

Heyl's view of ethnographic interviews (that they take place in the context of established research relationships) could be seen as somewhat idealistic. It might not always be possible to have enough time with each participant to discuss their views or particular issues fully or develop the openness of relationships required for 'genuine' exchanges, with some people naturally being more willing to share information and converse than others. However, in this research I aimed to develop situations similar to those described by Heyl where mutual trust, respect and understanding are fostered and there is a genuine exchange of thoughts, experiences and ideas.

I selected to utilize ethnographical interviews that were informal, conversational and semi-structured in design (Davis, 2008; Patton, 1990), allowing the interviews to be flexible in format and style. Semi-structured interviews offer the researcher opportunities to ask questions in a different order or wording for each participant and for new topics to be introduced if and when

they are required (Davis, 2008). The semi-structured interviews for this research built on the participant observation, researcher participation and informal conversations held throughout the research process, with this information helping to develop interview topic guides for the interviews. With each participant I conducted at least two audio-recorded semi-structured interviews that varied in length between one and three hours.

I also had numerous informal conversations with the women; these were in person, by telephone, over Skype or by e-mail. Informal conversations often captured thoughts, experiences and discussions as they occurred during fieldwork. Such moments allowed for the details of an individual's story to further emerge, which gave me, as the researcher, the ability to probe for more information if required and to have a sense of informality during the conversation, which often allowed the participant to relax and feel more at ease. Such informal conversational interviews have been referred to as "conversations with a purpose" (Burgess, 2006, p.302). Often the conversational and semi-structured interviews were 'in-depth', however, the length of each conversation varied depending on the topic, time and conversational flow.

The interviews were conducted in English, as I have very limited Arabic language skills. Prior to conducting the fieldwork, and during the first few months I spent in the field, I focused on learning Arabic to gain a basic linguistic competency of the language, and to have the ability to ask basic questions and follow simple conversation. However, I quickly discovered that learning the language was extremely challenging, and even though I had acquired a number of basic everyday phrases and words this very rarely helped me in interview situations. Despite only being able to understand and communicate in Arabic on an extremely basic level I felt that it was imperative that I try my best with the language to further immerse myself in my research environment. It has been noted that learning the language(s) of the location(s) being investigated is valuable to the research process. Charlotte Davies (2008) explains that "for the ethnographer attempting to understand another social world, the process of learning the language in which that world is lived out of is fundamentally insightful" (p.87).

All seven dance practitioners spoke some English; however, three preferred to speak in Arabic or

French during the semi-structured interviews. During our informal conversations, however, they all spoke in English. During the semi-structured interviews I relied on local interpreters, some of whom were from the local dance communities, others were acquaintances I met on my travels who were recent university graduates or who worked as translators for local agencies such as The British Council. Having a translator present during some interviews proved to be vital, as it allowed questions to be explored in both Arabic, English and sometimes French, with the opportunity to discuss translations with the translator for clarification of meanings during the interview process. It can be noted that where two languages differ as much as English and Arabic, translation from one to another is no easy task. Even within the variations of colloquial and classical Arabic there are multiplicities of variations that further contribute to the challenge of translation (Baalbaki, 1993). It is to be acknowledged that translations must to some degree be free, yet in this free translation, nuances may be lost, and indeed, ideas may unintentionally suffer distortion. In this thesis Arabic words have been kept to a minimum, only being used where it is considered essential.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. I sought further clarification on translations where required. The transcribed and typed interviews were returned to the individuals for review, where they were given the opportunity to clarify, change, add or delete any information, while also being offered the chance to reflect on their experiences further. From the outset of this research it was decided that the women's real names, rather than pseudonyms, would be used. The decision to use their names was made to provide a sense of authenticity to the women's experiences and narratives, rather than remaining concealed behind false names, while also giving them ownership of their stories and words. This was outlined in the consent process, with any potential participant who did not want their name to be used having the option to decline from participating.

#### *3.4.4 Ethics*

Ethical approval was gained from The University of Auckland's Human Participants Ethics Committee for the research to be conducted. This approval was gained before the initial approach to any participant and informed consent from all seven women was sought prior to



commencing any interview. Participant information sheets and consent forms were provided in both English and Arabic, and all translators signed confidentiality agreements.

It can also be noted that by being involved in the research there was a certain amount of potential risk for the dancers. This risk could be viewed as political; by speaking about particular governments' viewpoints towards the arts, state run and funded institutions or issues such as artistic freedom, there also could have been a risk to their own (as well as potentially their family's) security as well as any future artistic opportunities that might be available to them in their home environment and the possibilities to travel abroad in the future. The risks could also be considered social, in the sense that they were often revealing details that involved their family and friends. They were also potentially risking their public identity by speaking about their experiences, which may have affected how others, in the dance community or wider public, perceived them. These risks were outlined within the ethics consent process and all individuals agreed to take part in the interviews clearly aware of these potential risks. Following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 and 2012, when the majority of the research data had already been gathered, there were new concerns that there could potentially be further risk to some of the women (particularly in locations such as Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and Syria) when speaking about experiences related to political issues. I contacted all of the women explaining that they could again review their transcripts and make any changes they felt necessary to their comments in light of the Arab Spring events. All decided to keep their earlier comments, with some even adding further comments about the recent events and the impact that they feel these have had on dance in the region.

### **3.5 Process of analysis**

In developing the women's narratives and analyzing the research, the interview transcripts, field notes from observations and the literature became key points of reference, and required multiple readings. Triangulation of the collected data was applied as the primary process of analysis within this research, from which a thematic approach was then taken when analyzing the narratives that developed. Triangulation is a practice identified by Norman Denzin (1978) as the use of a variety of data sources in a study, providing clarification of issues and ideas that are

brought up and offering varying perspectives from different sources. A thematic approach to analyzing the narratives intended to provide an interpretation of what was said by focusing on the meanings rather than the language (Reissman, 2005).

The use of triangulation in this study has been purposefully selected to offer a form of validity to the research, which can be seen to be important given the limited documentation of dance in the southern Mediterranean region and international education in dance, as well as the contentiousness surrounding the southern Mediterranean's socio-political history. Part of the analysis process involved returning to the seven dancers with further interview questions or reflections on my own understandings of previous discussions, which I then shared and invited responses to from the individuals. The analysis process also involved submitting articles for publication and presenting papers locally and internationally to gain wider public response and feedback.

The triangulation process led to further analysis of the collected data, where through interpretive and inductive analysis it was sorted into key themes and investigated further. This involved looking at the collected data through various theoretical lenses (for example, the theories of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Friere) and applying these theories where necessary to further understand the women's experiences. It has been noted by Karen O'Reilly (2009) that in the practice of ethnographic research the analysis process can occur as the data is being collected, where the researcher pulls together various pieces of data that can inform further observations and interviews. The process of coding the data for this research involved a close exploration of the information and then the organization of it into key themes that emerged through the dance practitioners' narratives. These themes were then developed into categories, concepts and theoretical ideas. In this form of data analysis, the researcher is looking for comparisons or differences between data and data, data and concept, and concept and concept, making it useful for "individual processes, interpersonal relations, and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes" (Charmaz, 2008, p.83). It is also a process that requires,

Creative, reflexive (reflexivity) and interpretive (interpretivism) interaction between the researcher, the data, the literature, theoretical ideas that framed the

research as well as those that emerge from close analysis of the data, and the researcher's feelings, emotions, experiences and memory (O'Reilly, 2009, p.35).

Through this process the research was considered inductive rather than deductive (Warren & Karner, 2005), where instead of deducing empirical conclusions about the research topic, I aimed to induce new ideas and understandings, and present a collection of narratives and experiences. This analysis also involved discussion and reflection on the collected information with the local research partners.

### **3.6 Anticipated problems and limitations of the research**

It must be acknowledged that within the scope of a doctoral thesis there are research limitations due to practical constraints, such as time and money. During this research there were also other difficulties that arose that must be recognized. A significant amount of this research was conducted at international locations, from January to November 2010. During this time all interviews were conducted and all observations took place. This timeframe placed pressure on the need to conduct a large amount of in-depth research within a short space of time. However, by preparing the interview schedules and topic guides thoroughly, liaising with the key people involved and communicating clearly with all participating organizations prior to arriving to conduct the research, these difficulties were minimized.

English is not spoken as a first language in the locations where I conducted my fieldwork. In such circumstances language barriers and interpretive issues sometimes cause difficulties during the collection of data. As Stephen Turner (1999) explains, "translation involves negotiating non-equivalent cultural differences" (p.36). It was important to keep this in mind to allow translations to be as close to their authentic meanings as possible. Cultural customs and understandings also occasionally acted as barriers in allowing data to be collected with ease. To overcome these issues as much as possible I sought to gain a thorough comprehension of cultural customs and societal practices in the region prior to conducting field research. I also felt I was continually learning in the field and had to become very adaptable to various situations. I also found that the skills of a competent, understanding and willing translator were vital in the field to assist with the data collection process.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the possible risk involved in undertaking research in a part of the world that could be considered politically unstable and possibly dangerous. I was fully aware of the risks involved and endeavoured to take all possible precautions to avoid potentially volatile situations and prepared myself as thoroughly as possible for the environment in which I situated myself. Bruce Jacobs (2006) discusses that “no ethnographer is totally immune to personal danger in the field” (p.157). Therefore, it could be viewed that there is always an element of risk to the researcher regardless of the environment, and that it is the researcher’s responsibility to take the appropriate precautions to lessen the potential risks while simultaneously avoiding making substantial sacrifices to the study or the results ultimately obtained. I felt that the importance of collecting dance practitioners’ narratives from this part of the world was something worth taking a risk for, and ultimately contributes to the seven women having their stories included in the dialogue of dance in a global context.

#### **Chapter 4: The journeys: Seven dancers' stories**

This chapter presents the journeys of seven female contemporary dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean region who experienced dance training in Western cultural contexts. The narratives of Dalia El Abd, Meryem Jazouli, Nada Kano, Mey Sefan, Nesrine Chaabouni, Rebecca Camilleri and Noora Baker have emerged from formal semi-structured interviews and informal conversations as well as my own reflections observing, and sometimes participating in, their artistic and teaching practices. This chapter provides a picture of how each of these women have experienced learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context and how this learning has affected the dance practices they have pursued when returning home. The dance experiences they share here span the past 30 years, with some of the women being considered established artists, while others could be considered early career artists.

Before sharing the seven narratives it is to be noted that each experience is unique, and while each has the common theme of training abroad in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context there are also many distinctions within their experiences. For example, some of these women trained abroad for a number of years, conversely some trained abroad for just a few months at a time. Some remained abroad after training to teach, perform or create dance, others returned home immediately after completing their training. Some trained abroad in university dance programmes based around liberal arts philosophies, some sought conservatoire training, and others participated in workshops and residencies. Some have since returned home permanently, others are still moving between locations.

The diversity of experiences is in part why these seven women were selected as participants within this research, along with the key selection criteria that they were dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean region who had received formative training in contemporary dance abroad in Western cultural contexts and then returned home to perform, teach or create dance. This was coupled with the criteria that they were partaking in a dance practice in relative isolation from the wider surrounding cultural environment, not that they were 'Arab' or 'Muslim', rather that they were located in places considered to be somewhat suspicious of dance.

The seven women whose narratives are shared within this research were also selected to be participants as they were willing to take the time to reveal their stories to me. They took the time to meet and talk with me, they invited me into their homes, and persevered with my presence in dance classes they were teaching and rehearsals they were taking, and were consequently happy to have these stories communicated to others through this thesis and subsequent publications.

The narrative approach in collecting and developing the data has resulted in stories that focus on what these women wanted to share with me. While I frequently questioned and provoked discussions throughout the time I spent with each of them and within subsequent communications, the experiences they dove into, the memories that are deeply detailed rather than mentioned in passing, are drawn from their own perspectives and understandings of what they felt was significant or important to discuss. Therefore, there are some narratives that could be considered as 'well-rounded', providing comprehensive detail of their experiences beginning to end of studying abroad and also when returning home. Some emphasized their experiences abroad, sharing stories related to this time in much specificity. Others placed the focus on their experiences of returning home, exploring in depth the issues they encountered. As such, this contributes to narratives that vary in length and detail, with some aspects of an individual's narrative explicitly stating viewpoints and naming people and places, while other issues may be spoken about more generally, alluding to various themes and ideas.

Some of the seven women are currently working in established dance institutions in the region. Others have established themselves as independent dance practitioners. Some also work in both environments, or have moved from being an independent practitioner to working in an established institution, or vice versa. The question could be asked, why has the focus not been solely on dance practitioners who have returned home and aligned themselves with established existing institutions in the region? It can be reiterated that the focus of this thesis is on the individual not the institution. The discussion of institutions and established dance organizations in the southern Mediterranean region was not avoided during the interviews with the seven women; however, there was sensitivity when probing for feelings on this issue given that there could be potential ramifications in speaking out about certain institutions that could affect their

opportunities and relationships in the region. While numerous dancers from the region who trained abroad and then returned to work with organizations such as Caracalla Dance Theatre or the Egyptian Modern Dance Theatre Company were approached to participate in this research, some declined to be involved.

In this chapter each participant's journey is presented individually. The order in which the narratives are presented has been purposefully considered, presenting them in chronological order of how long they have been back in their home environments after training abroad, starting with those who have been home for the longest amount of time. Dalia El Abd's narrative will be presented first; she returned home to Cairo in 1999. This will be followed by the experiences of Meryem Jazouli who returned home in 2000 and then the narrative of Nada Kano, who returned home to Beirut in 2003. The fourth narrative will be from Mey Sefan, who returned to Damascus in 2008, followed by the narrative of Nesrine Chaabouni, who returned home to Tunis in 2009 and then left again in 2010 to return to Paris. Rebecca Camilleri returned to Malta in 2010 and Noora Baker has considered Ramallah to be home for a number of years, however over the past 15 years has experienced frequent dance training experiences abroad. The participants' experiences of returning home, however, are by no means linear. For example, Nesrine recently completed her Doctorate in Dance Studies at Sorbonne and spends her time between Paris and Tunis, essentially dancing between locations. Another example is Noora's situation; as I write this she is in London, pursuing postgraduate performing arts studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, reiterating the nomadic nature of the dance practitioner's life and the multiple directions that might be taken.

#### 4.1 Dalia El Abd, Cairo



Image 1. Dalia El Abd

The colleague who arranged my first interview with Dalia informed me that the only time I could meet her during my visit to Egypt was at 10pm on a Tuesday night at her home in Zamalek, Cairo. I was a little hesitant. I had just completed over 20 interviews in 10 days and I had a flight to Amman at 6am the next morning, but I thought ‘why not’ and set out to find Dalia’s house. During the taxi ride from Downtown Cairo I called Dalia to ask for directions. Her voice sounded clear and clipped with a slight English accent. I arrived at the front of her apartment building and looked through the decorative wrought iron double gates into a dark tiled entrance way. During the phone call we had just had Dalia told me her apartment number but I hadn’t had time to write it down – my mind was swimming with numbers – phone numbers, flight numbers, interview times, train times. I looked at the 10 door bells and the swirling script next to each that, had I been able to decipher Arabic, would have told me what apartment was Dalia’s. Before I had the chance to call Dalia again, someone poked their head around the corner of a door to the left of the entryway. A woman who might have been in her mid-60s glared at me a little like I had disturbed her. I momentarily questioned if I had accidentally pressed the door bell to her apartment or perhaps rattled the front gates. However, her face quickly softened into a smile – I



must have looked both startled and lost, and she pointed across the hallway to a door opposite to hers, “Dalia?” she asked. The woman let me into the building and I knocked on Dalia’s door. When the door opened and Dalia greeted me I already felt like I knew her a little, when in fact in contrast to some of the other dance practitioners I met with, I knew absolutely nothing about her background or history. I was relying on the few comments my colleague had made about her work and the statement he made: “You *have* to interview Dalia.”

Dalia sat with her feet tucked up underneath her and her arms folded like origami as we began the interview. She had made tea, heating the water on a small two element stove tucked in a corner of her apartment and clutched her grey porcelain mug with both hands. Despite it being a humid spring evening in Cairo, Dalia looked cold. The dim lighting of her lounge room distributed a lemony hue to the cream sofa we were sitting on and as we talked Dalia fidgeted with lint on the sleeve of her black shirt. At 3am I left her house and walked the few blocks to my hotel, the whole time recapitulating the experiences she shared with me over and over. Needless to say I did not bother to sleep; with our five-hour interview clear in my mind I had a lot to think about.

Dalia and I met again when I returned to Cairo a month later, and again in Beirut in April 2011, where I saw her perform live for the first time. I had seen earlier works she choreographed on DVDs she gave me, and had seen her teach at the Modern Dance School at the Cairo Opera House, but seeing her perform in person I felt I gained further insight of how the experience of training in a Western cultural context has influenced Dalia’s creative work. Dalia had briefly mentioned the idea for her performance *I don’t know what this dance is about, but it must be about something*,<sup>17</sup> to me when we had last met in Cairo, and although this was a studio performance of the work I was interested to see what she had developed. In the claustrophobic, overcrowded studio space of Maqamat Dance Theatre people lined the walls and crouched in the corners, bodies sandwiched between bags, programmes and video cameras. Dalia stood in the middle of the space, and then stepped a little off centre. She closed her eyes, dipped her chin and then slumped to the floor. The music started echoing from the corner sound system and trickled

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<sup>17</sup> Performed at the Beirut International Platform of Dance: Arab Dance Platform, Maqamat Dance Studio, Beirut, Lebanon on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2011, 2pm.

out in waves. Dalia's head and arms were hanging like a ragdoll, her long hair was covering her face and her loose black pants billowed onto the floor around her. Dalia started to move her pelvis forward, audibly breathing out slowly and deeply, lifting her ribcage up and back into her torso with her steady exhale, lengthening the space between each vertebra and tucking her pelvis under further creating a 'textbook' Graham contraction. It could be said that from this very first movement it appeared that the dancing history of Western contemporary dance was imprinted on her body, the movement she was creating and the artistic choices she was making as a choreographer.

During our first meetings and conversations Dalia reflected considerably on her childhood that was spent between Egypt and England. Dalia shared that she did not take dance classes as a child, but that it was in her PE classes at school that she discovered that she liked to move:

The school had this climbing equipment in the gymnasium [...] I remember that I didn't have any qualms about climbing so high, I didn't think I was doing anything great, and the teacher was like, "Oh, Dalia, wow, you're up there." There was so much more freedom [as a child in England] to explore movement in just everyday life, because you have playgrounds, you have big empty streets, you can ride the bicycle, everything – for me it was just exhilarating. I came back to Cairo as a teenager and was completely out of it – I was from another planet and couldn't understand why everyone was so backwards – they seemed backwards to me after being in England.

Dalia's first encounters with dance were at University where after some transitions from course to course she settled on studying theatre. She explained,

The Theatre Department [at the American University in Cairo] opened up. I would see the kids going in and out of the class and I would think it looks like they are having fun, so I took the acting class [...] I felt at home, in these classes it was like another world, outside of these classes I was different, I was a little bit strange at home. I was thriving in these classes, I loved it. From the workshop and the movement class, the teacher started noticing me, and we had to do improvisations in the class, and the teacher would say, "Dalia, you are very good," – and I felt very good [...] People were saying, "Dalia, you have to dance." I was like I know, I have to dance, I want to dance.

Dalia explained how shortly after graduating from university in 1993 she auditioned for the Egyptian Modern Dance Company:

After I graduated I saw this flyer in our department saying 'Dancers wanted –

Walid Aouni<sup>18</sup> – dancers with ballet or modern dance background’. I was like thinking – great! I didn’t know who he was or anything, I was just like ok, the Cairo Opera House is having auditions, they must be ok.

Dalia recalls her experience of the audition as “very funny”, and explained that “they got us to do things like touch your toes, jump around. Walid Aouni looked at me like he was not very impressed, but then he said, ‘Maybe we can do something with you.’” Dalia shared her memories of dancing with the Egyptian Modern Dance Company in the following narrative:

There were no dance classes, just rehearsals. I was 22. So we didn’t do any warm-ups, no ballet class [...] I hadn’t taken any dance classes, any dance technique whatsoever before – but do you know what I was doing? I was just doing fitness at home – sit-ups, some girls’ push-ups that sort of thing. I had actually started taking private ballet classes too. It was like an army drill, because there was no music, but I did learn to plié and tendu.

Dalia shared that after several months dancing with the Egyptian Modern Dance Company she came to the realization that she wanted to go abroad to gain further dance training. She explained,

I was teaching a group of kids creative movement, and I remember thinking, if these kids, even one of these kids, wants to be a dancer, a good dancer, a professional dancer, how can they do that here [in Egypt]? It’s not possible... I knew I had to leave.

In the summer of 1994 Dalia left Egypt for London to take part in a summer school programme hosted by the London Contemporary Dance School [LCDS]. Dalia auditioned for LCDS and she explained that “there were 25 people in the audition, and they took six people, and I was one of the six”. However, due to financial constraints Dalia was unable to stay in London and pay the tuition fees for the full-time training programme at LCDS. She returned to Cairo, and explained how she felt depressed and despondent:

I was depressed. I had already waited for two years after I graduated from college to go abroad. This was the time, timing is so important. You want something, you want something, and you work towards it, you work towards it, and then that’s it – you’ve got it! And then suddenly it’s gone. That’s how I felt about London Contemporary Dance School. I wanted to go there so badly, and then it’s gone, but if anything it just motivated me to try again.

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<sup>18</sup> Walid Aouni is a Lebanese scenographer and choreographer, and was the artistic director of the Egyptian Modern Dance Company from 1992-2011, and the Modern Dance School (Cairo Opera House) from 2004-2011.

It was during her time back in Cairo that Dalia began to search for other dance schools abroad and scholarship opportunities, visiting embassies and international cultural centres. Dalia explained that she felt that there was a sense of urgency to her searching for a school:

I decided that I had no time left; I had to just do it now – leave, get out. There was no internet back in 1994, 1995, so I would go from embassy to embassy asking about dance schools and scholarships.

It was during one of her multiple visits to the American Cultural Centre that she discovered videos of Twyla Tharp and Yvonne Rainer. It was through watching these videos that Dalia was convinced that America was where she needed to go to train. It was then through *Dance Magazine* that she found the names and addresses of schools in America:

I found a load of videos on dance, post-modern dance, of Twyla Tharp and Yvonne Rainer – and I would just go and I'd just sit in the corner and watch the videos, these dance videos... I didn't know who Twyla Tharp was; I didn't know who Yvonne Rainer was. I was so impressed and I knew that I wanted to dance like that. At the American Cultural Centre – I went there several times – but one of the last times I went I fell upon *Dance Magazine*, by accident. Totally by accident, and I came across addresses of dance schools at the back of the magazine... I had been asking people what are the addresses of dance schools? I was like, where has this been? So in this directory, there the Alvin Ailey Dance School, the Martha Graham Dance School, you know – I knew I had to write to them.

Over the next year Dalia saved enough money for a plane ticket to New York. Dalia explained how her friends and family were against her decision to leave Cairo, stating,

My parents would ask me why are I was making such a big deal – they thought it was just a hobby and that it was a silly idea to go away. Also a friend said to me, “Why don't you just get a video and learn the movements that you want to know?”

Dalia explained how she decided to leave Cairo despite attempts to make her stay by her friends and family:

I got home after buying my plane ticket and my father said – “You did not ask for my permission, you cannot go, you don't have my permission,” I was 25! He said, “You are not going.” I said, “I'm sorry, I am.” My sister said, “You are being so selfish, you just care about yourself.” So I got my visa and my plane ticket. Before I left, my Uncle came over to the house, with his wife, from the other side of town, and my mother's cousin came over – I felt this family gathering. They were saying, “Dalia, you can't go, this is the time for you to be married. You should be thinking of marriage at this age, you can't

go.”

Dalia left Cairo. Once she arrived in New York she set out to find a dance school that would accept her into their programme. She shares this experience in the following statement:

I would look at prospectuses from the schools – I still thought the best place was the Alvin Ailey School – but they had already started their semester, so I would visit every dance school, especially the Graham School and take classes. But I went to the Alvin Ailey School in January 1996, I had just turned 26, and I knew they were holding auditions. I auditioned and got a place, I was in the Certificate Programme – voila! I would wake up at night, sometimes I would have nightmares that I was still in Egypt, and that people were pulling me from every direction... I'd wake up and I'd be like... I'm still here, and think, “Dalia, you are so lucky to be here.”

Beginning her training in New York Dalia expressed how she felt that she fitted in to the school and learning environment easily:

I went to school in England, I felt often more English than Egyptian, so this place [New York] was fine for me and the Ailey School felt like home immediately [...] For me, I always felt like I never fitted in to Egypt anyway and finally I found a place where there were people like me, people who were 100 percent into dance. It was like a dream come true. I was excited to be in a place that I could really be me, and have technique, have creative things, work my body and like do improvisation and stuff – up until then I didn't even really consider that improvisation could be like a serious skill or anything, and for me I've always been quite happy to improvise and make up things – so when we had this improvisation class I was like, “Wow, you're kidding me, I get to just do whatever I want and say, ‘That's my dance’” – incredible, it was really great.

She also shared her feelings about experiencing specific dance techniques:

When I first went to the Alvin Ailey School I had the choice of starting intensely with Graham or Horton [techniques], and I thought let's do Graham, because I thought that Graham was harder [...] So I did the Graham and it was like, wow... incredible! This technique opened up my body, it gave me a sense of control over how to use my body in a way I'd never had – so a freedom to be able to make choices about movement and how to say certain things through a movement.

Although she explained that she felt that she adjusted to the socio-cultural environment of New York well, Dalia also suggested that there were some challenges when adapting to the dance classes and learning environment. Dalia explained how she navigated these encounters in the

following narrative:

At first I was very depressed because the teachers were not paying attention to me; they were not fixing me or giving me corrections. If they did say anything to me it was like I was being told off all the time; I was always doing something wrong. In technique class it would just be doing things over and over and over... I was not used to this; in the classes I had taken in Cairo I got more attention. This at first made me feel like I was not good and kind of like why should I bother learning in this class? Then at one point I said why should I be bothered by this? I felt like over the first few months I was learning in New York. I had gathered enough tools to understand my body, what it should be feeling like and looking like in particular movements, inside out thinking about breathing and connection with breath... so after a while I thought, “Dalia you know what you can do, you do not need the teacher to correct you. Pay attention to what the teacher is saying, listen to the corrections and apply these to your work – you be the teacher.” I started applying these things and then the teachers started noticing me, and asked me to demonstrate some things. This demonstration was like a compliment, because they would still yell at us and tell us off – even in our third year – but I was used to it after a while, this became normal and for me this was actually how I improved, it was good for me.

Dalia also expressed that dancing all day and also having to work in the evenings to support herself was difficult: “When I wasn’t tired I did very well in the classes, but when I was tired and wasn’t sleeping then it was hard. I had to work to support myself – I worked in restaurants, as a hostess – it was hard”. Once Dalia graduated from the Alvin Ailey School she had a part-time job in a contemporary dance company and was also teaching belly-dancing classes; however, she explained that visa issues were limiting her job prospects:

After I finished the school I had one year of work study, and in this one year you have to find a job in your field – if you don’t find anything you have to leave. So many of the companies, well, they require a Green Card. I joined this small contemporary company, part-time, but by the time I joined, it was April 1999, and my visa expired in August. So I had to change my visa, and the lawyer told me, you can’t because it is a part-time company, and also you have to be making \$20,000 [US] dollars per year to have your visa extended. I wasn’t making enough money.

Dalia explained that her parents were concerned about the visa issues she was experiencing: “My mother was like, ‘The lawyers are tricking you, they just want your money.’ She was going crazy and wanting me to come home.” Dalia shared how her parents arrived in New York and wanted her to return to Cairo. Dalia revealed the experience during one of our interviews:

One morning I was taking my CV to drop it in at the UNESCO school, I was applying for a job there [...] Then my Aunt's husband came with a car, with my father, and they pulled me into the car. They pulled my bag from me... which had my bank card and my passport and my address book and everything, and I was furious, and they pulled me in... I had no idea they were going to do this, no idea. It was very traumatic, and I couldn't reach anyone, or call anyone.

They were pulling me out of the car at the airport, and I kept thinking to myself, "Dalia you can always run," but I was also thinking, "I don't have a penny." I was at the airport – and you know Sadat, he was the ex-Egyptian President, and his sister was there – Sakina Sadat. I cried and said, "They are taking me, they are kidnapping me," and she said, "Why are you doing this to your daughter?" and they said, "She doesn't understand, she doesn't know anything." I kept thinking I could just run. It got closer to the flight leaving, we passed through check-in and every step I was thinking, "You can still run." We got the bus to the plane and I was thinking, "You can still run." Then at the top of the stairs on the platform I thought, "I can still run"... but as soon as I stepped on the plane I felt that a door closed, I couldn't go back, it was too late. I burst into tears, crying. I sat in my seat and I was just crying. I got back to Cairo and wanted to hide forever, and my mother is like, "We furnished your room – we repainted it – it is so nice you will like it"... I was in shock that this was what she was caring about, a repainted room!

Dalia recalled her feelings of arriving home to Cairo explaining,

I was crushed, down, depressed. It was awful and I felt so alienated... I couldn't connect with the people, I couldn't connect with the people at home, with my family, I couldn't connect with what I was reading [...] I couldn't connect with anything – but after a while I just felt like ok, I'm here, I have to do something. I tried to start some dancing things, but I'd lost all my connections – my ties – to Egypt. I didn't want to be there, I felt alien, to the point where I didn't leave the house – for me, my life, my home was New York.

Over time Dalia began to reconnect with the dance community, working as a dancer and choreographer in Cairo on various productions. She told this experience in the following narrative:

I went to the Opera to the Experimental Theatre Festival and some people saw me and word was out – Dalia is back, the one who was with Waïld Aouni a long time ago. I ran into Walid Aouni and he said, "Why don't you join the company, why don't you come back?" I thought – no way. Then I met up with a friend here, he directs plays. This play, it had some dancing in it, and there was one dancer that couldn't be in it, it was a 15 night performance, so I landed the role and I did it. This got me back into things, but it was hard and frustrating. I didn't know if I should just dance or choreograph. I didn't feel like a choreographer but I just took

on whatever work was happening and stumbled into choreography. One director I was working with said, “You have six days, can you choreograph this piece and find some dancers for us too” – in just six days! I said to him, “You know that there are only six days until the performance?” It’s like they think that you just press a button and art pours out! I did it, but I said and that was it. I said that is it, no more directors, I am doing my own thing from now on.

Dalia started teaching at local dance schools and sports clubs, and took on a teaching position at the newly formed Modern Dance School at the Cairo Opera House. While teaching at the Modern Dance School, Dalia created her first independent choreography; it was a process that was initiated through meeting a French dancer who suggested she contact the French Cultural Centre who might support the work if it involved collaboration with French artists. Dalia explained her experience of a cross-cultural artistic collaboration and the potential issues that emerged from the experience:

I think it’s good that we have things where we can work with the French Cultural Centre or the British Council; it makes it so much easier – financially – and also allows more people to go to watch or participate in something that is different, kind of educating people that could be an audience... I applied to do this collaboration with this French dancer, and the French Cultural Centre gave us 5000 Egyptian Pounds (approximately \$840.00 USD) to do the performance... When the woman at the [French] Cultural Centre gave me the money she said, “I’m not buying fish in the water, you’ve got to do a great performance.” I felt that there was a lot of pressure, but I felt because I was working with a French woman on the performance it would be a lot stronger, that I had some support and it was going to be successful because of this... I felt that there was a lot of pressure, and I had to do what they wanted – it was the only way I could have a chance of making my own, professional, work. But there are always all these politics involved and what made things worse – the cops stopped our performance, can you imagine?

The experience of the police stopping performances was something that became common place for Dalia and an issue that she would have to negotiate frequently when making work in her home environment:

This was not the first time the cops – *Al-Musannafat*<sup>19</sup> – came and stopped a performance I’ve been involved with, but it was my first independent performance, so for me it was really important that this performance went ahead. Even though the panel that censors the work had seen our performance, and said, “Yes, ok, you can perform,” it ended up on the day of the performance we were told to go home,

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<sup>19</sup> *Al-Musannafat* is the department for censorship and supervision of theatres, films, music, and dance affiliated to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture.



that the performance wouldn't be happening because something about the theatre not being safe. I think the reason is that they don't like independent theatre, they are afraid that independent theatre might create a revolution or put evil ideas into people's heads... we don't have time for this [laughs].

The surveillance from the state was an issue that Dalia spoke of often when referring to her performances, choreographic work and artistic choices in Cairo, explaining,

It's in the back of my mind that I have to be careful in the ideas or movements I choose, nothing too risqué. It's not like a complete freedom of artistic work, it's artistic work within boundaries – a lot more than in other places. As an artist here I do feel I have a responsibility to talk about issues, to talk about things people might be thinking but not necessarily saying.

The notion of responsibility and pressure had been something Dalia had spoken about previously, however, mostly in relation to her experience of dancing between different cultural contexts and bringing back particular experiences and ideas to her home environment. She often spoke of how she felt there would be specific expectations and pressures because of her experience abroad, that people would be viewing her work with particular expectations because she trained in the United States of America:

I did this performance – well I prepared for it – it was called *Roaming Inner Landscapes*. It was the day of the performance and I knew it was not ready, I didn't think it was ready. So everyone was outside waiting to come in and watch, and they were like, we want to see this girl that went and studied dance in New York. A friend of mine came into the space where we were performing and said, “Dalia, they are expecting something really great, they have high, high expectations” – and I just couldn't do it. I told people enough – we are cancelling the performance. After we went out to a bar, and everyone who was coming to see the performance was looking at me, and I felt so vulnerable, but I felt so much pressure, I just couldn't do it.

Dalia expressed how the pressure and particular expectations she feels in her home environment have somewhat inhibited her from making choreographic work. She explained this within the following narrative: “I'd rather perform in Beirut, in London, but performing my own choreographies here [Cairo] – it frightens me. Here I feel like I am exposing myself in ways I shouldn't.”

More recently, Dalia has been teaching Graham Technique classes at the Cairo Modern Dance

School and also teaching yoga from her home studio. Dalia explained how she feels teaching these classes in Cairo, and how she feels she may be adapting in some instances or replicating in others the material she learnt in New York, with the intention of developing a technique that can fit within the dance milieu of Cairo:

When I teach my students, I look at how I can adapt things for them from what I was taught in America, bridging the gap a bit between that world and the world here. I try to maybe change the music to something more local, sometimes incorporate some moves that are more relaxed and not so ‘technique’ based but this is about as far as I can take it. I find it very hard because for me Graham technique is Graham technique, some parts of it should not change in my mind, they are part of the history and I think they’re usually there for a reason – to work the body in a certain way. But teaching these aspects, I hope in a small way this might just change how they [the students] see things, they might question something, they might be able to develop their bodies to become real dancers... this is what we need. Sometimes I think they get bored quite quickly with Graham [technique], they don’t realize that you have to have a secure technique. I don’t want to force them to do it, but it feels like I do at times. I get frustrated also because I either teach this technique or I don’t, there’s no half way for me.

Observing Dalia’s class I noticed that some of the students followed Dalia’s instructions diligently, performing multiple contraction and release exercises. Others looked disengaged; they attempted a few exercises and movements and then began to talk to each other, ignoring Dalia, frequently checking their mobile phones and stretching out their muscles or lounging on the barres that lined the studio. On occasions I saw how some of the students began to ‘morph’ the exercises, much to Dalia’s frustration. They would take a movement she was working on with the class, such as a high release, and they would add their own take on the position, perhaps by moving their arms, rotating a leg in rather than out or keeping the movement rippling through their chest rather than remaining static and lifted. Dalia explained that she was struggling with how she could make the technique more appealing to her students, and relevant to the context in which it was being taught in Cairo; “I am wrestling with how I can make it more interesting to them – but I just don’t want to change it to get them to like it. I think about how it might fit in here and in all reality it doesn’t really.”

Just before I met Dalia for our first interview in March 2010, she had attended the British Dance Edition in Birmingham where dance artists from the southern Mediterranean region were invited

to gather and share experiences:

I just came back from the British Dance Edition. I was just one of the delegates watching, but it was great because I saw people like Omar Rajeh<sup>20</sup> there... and I am not very good at networking... but this was a chance for me to kind of meet with people who are like me, and maybe they are doing things that I'd like to be able to do. I kind of felt a bit of hope in meeting other Arab dancers, working in the Arab world but wanting to connect with maybe European traditions in their own way – like not copying them, but not rejecting them. It inspired me. I came back to Cairo and I wanted to make work... I have all these ideas – I want to do this and that, especially choreographically. The teaching is one thing, it's what you have to do to survive – and you know, I do enjoy it – but the creative stuff is what I want to push.

Dalia spoke extensively about the ideas and directions her dance practices in Cairo might take, and also shared the feelings of responsibility she felt when dancing, teaching and choreographing in her home environment. She explained that “here [in Cairo] you feel isolated, like you might be the only person who does something related to modern dance”, while also articulating that “at the same time I sort of feel a bit responsible, to actually do something with dance and to share what I've experienced.”

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<sup>20</sup> Omar Rajeh is a Lebanese dancer, teacher, choreographer and artistic director of Maqamat Dance Theatre and Takween-Beirut Contemporary Dance School.

## 4.2 Meryem Jazouli, Casablanca



Image 2. Meryem Jazouli

I felt that watching Meryem rehearse her solo work *Kelma ... un cri à la mère* was often like taking part in a meditation. Intensely focused, Meryem would create a movement or gesture and then stand for a moment of reflection and consideration before repeating it with a different impetus or provocation. The room was often silent, except for her breath and the echo of her body, feet or hands making contact and brushing past the floor. The piece, based on the works of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, focuses on the themes of exile and absence (Beirut International Platform of Dance Programme, 2011), strangely fitting for someone who has spent the majority of their dancing life abroad.

Watching the same work one year later in a performance space, the Babel Theatre, Beirut,<sup>21</sup> these themes appeared to emerge deeply embedded in her body, moving through her veins and projecting out to the audience. Meryem faced the audience, with a *bendir*<sup>22</sup> covering her face, balanced on the crown of her head. Her long black sleeveless dress left a tall shadowy silhouette on the white backdrop as she stood with her fists clenched by her sides, shoulders slowly lifting, tensing, creating a feeling of unease. She had heavy black boots on her feet, the laces loose, and she started to tap one foot. The tapping got heavier and heavier until it became a stomp. Pounding music began playing and she continued to stomp, the noise filling the auditorium and rippling through bodies. Up until the foot tapping and then stamping the work had been in silence, just the occasional audible breath or hand brushing the *bendir*. This contrast shook me awake; I noticed the people sitting next to me were more upright, more attentive. I thought that this uncomfortable atmosphere of tension might be exactly the mood Meryem was trying to create. She explained during one of our interviews, “I like to shock a little, disturb a bit; I think making an audience feel change is a good thing.”

I met Meryem for the first time in Casablanca in September 2010. She greeted my translator, Maria, and I at the door of her dance studio that was tucked at the back of an apartment building in the suburb of Residence El Bardai. She later told me that the landlord thought that she used the space primarily for children’s afterschool activities – drama, music, dance and painting – and explained that,

He [the landlord] would not have rented me the space if he knew it was going to be used for dancing; no one would have rented me a decent space if I told them upfront about the dancing – contemporary dancing as well.

Before we sat down to begin the interview, Meryem showed us around the studio that had high ceilings, freshly painted walls and polished floors. A small cafeteria space was next to the reception area, with red tables and chairs. We sat at one of the tables, Meryem brought us some sweet tea and we began to talk. Meryem explained that she was born and grew up in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, a city that she feels “is quite different in some ways from the rest of

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<sup>21</sup> *Kelma ... un cri à la mère* was performed at the Beirut International Platform of Dance: Arab Dance Platform, Babel Theatre, Beirut, Lebanon on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2011, 10pm.

<sup>22</sup> Bendir is a drum with a wooden frame.

Morocco, because it's like the face, it's manicured – the 'perfect' city". Meryem shared that at the age of eight years old she started ballet classes at the encouragement of her parents, as they thought it was "a poetic art form for little girls, something more beautiful maybe than swimming or karate". However, Meryem explained that her parents had no intention of her having a career as a dancer:

The result of what happened because of taking these dance classes was not what my parents had in mind! I had a different idea, I wanted to be a dancer and they wanted me to do it as a hobby. Had they known that I would become a dancer I think they would have enrolled me in swimming instead, they would have thought about it more.

Meryem explained that she remembers her first dance classes clearly, while also recalling how these first dance experiences informed the pedagogical modes that she later sought out within her own dance education and later influenced her own teaching practices:

I still have very clear memories from my first dance classes. I had a Russian teacher, but she was really rigid and strict. It was all about the individual dancer and creating a perfect aesthetic – a European body not a Moroccan one. I got frustrated with this way of thinking about dance. So even though I was really young I knew that this wasn't the way I wanted dance to be; it wasn't the way that I wanted to dance myself or later it was not how I wanted to teach or choreograph. I wanted to be artistically free, where I could decide the aesthetics I wanted to create and not have them forced upon me – I think this is why I found contemporary dance. I think that my teaching now is really informed by these early experiences and knowing what I do not want to replicate or copy from these early experiences [...] Plus, I think it contributed to me looking for a dance programme [when training abroad] that was more open, that I could use in many more ways – not being controlled so much.

In the summer of 1986, when she was 16 years old, Meryem travelled to Europe to take part in a dance intensive for six weeks. She explained how she was encouraged by a visiting teacher from France to pursue dance experiences abroad, explaining that, "This teacher for me was very important, she is the one who really told me that a dance career is possible and that if I want to work hard and push for it I could achieve it." This teacher assisted Meryem in enrolling for a summer dance programme in Paris and applying for a scholarship that contributed towards her tuition fees and travel costs. Meryem explained that "the school had some scholarships, this was the only way I could go – Europe is so much more expensive than here [Morocco] – the teacher helped me fill in the form and she sent it for me."

Meryem explained that when she first arrived in France she felt as though she had to ‘catch-up’:

The first training that I went to in France I was feeling a mixture of shock and excitement, because I was finally at the heart of this artistic area and I found that everyone was so involved with the development of the body and movement in dance. They were technically amazing, I was shocked. But at the same time I also realized that there were a lot of things that I hadn’t learned here in Morocco, so it was a shock, I had a lot to catch up on. I felt so weird, like really different and could not understand what we were being taught and why [...] especially about the techniques, like why we were doing them – it was like there was some secret reason why it was good to do Graham technique. I didn’t know people do this all around the world, no one explained to me why these techniques are perceived to be important. So I just kept doing them kind of going, “Why am I doing this?” until I figured out that there are like millions of people all over the world doing Graham [technique]... and it’s just another dance language, one that people are familiar with and take some value in.

Once Meryem had finished her baccalaureate year at high school she left Morocco to study dance full time in Paris. Meryem explained why she chose to train abroad rather than staying in Morocco, and her initial expectations of the experience:

For me, to go to France, it was not a strange choice – many people from Morocco go there to study for their university – for me if I wanted to become a dancer or dance teacher. I could not learn how to do that in Morocco, it was simply not possible. Plus, my father wanted me to have a diploma. I had travelled to France many times before; I spoke the language and knew some people living there. I was not particularly concerned [...] I was young too, and you are not frightened of these things, you just do them... I was expecting to learn mostly about ballet, that was what I had learnt in Morocco, and that’s what I wanted to teach. I honestly didn’t think a dance school in France would focus on anything else... really. The school I went to was like at a university. I chose it because I had a friend who recommended it and because I had to get a diploma – this was important to my family.

When I arrived I was a bit surprised because we were doing ballet and contemporary – modern dance. I was not expecting the modern dance – we took improvisation, Feldenkrais, you know, but it was like they were the ‘rest’ classes, not serious. There was really nothing about relating it to anything else we were doing like in ballet or anything – I was inexperienced so could not make those connections say between how I breathe in Feldenkrais and how that could help my plié in ballet you know, not then... I had never really experienced this so much and was not sure about it, but could not really say anything, I was already there and my parents had paid a lot of money. I felt that I had to do it and be a good student and get my diploma.

Meryem explained that when she first arrived in Paris she felt that she struggled to fit in to her new learning environment and she found it difficult relate to the other students in her class:

The first year was a little bit hard for me because I was shocked – about the people and how life was in Paris [...] I was also noticing my background in this new environment. I am Moroccan and I found myself in a space where there were a lot of people coming from other countries, which was good because I was not the only one from abroad, but at the same time I think I was a little bit lost because I didn't have the same skills – not you know body skills – but skills to be receptive to the others, social skills, so I felt removed from them and I think it had a lot to do with my background and the environment that I was coming from and my society, and I was very naive. Also, my background, being Moroccan made it difficult to get work teaching at first – I was not French, and so getting a job was harder I think. But for me I was just trying to learn the new dance things, I was just trying to understand what we were being taught, then on top of this you are learning about all these things – social things – that you might have been sheltered from in your home environment.

Being in a different cultural context for dance education, Meryem revealed how she began to question her motivations to dance, and was trying to understand how and why different skills were valued in this environment:

I had learned here in Morocco that dance was a freedom for me, but when I was abroad I discovered that most people do not understand this, it is all about the body, all about technical things, so it is a very restrictive way of teaching, too rigid for me [...] Also the focus here [in Casablanca] when people teach dance is often on the group – that the group is doing the right steps, the right technique. Abroad, what took time for me to figure out is that the classes are more about the individual; is the individual doing the right movement? For me, this made me worry whenever the teacher never talked to me individually, but would give the attention to the French girls. So... because the teachers sort of ignored me, really this made me feel not so good about my dancing. I didn't know what to improve on and felt a bit hopeless, not motivated at all. So it was this struggle, I felt left out but at the same time it was sort of inspiring to be around all these people who were so interested in dance. At times this pushed me a bit; I felt that there was this passion I could feed off a bit – this was something I didn't have in Morocco. Plus this contemporary dance was a movement that I felt comfortable with and maybe more easy than ballet for my body.

Once graduating with her diploma Meryem started teaching and performing in Paris. She explained that it was difficult to find work teaching dance: “It was a little bit difficult for me to



find a job in Paris because I'm Moroccan – so often people, well, they just gave me a few hours here and there.” She taught at various dance schools, often in the suburbs of Paris, explaining, “It was easier to get a job being Moroccan there.” Meryem spoke of how she took on various dance projects and short contracts with contemporary dance companies that gave her the opportunity to travel and perform throughout Europe and also gain experiences working with diverse choreographers. After four years of freelance teaching and taking on short dance projects Meryem joined an independent contemporary dance company based in Paris, where she also took on the role of company teacher. Reflecting on this experience Meryem stated:

This time, when I was dancing and teaching for the company was very good – it gave me the time to improve my dancing and teaching because it was a luxury to be able to stay in the same place, work all year round and not just jumping from one thing to the next [...] I learnt a lot about how to manage things, how a company works and I think that helped me when I came home, just to have these experiences and contacts that you build up when you are working in one location for a while.

Meryem decided to return to Casablanca in 2000, when she was pregnant with her first child. She explained that she made the decision to come home because she wanted the support of her family during this time:

The main reason that I came home and stayed here was that I had a baby. So when I had my baby I had to try to find a way to be a mother and a dancer at the same time, and I thought it might be better to do it here [Casablanca] where I had some support from my family. Of course I sort of always felt that I was going to come back and do something for dance here, I just was not sure when, and this situation sort of decided for me really.

She explained that her return home to Casablanca was a transition that she found complicated for many reasons and describes the feeling of arriving home as “returning to a desert”. She explained this feeling further in the following statement:

It was too hard for me. I was coming from a very dynamic environment in France where there was a lot of dance, there was a lot of exchange and all of this, but then when I came back to Morocco it was like a desert here. I felt that I was returning to a desert. There was no dance, contemporary dance like I was used to in France, nothing dynamic [...] so it was very frustrating for me.

Meryem described how she began to question her motivations for dancing in her home

environment, and if it was something that she could continue, stating, “It was like for two years I was asking myself big questions, sort of interrogating myself about whether I should continue to dance or asking myself, ‘Should I stop?’” She started teaching ballet at local dance schools in Casablanca and spent time travelling between Paris and Casablanca taking up dance opportunities in both locations, explaining that she did this in part “to ease into the transition home, but after a while it just was too much, I came home for good”.

Meryem explained how when she returned to Casablanca permanently she had the intention of focusing on performing and teaching dance. However, she found that in Casablanca the new experiences she was engaging with allowed her to also begin to develop a choreographic voice:

Before coming back to Casablanca I had no intention of being a choreographer, it was not established as an idea for me, just not something I had ever done. I arrive home and it is sort of presented to me, people were asking, “Will you make a dance?” and I was thinking, “No, no, that’s not what I do”... But, then I thought, “Well why not?” – I need to make dance work, so I can continue to perform myself – because it was not like I could join a company or that there were lots of projects for me to dance in. So I started exploring choreography at first because I wanted to dance, but then I realized that actually there might be something in this for me – something interesting that I want to pursue.

Her interest in choreographic practices emerged further after an encounter with a dancer and choreographer from Belgium – Fatou Traoré. Meryem and Fatou worked collaboratively on the creative process of a short production. Meryem explained that she felt it enabled her to develop her confidence as a choreographer:

Working with Fatou I learnt a lot. I made connections with the dancers here in Morocco who could then be dancers in my choreographies, and through Fatou I met with some more European choreographers and discovered new ways of thinking and moving. There was this exchange I suppose between Fatou’s ideas, her current issues and themes, and what I was working with, the themes I was interested in. This pushed me more deeply to go into researching my own work as a choreographer, something I had not considered so much. Without this exchange I’m not sure how my work would have developed, I think it gave me confidence initially.

Meryem’s research of her own dance practices also included reflection on the various pedagogical methods she experienced abroad and how this informed how and what she taught in her home environment:

By going abroad I think it allowed me to see the teaching in a different way when I came home. At first I was just repeating what I learnt abroad, but then I was not feeling that I was making such a connection with the students, not like in France. Something had to change, and it was what I was teaching and how I was teaching it. So I thought more about it and I just started to ask more questions about what I was teaching and how I was teaching it. I questioned what I had learned say, when I was 20, and now 15 years later how do those same ideas work, why don't some of them work? Why do some things not function well? Why might they work in France but not here [in Casablanca]? I was trying to see what was helpful to keep – pedagogically – but also what material was relevant to what I wanted my students to be able to achieve and experience. For me it was like making a bit of a new vocabulary, a new language to use here, not just relying on the old way and wondering why we might not be able to express ourselves so well in another dance language.

Through her investigation of pedagogy and practice and how foreign knowledge might be situated, applied and viewed within her home environment, Meryem explained how she was also questioning her own self-identity since returning home:

I was questioning the state of freedom we have here, and for me this is what I noticed when I came home – you are free but not as free as in other locations. You only notice this by going abroad I think, you then notice how confined you might be at home. For me this was connected to how to express my identity as a dancer, as a Moroccan. For me it was a bit of an identity crisis, what to do, what to teach, what to dance. It took a while but I started to think that maybe I am not as French as I thought [laughs], so, I decided that I just wanted to get rid of the occidental or Western model that we rely on here, try something that is just me, maybe a mix of things, maybe not 'Moroccan', maybe not 'French', maybe just something that is me, here, now.

After continuing to explore her choreographic and pedagogical work in Morocco, Meryem established the Association les recontres de la danse in 2002. She shared that she decided to establish the Association in part because she was feeling frustrated over what she perceived to be the slow development of a contemporary dance community in Casablanca: “It is a bit difficult here to get exchanges and contacts with people, so it was very frustrating for me, and if I wanted it to change I had to do something.” Meryem explained that Association les recontres de la danse is “a location where people interested in dance can gather, share ideas, have a space to rehearse and perform in, and for collaborative projects to be developed”. Meryem expressed this further in the following statement: “I want to bring the public here – to get them more initiated to dance

– to make people aware of contemporary ways of dance... making it an open space, a sharing space to have this ongoing discussion about dance”.

### 4.3 Nada Kano, Beirut



Image 3. Nada Kano

It was 11.30am on a Friday morning in April 2010 and I was running late, very late. I had arranged to meet Nada at her dance studio in Corniche el Nahar at 11am. After noticing that I was getting a very detailed tour of downtown Beirut, and that we had driven past Martyr's Square for the third time in about 10 minutes I had a feeling that perhaps the driver had no idea where to go, and that my hand scrawled note of Nada's studio address was clearly not enough information to get me there. Frustrated, I decided to stop the taxi and get out. Already a little disorientated from the taxi ride, I chose a direction at random and started to walk. I asked several people if they knew where 'Beirut Dance Studio' on 'Rue Nahr' was and received various directions. I asked a young woman who was standing outside a florist shop and she told me that she knew exactly where the studio was, her niece took ballet classes at the studio. Before I had the chance to even ask for further directions she had already taken me by the arm, leading me across the street. As we walked she told me how much she liked watching her niece dance, and

was thinking about starting dance classes her self – maybe tango or salsa. We walked down the street a little further and into a high-rise office building. Nada’s studio was on the fifth floor of the building, between an accountancy firm on the fourth floor and a computer repair business on the sixth floor. Stepping out of the lift my new friend pointed me towards the door of the studio, wishing me luck. I rang the bell and Nada opened the door. Dressed all in black with long reddish-brown hair to her waist I immediately noticed how she towered over me. Welcoming me into the large entryway she explained that her English was “not so perfect” and introduced me to her friend and colleague Lea, who would act as a translator occasionally during the interviews we did together over the next few days.

Beginning our first interview Nada explained that she had started taking ballet classes when she was 11 years old, at the encouragement of her grandmother who was an avid ballet fan: “I was not very young when I started, I was eleven years old. I started because of my grandmother – she loved ballet and saw classes offered by a French teacher and suggested to my mother that I might go.” However, she quickly elaborated, explaining that growing up during the Lebanese Civil War<sup>23</sup> the dance classes she attended were sporadic and that it was often difficult to attend them on a regular basis:

I’m a pure generation of the War – so it was really very bad in the country at that time, and the dance classes were very few, and we could not have very regular training, so we could not really do it seriously. Something would start, some classes would begin again – you’d just start learning something – and then it would stop because of the War.

Nada recalled how after watching a film of Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn dancing *Romeo and Juliet* at the Russian Cultural Centre she decided that she wanted to become a dancer. She shared this experience in the following statement:

I saw a movie in the Russian Cultural Centre in Beirut – it was *Romeo and Juliet* with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, the old, the old movie... [laughs]... but it was the only thing that we had, because there was really nothing, nothing, nothing... So I decided then that I really wanted to be a dancer. I must have been maybe 13 at the time [...] I was just taken to this other world by seeing this movie, because we never saw ballet live here,

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<sup>23</sup> The Lebanese Civil War was from 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1975 until 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1990 (Fisk, 2005).

except for maybe a few small shows at school with local ballet studios. Besides that, I had no real concept that ballet could be like in this movie – amazing! I just wanted to do that; at that point nothing else mattered to me. I suppose you could say I was quite obsessed.

Nada explained how during her early years of training in Beirut she felt she would need to go abroad to further her dance education:

I don't know how I realized that I had to travel – and maybe it was because of seeing that video – maybe it was because ballet seemed like this far away thing that only really existed outside of Lebanon. I just felt extremely aware that it was not possible here at that time to be a dancer. I was frustrated with the small community of dance people and also my parents would not accept it – for me to travel away to train to be a dancer. They were ok with me dancing, as a hobby, after school, but not as a career. So I decided to run, to go, even if I had to run away... I would do whatever I had to do – leave my parents, even if they would not forgive me – go somewhere new. All of this just because I wanted to dance. For me it seemed like I had no other option at the time.

In 1985, at the age of 17, Nada left Lebanon for France where she joined the Rosella Hightower School in Cannes. I was interested to know how Nada chose where to train, and her experience of transitioning between locations. When I first asked her questions about this experience Nada seemed closed and somewhat unwilling to discuss this period of her life. Only later, after several meetings and discussions did she expand on this experience, recalling the motivations and emotions that surrounded it:

Really, I don't know how I ended up in Cannes; it was really by chance because I had searched for schools everywhere – mainly by asking at the cultural centres and my ballet teacher. I think she had a lot of influence at Rosa's [Hightower School] – she had some connections to it, because one day she told me that she got me a place at this school, that it was starting the new term in two weeks and that I had to decide straight away if I was going or not. I didn't know anything about the school, what it was like, what they taught. I trusted her opinion though so I said yes – without telling my parents, without figuring out how I was going to get money to get there, pay fees or live, I just said yes. I borrowed some money from my cousin and bought a plane ticket. I packed, I still didn't have a proper visa and that caused me some problems when I arrived [in France], but I just left [Beirut]. I didn't tell my parents. I was afraid that they wouldn't let me go... I was afraid that I would soon be too old [...] I just left, and I've always regretted just leaving and not telling my family – it caused them problems and took time to recover from.

While Nada shared how she was not particularly selective regarding the school she attended, she was clear that she wanted to be in a French speaking learning environment:

I speak French and I felt that I was a bit familiar with France. I knew people there and I'd been there before; this made my decision a bit easier, or maybe it restricted my options more. There was no way I would have gone to study in an English [speaking] country.

Arriving in Cannes and beginning her training at the Rosella Hightower School Nada explained that she can remember being engulfed by new perspectives and ideas of dance, while also being introduced to Western contemporary dance:

I got there [to Cannes] and when I saw the dance they were doing there I was like that's what I want to do, that's *exactly* what I want to do, that's what I imagined and that's what I found, although I didn't know anything about it because there was no Internet, there was no satellite, our airport was always closed, that sort of thing... So I really knew nothing about modern dance, all these ideas, choreographers and things that people would talk about, I'd have no idea about them at first... I was quite blown away [...] I was desperate to learn this modern dance; it seemed so fresh, a bit more new. So I majored in ballet but took a lot of contemporary and modern classes too.

Nada recalled how she felt during her initial dance training in Cannes, explaining how she found the experience of the dance education she was receiving and the Western cultural context:

It was both easy and hard for me – it was easy because that was what I wanted to do, I wanted to dance. I did not find the classes particularly different; I mean, I had a French teacher in Beirut, and although the modern dance classes were a bit overwhelming, there were some classes, I remember contact improvisation for me was just not good – I wanted to cry in that first lesson – it was like I was in the class naked! I was in shock that I was going to have to roll over someone else – a stranger! But you know, once I got over that and started to get into it all I was just so happy to be there and to be learning. It was hard because I started when I was not very young, I hadn't had years of training like the other students at the school with me, so I felt behind, and also it wasn't that easy because I was away from my country, my family. It was all new to me in France, the environment, the people – it took time to get used to it – and even though I spoke French I sometimes felt like I was from the outside, really different, especially at first – I knew I was the odd one out, it was not my place, but someone else's place. I had to try so hard to fit in at first, to make friends. But it was sometimes hard because I was trying to survive in France working in the evenings to support myself, dancing during the day and training as much as possible – but I was completely in it, so I didn't really – I didn't see anything else, you don't think, you are just doing it.

Nada recalled some of the prominent moments of her time learning dance in Cannes:

For me it was thinking about things like choreography and of how to consider the body, like working with different choreographers was really special for me. At first



the choreography and composition classes were hard and I was shocked. I wanted to be told what to do, but instead I was asked for ideas – I was the dancer and I found it confusing why the choreographer would ask me to make up his dance. I mean in the end I sort of understood more about this process, that I felt like the dance fitted me better because I was more involved in the making of it. This I think shifted how I thought about both being a dancer, and probably influenced how I make work too [...] I also have a very clear memory of how ballet was the more fun class, that was really different for me. In ballet it was actually the most open, more relaxed style to the classes. The modern was where it was like being in the army – jazz class was too until we got a different teacher... it was like the modern teachers were trying to make it very serious by being very strict on us and how we behaved... of course this made me afraid to do *anything* in these classes!

When her three years of training finished Nada returned home to Beirut briefly in 1988. She explained that this was a decision she made primarily because of visa and employment issues, stating,

I graduated and had a part-time job in a small [dance] company but to stay on in France I needed a full-time job, my visa was running out, so I decided to come home and see if I could do something here [in Beirut].

Arriving home, Nada realized that with the country still engaged in Civil War it was difficult to dance, teach or perform on a regular basis. She explained,

When I came back to Lebanon from France I was here for maybe six months, and the War started to flare up again so I travelled to Paris and I stayed there from 1989 until almost 2000, so a long time. When I came back [to Beirut] in 1988 it was really hard for me. I didn't even really want to come home but I had a few visa issues with getting work and everything after I graduated, but as soon as that was sorted out I went back to France. I felt that coming home then [in 1988] that I was really different, that I had changed a lot in those three years I was away [...] I was noticing the gap between societies and just lifestyle was so different. Only now, really only now it is starting to move [in Lebanon] – with mainly the Internet I think, with the world opening up and travelling is much easier now, people can see new things, they can have an idea about what's going on outside. I remember when I used to come and go between the two countries, the people here [in Beirut]... they were completely different.

In early 1989 Nada returned to France, this time basing herself in Paris teaching at Centre de Danse du Marais. She explained how during her time in France she felt as though she was gathering dance knowledge to share with the local dance community in Beirut when she returned: “I wanted to do something to help build the dance community, especially contemporary

dance... it was kind of like a goal I suppose.” Nada made frequent trips back to Beirut, often teaching workshops and classes during these visits and bringing colleagues from France to teach for these short periods of time:

I came back for summer vacation every year... When I came back I started to give classes, just for friends mainly, they asked me to teach them. So every summer I used to give classes, and from time to time I would organize workshops with my teachers from France and the people that I knew there.

These experiences of teaching in Beirut during the summer holidays allowed Nada to establish a regular group of dancers that would join her, and to make small informal performances. Nada expressed how she felt that these experiences formed the foundation of the Beirut Dance Company, which she later established in 2003:

So I had this small group that would gather each summer, and it started to be more involved in the local dance scene in Beirut each summer, so by 1998 and 1999 we decided to do a small show. Because there was nothing in dance in Lebanon, nothing in dance here, there was Caracalla, but that had always been here... and that’s all – nothing – and people used to look at dance as if it was something strange, they didn’t understand. We did this show, the next summer we did another [...] This I think... it was the beginning of my company, but at the time I must admit I wasn’t thinking a company was something I would actually be able to do here. I thought maybe I’d do a company in France, but these performances and the group of dancers I was working with on these small productions was the beginnings.

Returning to Beirut more frequently between 1998 and 2003, Nada explained how she felt “very alien” in her home environment, and expanded on this feeling in the following narrative:

For me as a dancer, I had a lot of problems with society, a lot of problems with Lebanese society – they didn’t understand what it means to be a dancer... it was really an out of space thing. I would come home and feel like I was very alien. If people asked me what I did and I said, “I am a dancer,” I would get strange looks. Sometimes people would say things, negative things. Others might just ignore you and pretend like they didn’t hear you. But I kept coming back because there was a small group [of dancers] who wanted to do this more seriously, I felt like I could do something with this group. So, I did a kind of exchange between about 1998 and 2003, between living in France and Beirut – I was here for six months and then there for six months. So it was like this for five years and I suppose that it was only as I spent more time here that I noticed how I did or did not fit into the regular society here. I had to accept that, find a way to cope. I suppose I created my ‘dance haven’ – the studio, the company – as my way of dealing with feeling odd here. During 2000 I did another production in the summer with the group – it was a collaboration with some dancers from France, and this was when I really decided that I could make a company here. It took me time to build up the dancers and the courage, but

I wanted to share my own work here at home. I think it took me that long to get used to the idea that I could do this [have a company] here, and also maybe that I would be living here all the time.

Nada returned permanently to Lebanon in 2003, and shared that her initial intention was to establish a dance school: “I started a small school – before this I was teaching everywhere, in clubs in small spaces – so I started a school with children... so something more solid was starting to be built.” Nada spoke of how, prior to returning to Beirut permanently, she viewed herself as a dancer and teacher of dance; however, once she arrived in her home environment she felt that she had to take on new roles to make dance a viable career option in Beirut. She explained,

I was still a dancer – I had been doing some teaching, but I saw myself as a dancer. I did not want to go into choreography, or to do so much teaching, and on reflection I suppose I did not want to go into teaching so much so early on – but I had to, it was the only way to make a living from dancing here.

Nada opened her dance school, the Beirut Dance Studio, in 2003. However, the development of both the school and the company was disrupted considerably by the political tensions and instability of this time and the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War.<sup>24</sup> Nada explained this experience further in the following statement:

Between 2003 and 2007 we had a very bad situation in Lebanon. Of course 2006 was very bad so everything froze again – it’s like it goes on hold completely. Because dance is a really young thing in Lebanon – the dancers, the semi-professionals that had started to emerge, they left or stopped, so when it all settled down we had to start again.

Nada explained how when the conflict and political situation in Lebanon settled she continued to focus on building and strengthening her company. She shared that she felt that the development of her company was assisted by the return of several Lebanese dancers who had been abroad training and performing:

I felt that suddenly, after this period of time [of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War] in 2007 we had a new generation, and then the company was becoming very active – but with a very new and young generation. I think this was in a way helped by some dancers coming home, some who had been training or dancing abroad, and then they came back because they heard about the company and they thought, “Maybe I can make a living, do some

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<sup>24</sup> Second Lebanon War, also called the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War and known in Lebanon as the July War took place between 12<sup>th</sup> July and 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, with the Israeli blockade of Lebanon ending on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2006 (Sultan, 2008).

interesting work at home” [...] What I want to continue to do is to get back people who were here and who have left, who have travelled abroad and are dancing abroad – we need them – because that’s how we are going to build dance here, it will not build if people just leave.

Nada shared how she feels her company fills what she perceives was a void in the dance scene in Lebanon, explaining, “There is Caracalla,<sup>25</sup> but that had always been here. For me this is not doing anything new, just maintaining the old or the predictable... and the other things were coming from theatre – I wanted to sort of bridge that gap.” Nada described how she felt her artistic work fits within her home environment, and also how others might perceive her creative work:

My work, it’s not the classical procedure because I am both the teacher and choreographer for my dancers – this is because of the situation – I have to be both. I can’t just teach them [the dancers] and I can’t just create work... plus I think the style of my choreographies are also given in the classes I teach. For me, I wanted to give a training that was classical at first – because I was making more classical choreography, choreography that I saw in France. I was just doing that here [in Beirut]. I was inspired by the work I had been around in Cannes, in Paris; I was taking that and using that as a starting point here. But I discovered that there is a certain style that I need in my choreographies – the structure of the bodies, the muscular way of using the body – for example, I need techniques in my choreographies – but I hate the very classical style, I am not interested in prescribing exactly the same as what is being done in France for example, so the way I teach is very neutral, I try to make it a neutral starting place for the creation to happen. I don’t know what to call it, but I think it’s the best of both worlds. I think by making it a bit more neutral, not very classical, not very contemporary, it is palatable. Audiences here [in Beirut] appreciate it because they can take it as something new but not radical. Some might say I’m boring by doing this, but this is how I can make work here, have an audience – very practical things. When I first came back here [to Beirut] I was probably very European in how I approached things. Now I’ve been back here for a long time and I think I have definitely adapted a bit – you have to, it’s the only way to survive. I get frustrated when people assume my work is under the ‘European’ label. People say I don’t look like a Lebanese dancer – that I’m too tall, too long, too athletic – but I am Lebanese, I don’t try to avoid this when I dance. The same with my choreography, I don’t try to create anything under a specific label, European or anything else.

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<sup>25</sup> Caracalla Dance Theatre was founded in 1970 by Abdel-Halim Caracalla. The company is based in Beirut, Lebanon, and aims to fuse Western contemporary dance practices and local folkloric dance techniques.

Nada expressed how since returning to Beirut she has developed what she describes as her own “dance haven”. This is a notion that is particularly noticeable when you step inside the space of her dance studio. Floor to ceiling mirrors line the walls of the studio, colourful designer furniture fills the reception area, and images of Paris Opera Ballet stars hang in the hallway. As children arrive for their afternoon dance class with an entourage in tow – mother, nanny, siblings – it is clear that there is a demand in Beirut for dance education opportunities such as those provided by Nada. She explained that her school “is what makes the money so the company can survive”. Nada explained that while she enjoys teaching she also feels that there are difficulties teaching Western dance practices, such as ballet, in a non-Western context. Nada shared how she has tried to adapt her dance knowledge and pedagogical methods for the context in which she is teaching:

I now, I like teaching, but there are challenges. I think you cannot take the European model and put it here, you cannot. You cannot just transplant ballet or something like modern dance and expect it to sit perfectly, for it to be accepted immediately and for everyone to love it – no. Even in the way of teaching, you cannot, you have to take into consideration where you are, what mentality, what psychology, how to get them to go to a professional level. It is very important to adapt it, even if you are going towards the same result you have to find your own way, you cannot tell people things in the same way as you tell them in Europe. I think our way of being is different, we see things differently, we feel things differently, it is very different here, and I’ve tried to think about this in relation to what I teach and how I teach [...] I might not always use ballet music to do ballet to – why not use Arab music? I might not end class doing a reverence in straight lines, but in a circle. Ok, so these might not be acceptable ways in Europe but here I think it is a way of connecting it to the local environment more.

Nada expressed strong views about ‘importing’ dance practices, dance institutions and dance practitioners themselves from abroad. She explained this in the following statement:

I think for us to develop dance in Lebanon, it is important for us not to import... I think why to import teachers and how institutions should run, companies, choreographies, why to put this energy in importing rather than developing what we have here already? We need something solid, not something that will just last for two or three years and then that is all – you need something that lasts for generations, and not something depending on a single person.

Provoking this discussion further I asked Nada if, as someone who received their formative dance training abroad, and whose teaching and choreographic work draws from Western dance practices, the concept of focusing on the ‘local’ could be viewed as somewhat contradictory.

Nada explained,

Of course, but just because I went abroad doesn't mean others should have to – 20 years ago I think that going abroad might have been the only option if I wanted to be a professional dancer, now it's not the case.

She went on to explain, “I think there are possibilities here, now, to be a professional dancer – I think even people that go abroad now come back and realize that they can continue their career here.”

#### 4.4 Mey Sefan, Damascus



Image 4. Mey Sefan

I had arranged to first meet with Mey at 11am on a warm spring morning at *Café Downtown* in Al-Jazzari, a suburb of new Damascus where an eclectic array of people mingle in the streets and spill out of cafés, boutiques and restaurants. I had spent the previous day wandering the claustrophobic maze-like streets of the Old City, and now, surrounded by the wide boulevards and well manicured gardens of Al-Jazzari I felt like I had ventured to another planet. A colleague in Egypt had put me in touch with Mey by e-mail, and after hearing about her work from other dancers in the region I thought it would be wonderful to include her in my research. I sat in the corner of the busy café keeping my eye out for someone who could be Mey. I always felt a little nervous meeting a new interviewee for the first time, unsure if they were genuinely willing to share their story with me or only meeting with me out of politeness. I fretted over if they would have to leave our meeting early and I would never see them again, or if they would be short with their answers to my questions and annoyed at my request to follow them through their day to day

life, teaching, performing or creating dance in their home environment. I must admit I always felt more relaxed after that first meeting was over.

I flipped through my notebook, pretending to read. I occupied myself momentarily with my mobile phone, acting as if I was busy sending imaginary messages to imaginary friends. Noticing that it was 11.15am I was getting nervous that I might be in the wrong café; perhaps I got the time wrong. A few minutes later a woman with short dark hair, with flicks of auburn embracing each curl, walked up to the large glass doors of the café. Before coming inside she rummaged through her bag and then proceeded to light a cigarette, casually exhaling the smoke, slowly tilting her chin upwards giving me a sense of guarded arrogance to her presence. I was quite certain this was Mey, and I went over to meet her. I had initially arranged to do two interviews with Mey: one for the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* book and another for my PhD research. However, as we began the first interview, sipping on iced mint and lemonade drinks in the café courtyard, I quickly realized that she had a lot to share and was very open and forthcoming with her experiences. The impression of defensive arrogance I perceived at first glance was unfounded; rather, I discovered that she was a woman who was direct and honest, keen to bring me into her dance world in Damascus.

We met several times during my visit to Damascus and again over the coming months in both Bodrum and Beirut. In Damascus we sometimes would meet for formal interviews, other times I watched her teaching or rehearsing students at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts (HIDA). Then there were the times when we just chatted in the evenings over many cups of coffee. Mey was instrumental in introducing me to those involved in the dance scene in Damascus, taking me to visit the Dance Department at HIDA on a number of occasions and allowing me an insight into the environment she was working in and the challenges she has encountered as a dancer, teacher and choreographer in Syria.

Mey was born in Damascus, and recalls performing when she was in kindergarten, explaining, “I loved to dance and they always gave me the solo parts in the performances in the kindergarten.” Her eyes would light up as she recalled how in 1987, when she was six years old, her mother



enrolled her in ballet classes twice per week at HIDA, almost as though this moment was a turning point in her life. When inquiring why it was ballet and not another dance form that she studied, Mey explained that, “For a middle class family like mine ballet was quite popular back in the 1980s; because of the Russian influence here they used to get teachers from Russia to visit and do exams and a full programme and everything.”

Mey’s parents encouraged her to continue dancing throughout her childhood, and in turn Mey began to take more ballet classes and occasionally folklore or jazz classes too. Mey explained that her family was very open and liberal towards her being involved in such activities: “In this society, these are sometimes issues about women dancing – taboos and stuff – and of course my family was the biggest support for my dancing; if they were not behind me it would have been impossible to dance.” The assistance she received from her family regarding her involvement in dance was something that she brought up frequently during our conversations, explaining that she perceives this to be somewhat unusual in her home environment of Damascus. After finishing her general education Mey continued her studies at HIDA where a full-time dance programme had recently been established. Mey explained that she felt the decision about where she should train was, at this point, decided by HIDA:

When I finished my school, I was thinking ok, what to do now. It wasn’t clear if they would send us – the government, the country – if they would send us to continue outside [of Syria] and give us scholarships to continue, or if they would open the Higher Institute here so it was full-time training. So, there were two possibilities: we could get scholarships to study outside and come back, or there would be the Higher Institute. They set up the Higher Institute and I got told that I would be training there.

After our first meeting, Mey asked if I would like to visit HIDA and see some of the work they were currently doing there. I was eager to become further involved in the dance scene in Damascus, and without a contact at the Institute I was excited that Mey would be able to take me there. Thinking that this visit might be in the next day or so I got out my diary to schedule an appointment. Mey looked at me and said, “We can go now, it will be no problem.” We left the café and stood on the dusty pavement waiting for a yellow taxi to come by that was willing to take us the short trip across town to HIDA, situated in the grounds of the Dar al-Assad for Culture and Arts. Mey explained that it was within walking distance but in the midday heat the

walk would not be particularly pleasant. Once inside the taxi the heat appeared to be even more overwhelming, the warmth of the black vinyl interior of the car at first was mildly uncomfortable, and then all consuming. I think Mey could sense how I was struggling with the heat and this is perhaps why she kept talking to me almost non-stop, keeping my attention and making the journey go a little faster. She explained how for a long time she felt that HIDA was like a second home for her, spending much of her childhood and adolescent years there. Hearing her speak of the Institute so fondly, I wondered why she went abroad to further her training. Later, I asked Mey about this and she explained that after her first year of full-time training at HIDA she was unhappy; she felt that she was alone in her studies, without peers to challenge her dancing and she was uncertain how pursuing her training in Syria might lead to a professional career in dance:

I started at the Higher Institute [of Dramatic Arts] full-time when I finished high school... but I felt that it's not quite right and it was not really going anywhere for me. I was questioning what I would do when I finished [training] and how I would make a career as a professional. I finished my studies at [high] school, I was like 17, and I was thinking, do I go on with this? I mean the questions start much earlier because like almost all of my friends [at high school] – not almost, *all* of them, they stopped [dancing] – I was the only one that continued. I felt like I was the only person who wanted to dance and no one understood why I wanted to do this. That's hard, and it's hard when you are in a class with maybe one or two other people and you want to learn new things and improve. I think that's what sort of planted the seed for me to go abroad.

Although Mey's experience of full-time training at HIDA took place in the late 1990s, similar concerns were expressed by some of the young dancers I met who were currently engaged in full-time training at HIDA. A group of five students in their first year of full-time training sat in the cool corridor outside one of the dance studios. Slouched against the concrete wall and surrounded by their dance paraphernalia – water bottles, extra tracksuits, bags, dance shoes – they began to share their concerns about their future outside of the institution. They mentioned that they were afraid that they would not be able to make a living from dancing when they graduated; others explained that they were unsure how they would be able to pursue their dance practices outside of the institutional environment provided at HIDA and some felt that they needed to leave Damascus, to travel abroad to further their training. When asking these students why they felt the need to pursue training abroad they spoke of needing to improve, of wanting to

fit in and dance in a location where people ‘got’ them and their work.

For Mey, the feeling of isolation and the questioning over future dance directions she could take in Syria in turn propelled her to begin exploring the opportunities that might be available to further her training abroad. Mey explained how she had approached several foreign embassies, cultural centres and institutions in Damascus inquiring about scholarships and the possibility of receiving dance education abroad. Mey applied and received a Goethe Institute Scholarship for Performing Arts to cover her tuition fees and living costs in Germany for three years:

I managed to get a scholarship from Germany, from the Goethe Institute because I heard that they give money for training. Otherwise I never could have gone, it would have been too much money, there was no way that my family could afford it, and this scholarship was for three years of training. I wasn’t that keen on Germany, but I couldn’t turn down the scholarship – a chance to have a dance career – so I went to Germany when I was 18. This was another taboo, a girl, who was 18, out of the country, alone, studying dance.

Mey had initially wanted to continue her ballet training when abroad; however, after watching videos of Western contemporary dance she explained that she felt that this might be something that she would like to pursue instead. This form of contemporary dance appealed to Mey because of its “energy”. She explained, “I was so excited to just see something a bit more real and, you know, quite physical – like strong.” This encounter with contemporary dance directly influenced the institute she chose to study at:

Up until I went to Germany I had been studying ballet, but I wanted to study contemporary dance, because I saw something here [in Damascus] about Martha Graham, Matz Ek and Alvin Ailey and I thought, “Oh great, this is contemporary dance!” So that’s why I decided to study at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts [Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main]. It was on the list of schools I could choose from and I saw that they had contemporary dance, but they also had folklore and classical ballet, so I thought, “Oh, it’s a nice mixture.”

I didn’t know much more, I was a bit pressured with time, and there is no one to help you so I just went with my gut instinct. Then I went to Germany, I was struggling with the ballet, and then there was all this new contemporary dance which I had never seen before [...] After a while I was becoming more interested in the contemporary dance. I was like, “Hey what is this?”... I had been thinking, “Oh I have to do ballet, that’s why I’m here”... but then also at the same time I was thinking, “This contemporary dance could be interesting.” I did not think that

immediately, but after some time.

During the first few months of her training in Frankfurt Mey initially thought she might change schools: “In the beginning I thought I was completely in the wrong place and I have to change and maybe I’d go to the Stuttgart Ballet or something.” She elaborated on why she felt this way:

I did 11 years of very hard Russian school [in Damascus], and then I went to Frankfurt, and it’s one of the best schools in Germany – but at the time I didn’t know that. In the first class the ballet teacher came in and explained to us how we are to stand in the first position, and the second position, and how to do a tendu and a pli  , and I was like, “What the fuck is this? I’ve already finished with the ballet repertoire.” I always wanted to go en pointe or en relev   and she [the teacher] always said to me, “No, don’t relev  , just keep everything flat.” I couldn’t understand why the teacher wanted us to do something; I thought, “This is not a real dance school.” I felt that I had wasted those 11 years learning ballet if this is what was happening, that it was too relaxed, like the teacher was a bit lazy, but I suppose it was just not what I was used to. But then with time I realized that the teacher wanted to achieve different things, not just do the steps, but understand them too, to understand the ballet technique in a different way.

Mey explained how during the first months of her studies in Frankfurt she began to reflect upon her learning experiences in Damascus:

Some of the teachers I had in Syria they never explained things, they just say, “You are so bad, you are so bad!” – it’s all about doing more and more. We had one Russian teacher in the Frankfurt school and she was always like, “People, cheat, cheat for the audience, always show the foot that is to the audience straight but this one has to be like 90 degrees,” and this was quite funny to discover that there is like another way of looking at things. I was like, “Oh yeah, I could cheat this movement, do it a different way and it’s ok.” For me it was like discovering everything new and again, and to have a new understanding of everything. At the beginning I was against it a bit – reluctant to accept that there might be more than one way of doing something, because you know you are doing it one way for such a long time. But over time it was realizing that for once it was not about doing millions of turns, kicking your leg high – it was more about *how* are you doing the turn? Do just *one* but think about it [...] This was like really new for me.

The confusion over the teaching style Mey was experiencing was not only in ballet classes, but also carried through to other classes and learning environments during her first year in Germany. It also emerged through our discussions that the material being taught was somewhat alien for Mey, with little explanation or direction given to assist her fitting into her new learning

environment. She explained this experience within the following statement:

In the first year I was there [in Germany], there was this class, where we had to lie on the floor and do strange voices and feel the floor, and feel the air between your body and the floor, and to imagine yourself as all sorts of things, like imagine that you are an eye, and then next thing you are a rabbit, and then you are like a falling – I don't know what – and I was just starting to learn German and I was like, "Heh?" I was looking at my friends and just imitating something, just to do something. I was always like, "Oh, I have stomach pain, oh I have headache, oh I cannot go, oh I'm so tired"... Oh god, I really hated it. But what was really horrible for me was improvisation in general because like when they come and give you a task and then you have to do something for like two minutes on your own – this was horrible, really horrible for me.

Mey also shared that she had specific expectations of the classes and dance forms she would be learning in Frankfurt, explaining,

We had contemporary class, I thought I was going to be doing Alvin Ailey, then we were doing like Alexander technique on the floor and I was like what is this? Where's my Alvin Ailey? I wanted contractions, hinges and tilts.

Language issues also made the new learning environment confusing and complicated. Mey expressed this within the following statement:

I had many difficulties to read some words, I was like, "con-tac-t im-p-ro-v"... and it was in German too and I was just starting with German too and it was like hand written so it was even harder to read, and I remember that I was there thinking, "What is 'con-tac-t im-p-ro-v'?" I spent like two or three days thinking what the hell is this? I had no idea, nothing. The teacher was just like blah, blah, blah in German and I'd just understand a word here and a word there, and the rest of the time I was like sleeping – I spent a lot of time avoiding having to talk or ask any questions. I'd copy my friends, I had no idea what I should be doing, I didn't understand the teacher or what he wanted me to do... This was not in every class, but a lot of them. But, you know, this contact improvisation was a no-no, a real taboo, it was just not something I could understand at first – like why are we doing this? I was sure that they were just crazy, because you know, the way they taught was less strict. I felt like we were not being taught anything because of this... this was really different for me, it was so different at first from what I was used to in Syria.

Along with the language issues that Mey spoke of experiencing, she also shared her feelings of the culture shock she was encountering, both inside and outside of her learning environment. She explained how this felt:

Everything was so strange there at first, the teachers were so strange, the people treated me differently because I was from Syria, and the country was strange to me. People, they'd ask, "Do you come from Arabia?"... "Are you living with camels and in a tent?" Yeah, sure, and I brought my camel with me to Germany [...] This made me feel bad, I was embarrassed and angry. I felt like I was out of place, I felt like I was from another planet. I became the 'Syrian' girl, that's who I was to people. I wanted to always scream, "I'm more than that!"

However, over time Mey explained how she began to feel more comfortable in her new environment and started to enjoy her time studying and the new ideas and concepts she was learning:

So, with the contemporary I started a little bit to feel it, to feel what it was about. We worked with one choreographer who I just clicked with, and it was like this experience got me into thinking about dance in a different way. Over time I sort of felt more like I knew what was expected of me to be like a professional; I started to realize why some of the things were being taught and how they were connected to each other.

Mey also recalled a specific performance that shifted how she perceived dance and the dance education she was receiving in Germany:

I remember there was one moment in a choreography that we did with this choreographer – this was the first time I danced and really enjoyed it; I was not thinking about what comes next, so I was really there, and I was just dancing it and remember exactly this up and down movement, and then I switched off and I was in a trance, I was really in a trance, I was really somewhere else. I remember I couldn't feel anything – it was so strange – the music became so strange, and the hall felt so big and I just felt my body from the inside, like every single muscle in me and every single cell in me – everything – was alive; everything was like bigger than real life, and so light... I was really in a trance. And then when I finished I was like, "Wow, what is thing? Wow!" I remember this moment so well, this was the 'ah-ha' effect you know, this is what I was looking for. I didn't know up until then what I was looking for – and this was it. This was like opening my eyes – so this was after maybe one and a half years of studying there [in Germany] and then I really started to go, "Ok – let's understand this more. I want to feel this dance thing, take it to a deeper level." What is quite funny, now anyway, is that my work is really based on things like kinesiology, Pilates and Alexander technique, all those things I found really hard to get my head around at first. After a while in Germany, it was like the Alexander technique clicked, the Pilates clicked, and all of this Alexander technique made me feel as though I could do anything, my legs were spiralling, I felt really grounded but light.

Mey described how in late 2002, after completing three years of training in Frankfurt, she made the decision to come home to Damascus. She explained that she had assumed throughout her time in Germany that she would return home to Syria once her training was completed. Her decision was also fuelled by the desire to form a contemporary dance company in her home environment. However, after arriving home the expectations and pressure in her home environment as someone who had ‘trained abroad’ became overwhelming and she returned to Germany a year later. During our first meeting Mey did not divulge further on why she returned to Germany; almost like it was a taboo topic she quickly changed the subject, lighting up another cigarette in haste. It was only during later conversations that she began to reveal that there were particular motivations that pulled her back to Germany. The first was to reunite with a boyfriend who she then married, and the second factor was the feeling that she needed to learn more about her dance practices to in turn be able to teach, perform and choreograph in a way that she would feel creatively satisfied within her home environment. Mey shared this experience of going between Syria and Germany in the following statement:

I came back [to Damascus], I was like 22 when I came back. I’d never considered staying abroad for a long time, or permanently. The whole time I was in Germany I felt like I had a life back in Syria that I had to come home to. There was this sort of expectation from my family, from the Goethe Institute... I started to organize a small group here to teach them things and to do stuff – that was really why I wanted to come back too – I was naive and I thought you could just make a dance group and it would work. Also the Higher Institute asked me if I could come and teach, so I went there and taught a couple of classes, but I felt that it was too much pressure, too many expectations... to come back and everyone is looking at you, like what is she doing, what is happening? Waiting for me to do any small mistake so they could attack, and I felt under so much pressure, and I felt like I was just repeating what I had learned in Frankfurt, I was not sure of myself as a teacher – I felt like when I left Germany I was just starting to understand what sort of dance I might want to make. I didn’t feel strong enough to stay here... I went back again to Germany – there was also an old love story you know, and I got married.

When Mey returned to Germany in early 2004 she started to choreograph her own work and initiate cross-cultural collaborations between Syrian and German dance practitioners. This led her to establish the dance company called Myosotis, where collaborative works between artists from both locations, Germany and Syria, were devised and performed in Europe. She was also teaching a variety of dance and somatic practices and continued to engage in performance work

across Europe. In 2008, after being back in Germany for four years, Mey decided that it was time to return home, this time she cites homesickness as the driving force. She also explained that she felt that she had gathered new knowledge that could be applied in her home environment:

I was always visiting once or twice a year, or sometimes even three times a year. I always felt that I really, really want to be here [in Damascus] now, like I always felt pain when I left Syria. So, at a certain point in Germany I said, “Ok, I need to go home, I miss it.” I felt that it was like now or never. I could have stayed in Germany but I would have got stuck, and by this stage I felt that I could do something here [in Damascus], that I could bring something home. I came back and I was like, “Ok, so I am here, now what?” I thought, “Ok, I will start a company.” A company was something I always wanted to do, make my own work, influence the dance scene here.

Mey started Tanween Dance Company with a group of four dancers and also hoped that she could continue her teaching practice. However, Mey explained that on arriving home and re-establishing herself, she felt somewhat alienated from the local dance community. She explained, “I felt like everyone was afraid of me, the people at the Higher Institute [in Damascus], everyone was afraid of their position, like thinking that ‘she might come and take my position’.” Mey also shared her frustrations of establishing a small dance company with limited resources in an environment that presented several challenges to those involved in the performing arts: “With no funding you can’t pay your dancers, when you do a performance no one wants to know about it, only your friends come, plus even finding dancers willing to work with you in your way is hard.” These difficulties led Mey to make the decision to place her ambitions for a dance company on hold and to pursue something that she felt might actively generate interest around contemporary dance within the wider community. This led Mey to start a contemporary dance festival in association with others in the southern Mediterranean who had similar projects. When explaining her experience of establishing and running the Damascus Contemporary Dance Platform in 2009 and 2010, it seems that Mey’s expectations of what contemporary dance might be and how it should be appreciated sometimes conflicted with others’ understandings and expectations of contemporary dance:

I tell the dancers at the Higher Institute that I’m doing this festival and that Sacha Waltz is coming, and of course nobody knows Sacha Waltz, and I say that they are staying five days here and they don’t have a lot of things to do because they have to wait for the stage to be built and things, so they [the students at HIDA] could come to the Old City and talk to her – and they are like no... they are not



interested. I couldn't understand why. I just thought this is so strange, you are a dancer, don't you care? I think certain choreographers' works need to be seen here. I think that people should know about these peoples' work and the importance of them within the contemporary dance world. This is how we are going to develop our work here, how we are going to produce better – more sophisticated work. There are other people here who don't think it's so important, they don't care about some dance company from Europe in the same way I do.

Mey was also questioning how her dance experiences in Europe might be adapted within her home context. She stated, "I don't know what I should do sometimes with what I learned in Germany, and sometimes me – as a Syrian – teaching Western contemporary [dance] here is not seen to be a positive thing, people would rather foreigners teach it." This feeling that 'foreigners' might be more accepted as teachers of Western contemporary dance practices was also reiterated within Mey's following statement:

The Higher Institute Director is like, "We have a teacher from Holland and we have another teacher from Greece," and he is telling this to everyone... So what! You can immediately feel the complex, I mean he is not saying we have a teacher from this and this school, or she was teaching at this and this school, or she was working with this and this company, just the country – so what! It is this complex – from abroad – it's always this complex and it's so awful.

Teaching in her home environment was often a topic of conversation that Mey spoke about extensively. She would often question what she should teach, how she should teach and the repercussions of teaching particular ideas, concepts and movements in her home environment. She gave an example of an encounter she had recently at HIDA, where her assumptions of what should be taught and how did not necessarily fit with the expectations of the students she was teaching:

I hadn't taught these students for a while, and we started with these workshops and I told them, "People ok, it's been six months [since I've last taught you], we will do something easy." I did one hour on the floor Pilates – very easy – just like to starting to feel muscles again, we didn't even do any standing work or release work just an easy Pilates class. But it's Pilates, so moving the inside muscles, thinking more about *feeling* muscles, bones, sensations, listening to the body... They were a bit bored though, I could tell as I was teaching them... I was wondering how I could get them more interested in the exercises and ideas. But the funny thing is that the next day nobody could walk. I didn't feel anything, I wasn't sore, nothing, and I'd had six months off. Nobody could walk and they [the students] were like, "What did you do to us? Why do we have to do this? How is this going to make us better?" and I was like, "Moving your muscles... the right

muscles... the muscles you need to dance.” For me it was obvious. Maybe I didn’t explain enough to them all about Pilates and how it is connected to dance, but I thought that’s it, we have very different ideas of what you need to do to train to be a dancer. For me a dancer has to be dedicated, be able to perform technically, physically well – for me this is the technique, and that is what we don’t have here – and then everybody wonders why they have damaged knees and injuries and they are like 20 and they are already damaged. This teaching here was hard. Looking back I had to learn more about how to be an actual teacher, and a teacher in a Syrian environment [...] Now the environment is just part of my teaching. It’s not even something I think about – I just know. I can’t teach contact here like I would in Germany, but it’s not like I’ve sat down for hours and thought about how to do it differently here. Like, I know this place. For me I know my home, I know what works, what won’t. Here I can’t just get them to roll all over each other at first, it just won’t happen, that’s just how it is.

The role of Western contemporary dance in a Syrian context was something that Mey and I discussed on several occasions. Mey explained how she felt that particular dance groups based in Syria were drawing on Western dance practices under the guise of presenting folkloric dance. She explained that while she did not necessarily like or agree with the artistic work that some of these groups were presenting, she feels that exposing a wider audience to these dance practices has enabled her to pursue her own artistic practices with more ease:

I tell someone that I am a dancer they are like, “Oh, do you know Enana?”<sup>26</sup> You must go and dance with them.” So, in a way the work that groups like Enana do is good because it puts dance out there and gets people to see it, and you know thinking about it, thinking about the body... so it is very important, and I could never do this work without that new understanding – I mean people would come to my performances and think who is this crazy naked woman? [Laughs]

However, Mey expressed how censorship in her home environment has at times restricted the work she feels she can create or share publically:

I have to think about the work I make in relation to the environment – the censorship that goes on. I have to do this, there is no choice – you could be in a lot of trouble if you just went ahead without considering this. Like, in the Festival [Damascus Contemporary Dance Platform] I had planned on showing various films on Pina Bausch. Everything had been arranged so far and the programmes had even gone to print already. We had gone to extremes to get all these films,

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<sup>26</sup> Enana Dance Theatre Troupe was established in 1990 in Damascus by Jihad Mufleh. The company presents theatrical dance works for the stage, television, and film, blending Western theatrical dance practices with folkloric narratives and concepts, a blend that often “depends on many foreign experts specialized in classical and modern dancing and solicits the help of various specialists in popular dance besides Arab experts in local popular and folk dancing” (Enana Website, para.7).

among others *Café Müller*, *Die Klage der Kaiserin* and *Coffee with Pina*. In Syria you have to submit all the films prior to showing to the censorship of publications board for permission. Shortly before the festival I received an angry phone call from The Ministry of Culture claiming that *Coffee with Pina* had been produced in Israel [...] After that, nothing could be shown at all [...] In the end I was even threatened with going to prison.

Working in Damascus has also led Mey to sometimes feel guilty about dancing, and to question the relevance of Western contemporary dance in her home environment. She illuminates these feelings in the following statement:

Sometimes you really start thinking, “What are you doing? Why are you doing contemporary dance in such a fucking society?” Sometimes doing contemporary dance here you really start doubting it, what am I doing? I learnt the dance I do in Europe; I can’t just stop doing it this way because I’m home. But this is my dance, this is part of who I am. But at the same time I think am I living in a balloon, a bubble. You know, I go to the Opera House and do some contemporary dance and talk about kinesiology and stuff – when there are people who are like... I mean you are in a war zone – ok so there is no direct war here but you are living in a war zone – I mean it’s tension. But I want to use that tension as a way of making my statement towards the issues we are facing.

Mey and I met again in April 2011 in Beirut at the Arab Dance Platform. The Syrian uprising was becoming heated and she had arrived a few days late to Beirut and had cancelled the performance she had planned on presenting. Her home environment was bubbling with tension, the cracks in the Syrian government were beginning to show and violence against citizens was becoming more frequent as the Al-Assad regime fought to maintain control over the Syrian people. Mey’s face looked drawn as we stood outside the Al-Madina Theatre after a performance. She kept her eyes lowered as fellow dance colleagues who were in Beirut for the festival filed past. Mey explained that she was concerned about how she would continue her creative work during this turbulent time, but she explained that she felt it important to remain in Damascus and that there was an urgency to speak out about current issues within her home environment through creative work.

#### 4.5 Nesrine Chaabouni, Tunis



Image 5. Nesrine Chaabouni

Nesrine was one of the few participants from Tunisia at the *The symposium on dance pedagogy in Arabic-speaking countries* held in Bodrum, Turkey, in July 2010. She was teaching a workshop as part of the symposium programme that was based around the relationship of dance, spoken language and sounds and hearing. I was intrigued to find out more. A small group of dance educators gathered underneath the canopy of an outdoor studio where Nesrine was about to begin teaching. We started by sitting in a circle and Nesrine asked us to centre our attention on our breath, firstly taking time to listen to the breath moving through our bodies. She then asked us to let our exhale breathe to create an audible humming sound, and explained that this breath and sound could move our bodies. I exhaled and let the weight of my breath pull me back towards the floor, feeling as though I was sinking into the ground. I opened my eyes for a moment and looked up into the awning above filtering a hazy light and warm pulse of the sun. I was still lying on the floor when Nesrine asked us to sing. I was a little confused, did I hear her

correctly – did she ask us to sing? She explained that we were to take the humming that we were making with our exhaled breath and to turn that into song, to sing anything, even if it made no sense, even if it was in a language that no one else understood, but to sing. This singing led us to movement, and the movement led us back to singing. After the workshop I asked Nesrine if she could explain why she was particularly interested in this nexus of dance, language and hearing. She shared her thoughts in the following statement:

I am interested in the internal voice and how we individually imagine it [...] For me, as someone with hearing difficulties, this is like exploring my own world and sharing it with others. I never would have considered this before experiencing my body in a more somatic way, the ideas coming from an internal place and becoming movement. Originally for me dance was not about this, but I found it over time.... Maybe it might seem like I have asked an everyday question, but I see that this sort of exploration is not just about hearing, like for example when someone has an amputated arm all they can imagine is that the arm is still there, the phantom limb. For me this is the same with hearing, I can still imagine that I can hear well.

One evening during the symposium Nesrine and I sat down to do an interview. A calm, warm, summer breeze was drifting over the Gulf of Gökova; we sat on the beachfront, facing the Greek Island of Kos that was visible in the distance through the hazy twilight. To begin with Nesrine appeared to be a little hesitant to share her experiences of dance in both Tunisia and France, explaining that she thought there was “nothing special” about her experiences and artistic work. However, once she began to recall memories and encounters the interview developed to reveal a rich and diverse experience of dance. Nesrine stated at the conclusion of the interview, “I suppose I have done things, some interesting things, I have never really thought about it before.”

Growing up in Tunis, Nesrine explained that as a child she enjoyed dancing around home, and she described some of these early dance experiences:

I was dancing all the time at my home, with the music and the mirror and I was always watching the dancing on the TV and I would repeat and copy the moves and things like the Janet Jackson video clips [...] I was dancing in belly-dance classes with my mother at the age of eight, so 1990 [...] for me belly dance was something that I feel like I’ve always done.

Within our conversations Nesrine often reiterated that her family was supportive of her dancing.

She explained,

My family is very flexible and calm about me doing these things like dancing, and it's because of my family that I am doing what I am doing now. For example, I think my father he does not have the typical Arabic mentality. He is a writer himself, so quite creative and he encouraged me to continue dancing. Because you know in our countries [referring to her experiences in Tunisia] there is always the taboos about the body, about the dancer, and they just think, "What's a dancer?" It's not very important within the society, but my father and my mother, they believe in dance and in art and they encourage me.

Nesrine shared that during her childhood she often felt that she was distanced from social interaction because of a hearing difficulty. She stated:

I was in my own world and I didn't connect with what adults were saying because I don't hear very well. I didn't connect with other children because I was different – as a child I was living my own world, because of this hearing problem.

Nesrine explained how at the age of 15 she began taking dance classes at the National Centre for Dance in Tunis:

At the age of 15 I was at the National Centre for Dance. I decided to go because a dance teacher came to our school and gave a presentation on dancing. I wanted to go and try so I went along with some friends, and it was with a teacher who had trained in France I discovered this contemporary dance. This was it; for the first time in my life I see a class of contemporary dance, but at the time I didn't know that it was contemporary dance. When I heard people say 'contemporary' I was thinking that it would be African dance or something. I was like, what is this exotic dance? I didn't know... but it looked quite sophisticated I thought and I knew that I didn't like ballet dance – I had seen the class and it was very rigid and I just didn't like it, but I discovered contemporary dance and I loved it, it was natural for me to dance in this class.

When Nesrine was 17 years old she performed at the Carthage Theatre in Tunis. She recalled this performance vividly, and explained how she felt after the performance:

After the performance some people came to me and told me that it was very good and that I was very good. They asked me for my age and I told them I was 17 and that this was my first professional performance [...] They don't believe that I could be so professional at such a young age. And this is what really made me want to do it, to keep dancing. I'm not sure why this moment is so strong in my memory – but I think when you have an experience where people react positively to what you do on stage that makes you want to keep going.

For the next two years Nesrine studied at National Centre for Dance in Tunis; however, she described how when she was 18 years old she had “a crisis, a breakdown” because of her hearing problem. Nesrine explained,

At the age of 18 because of my problem of hearing I had a crisis, a breakdown and I decided that I didn't want to speak. I said to myself, “I'm going to learn sign language.” I was a teenager, I was being rebellious. I went to a school to learn French sign language. But I decided that there might be another way for me to communicate how I feel. So that's why I decided that my language would be the choreographic language, the language of dance.

In 2000 Nesrine enrolled at the Institut Supérieur des Beaux Arts de Tunis, and it was here that she completed her undergraduate degree in fine arts, followed by a Master's degree researching the relationship between sculpture and dance. During the week of the symposium in Bodrum Nesrine showed me images that she had on her laptop of the work she created as part of her Master's research. Beautifully photographed, she was swathed in a sheer fabric, her body painted in a white-wash and with a backdrop of blue light and two floor-to-ceiling mirrors that were repositioned at various points of the performance. As Nesrine showed me the images she described the performance in such detail I almost felt as though I had watched it.

She also shared with me that it was performing this work in Paris that led to her meeting the woman who is currently her doctoral supervisor and who encouraged her to pursue further choreographic research at Université Paris Panthéon Sorbonne. She explained,

This teacher, she was French, she taught at Sorbonne – but I didn't know this at the time, but she saw my performance and was very encouraging of my work and ideas. I felt like she understood my work and would help me develop it.

Nesrine went on to explain:

For me this is what I needed – someone who believed in my dancing, and this teacher, she did. I was amazed that a teacher took that interest in me, it made me want to be like that in my own teaching – caring about individuals – and I think it was this encouragement that led me to go to Sorbonne.

After graduating from Institut Supérieur des Beaux Arts de Tunis she applied to the Université Paris Panthéon Sorbonne to undertake a doctoral degree. She was accepted and moved to Paris in 2007. Nesrine explained the motivation for leaving Tunis and going to Paris in the following

statement:

I had my master's [degree], I met the criteria for a doctorate and honestly I didn't know what to do with my life. I felt like I was going nowhere in Tunis, that I was not able to explore new ideas, ways to explore dance so much. There were not so many people to exchange ideas with. There was never a choice about going to one place or another – for me I speak Arabic and French so if I was going to go somewhere outside the Arab world to study it would be France; it is a familiar language, a familiar place for me to be in because I have been there many times before.

It also appeared that Nesrine's parents were supportive of her decision to train abroad, as she stated, "My parents encouraged me to keep studying; my mother has a doctorate so she encouraged me to continue." Arriving in France there were particular issues that Nesrine faced as a student: "The situation of students in Paris is hard. It is hard to live in a little space, to have no money, and work in jobs like cleaners or babysitter, and to have a resident card." Issues over residency cards and visas tended to dominate Nesrine's initial experiences in Paris; however, the dance learning and performing was something she was thriving on, as she explained in the following statement:

For me the issue was when I got to Paris I had been accepted by the university but I didn't have all the papers I needed – I wanted to stay in France, so to stay in France you need to have papers; to get papers you need to be enrolled in studies. So you need to have an enrolment in the university and at this stage they had accepted me but not enrolled me – it was hard because I couldn't work. Then once I got my residency card it was easier but people see you are Tunisian and automatically will not give you the job. I worked in the suburbs, I taught in the suburbs and I didn't actually want to do this – I wanted to study to do my doctorate and you know, take dance classes, not spending my whole time teaching kids in the rough part of Paris – I could do that in Tunis and at least teach in the nice part of town! [Laughs] [...] But when I was studying and dancing I was learning so much, I was like a sponge, I wanted everything, every little bit of information. It's like I had been deprived in Tunis and here there was so much... I never really felt out of place but maybe I was just so enthusiastic to learn everything that nothing else mattered to me so much... The only thing was that in some of the first classes it was like people thought I knew nothing, but it was just that maybe I knew different things from them; once we started working though this barrier it sort of broke down... I was learning all the time because coming to study in Paris with different choreographers made me realize how different making dance can be. Until that point I was certain that there was the dancer and then the choreographer – no in-between – each person doing their job – this idea was shattered when I started to learn here... I think, also it was not so hard because it was a university like in Tunis – if it had been a dance conservatory it could have been harder



because I was not used to that type of place, also there were people from all over, not just from France, so that for me made me not feel like the only person who was from somewhere else.

However, Nesrine raised an issue that she found to be challenging when beginning her doctoral studies in Paris:

I was taking practical classes outside of university just to feel like I was still dancing... the classes I was taking in preparing my doctorate were heavy with theory that the dance became forgotten about almost. I could not see how these things could work together and at this stage no one had mentioned practice-led research to me. I'm sure people were talking about it, but no one spelt it out to me... this was not in my mind, I saw them as two things, separate. Because of the confusion I felt over how theory was fitting into dance and into what I wanted to investigate in my choreography and teaching I almost left Sorbonne. I thought, "This is not my place" – but then I thought, well, Tunis is not really my place either... so I was sort of homeless [laughs] [...] After a while I got more used to the ideas, the concepts that were being taught and how I could balance the practice and the theory.

Despite enjoying her time in Paris, Nesrine shared that she has occasionally felt 'split' between the locations of Paris and Tunis:

I'm free in Paris, but it's an individual society which is something I'm not particularly used to, and it's very expensive to live there, but there are some beautiful things. In Paris everywhere you find art, dance class, performances, conferences and symposiums things I cannot find in Tunisia, but at the same time I feel that when I'm in Paris I am missing part of me... that I am 90 percent in Paris but the other 10 percent is in Tunisia. I feel quite homesick for Tunis. This homesickness, it is so much I even feel I want to make work about home – about Tunisia, about my family – much more so than when I am actually there. But I need to be here – at times I feel the only reason I'm here is because of dance, because dance is my passion and that is where I can do it. Some people at home might not understand my choreographies or how I like to dance, but for me this is the way I move. I have what I learnt at home, what I learnt abroad – I have both, that's who I am. I'm not purposefully trying to be different or 'foreign', I just feel that what I create is how I can best express my ideas. I hate to label the dance I do as 'Tunisian' or 'Western'; it is not either, it is a mix and they are just labels.

Nesrine explained that she expects to complete her practice based doctoral research in 2012; however, she took a year off her studies and briefly returned to Tunisia in 2009 to get married and also to teach dance at The University of Tunis. She explained her experience of returning to Tunis in the following statement:

I was married [...] but then I got divorced – it was a very short marriage of only seven months. My husband was a little bit aggressive and was not ok with me dancing – so that's a bit of a problem for me... When I was back in Tunis I was teaching at the Drama Institute at the Higher Institute of the Tunisian University and I was teaching a lot of things – choreography and contemporary dance, preparation of the body for actors and the body and rhythm. It was a lot of responsibility to do many different subjects and very tiring. I felt that I was not prepared to teach, I did not really get taught how to teach but I had to learn fast. I knew that one day I might like to become a teacher, but maybe not so soon, but every day I was writing down what I was doing, so it was important for me to document, that I knew I might need that in the future [...] It was very difficult, very difficult to create classes [when teaching at the University of Tunis], and I didn't have much experience and I didn't have much information to make the classes – so I developed it on my own and also working with my students, and also because the students had never done dance so it was sort of new for all of us – for me teaching and for them dancing.

Nesrine explained how she felt both isolated and restricted within the dance environment in Tunisia:

It was like I could not breathe. I felt that I needed to learn more before I came back [to Tunis] and started teaching, it was too soon to come home, and I wasn't sure how to teach what I was learning abroad, where to begin, so I went back to Paris.

Nesrine returned to Paris to finish her doctorate and to continue to create work and explore her practice as a dancer and choreographer in France. Over the week of the symposium in Bodrum Nesrine often spoke of the choreographers that were currently influencing her research and ideas about dance performing, teaching and making, specifically French contemporary dancer and choreographer Dominique Dupuy. She started by explaining how his work has influenced her doctoral research and later expanded into a discussion of how these ideas could be applied when she returned to Tunis:

I have got a lot of good information from Dominique Dupuy's way of working. He approaches the class like it's a group of friends, more informal and that it's an open space to explore movement because he works without music and he works specially on internal listening, with space in the body, with the torso and posture – internal music – so really he is someone who had done the 'ground-work' for what my research is based on. I was thinking, this class is not going to work, nothing will happen, we won't learn much. Later I realized, well, it didn't have to be strict – we were still learning a lot, maybe even more because it was an open environment.

When I've taken class with Dominique I have often wondered how I would in a way translate this to other people. I don't want to copy but how could these themes be taken to a different place, maybe like Tunis – somewhere that has some different understandings of what dance might be, or should be even. So I do all these stage workshops with many people, and think the same thing. Like there was this workshop with one of the dancers from Sasha Waltz – it was great and you know, really innovative but apart from being nice for me to do how will I take this home? So I try to take many different things, think about what I might keep and what I might leave for someone or somewhere else. I'm curious in things, in different ways of looking at the body and making movement and I think I will always just keep investigating, and asking too many questions.

She explained her thoughts of learning dance in a different cultural context, and her intention of returning to her home environment:

For me, this time I sort of look at things a bit differently. I wonder how I might take what I have learned in France back to Tunis. I wonder what people might think of the creative work I do – will they think it is strange, or will they like it? Also, having the teaching experience in Tunis makes me realize how much more I need to learn. I cannot just repeat my lessons from Paris because they are not so relevant – they might be nice to watch but they are not connected to the place or the people I might be teaching, unless they are maybe going to Paris! [Laughs]

Nesrine shared that she was unsure about exactly how long she might remain abroad, but she explained, “I don't know how long I'll be away... I might be able to apply for another visa [...] but there is no guarantee that I will get it. I have a Tunisian passport – that means nothing here [in France], they [the French government] don't want us [Tunisians] here. I think it will not be so long, maybe just two or three years more, but if I had a choice then even sooner”. When I asked her why she might like to come home sooner she replied, “I am Tunisian and I feel I need to contribute something to dance in Tunisia. There are many people dancing the same dance as me in France, in Tunisia I think I can change something”.

#### 4.6 Rebecca Camilleri, Malta



Image 6. Rebecca Camilleri

I met Rebecca when she was a participant at *The symposium on dance pedagogy in Arabic-speaking countries* held in Bodrum, Turkey, in July 2010. After our first meeting and conducting an initial interview I made plans to follow up with a visit to Malta to interview Rebecca further and observe her teaching and choreographic practices. I arrived in Malta in early October 2010. Rebecca met me at my hostel that was tucked into the back streets of Valetta. Perhaps it was all my travelling to new locations and meetings with new people, but I was excited to see a familiar face and I felt like I was catching up with an old friend. It was the late afternoon and Rebecca took me through the centre of Valletta, from the City Gates to Fort Saint Elmo, around the harbour to Barakka Gardens. As we walked Rebecca shared the histories of the various buildings that we passed and she also updated me on her current work, creative practices and ideas. We sat in the Upper Barakka Gardens, the warm breeze drifted over the Grand Harbour, stray cats with their kittens lingered in the sun, vendors were selling iced tea and tourists from cruise liners

docked for the day took in the view or stared with perplexed expressions at maps and guide books. Rebecca pointed to a bronze sculpture in the Gardens, drawing my attention to it. It was not a particularly large sculpture but quite detailed; I noticed that people were taking photos of it and some children were climbing up it. Rebecca explained that it is a work by Antonio Sciortino of three children running, called *Les Gavroches*.<sup>27</sup> Rebecca explained to me that as a child she too climbed up the sculpture, pretending that she was a part of it, a fourth child running. She looked away from the sculpture, and shared with me that she still feels like she is part of the sculpture – however, now in the sense that she feels as though she is running and running but not moving anywhere.

As we sat in the gardens Rebecca explained her early memories of dance:

I used to go to a private school [...] At the school there was a dance class and a performance at the end of every year. I don't consider it was good exposure to dance, just more fun. The other dancing we did was just a little bit on P.E. [Physical Education] [...] When I was 12 my cousin was going to ballet, and I wanted to go too. It was quite a struggle to convince my parents and eventually they sent me. I did one year and really enjoyed it. But they said, "We can't pay anymore because it's too expensive," so I stopped.

In 2004, at the age of 16, with a part-time job to pay for the classes, she resumed ballet classes and also started taking jazz classes. Rebecca explained this experience:

I was quite old, I didn't have any certificates, I thought I'm never going to make it, I'm never going to catch up and I can't wait until I'm like 21. I felt this urgent need – like it's either now or never. Many of my friends had been dancing since they were like four years old. I used to think I've only been dancing for two years and I'm actually quite good for how long I've been doing this, I might make it!

Continuing to take dance classes during her first year at university where she was studying psychology, Rebecca recalled how she felt that she wanted the opportunity to dance more often and considered pursuing dance to a professional level. She explained,

I knew that if I really wanted to do this [dance] like, every day... to take dance to another level I would have to leave Malta and find a school or something. I didn't know anyone who was a professional dancer in Malta, so I guessed it just didn't happen.

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<sup>27</sup> Translated from Maltese to English as *The street urchins*.

In 2006 Rebecca decided to audition for tertiary dance institutions in England. She explained why she chose to look for dance programmes offering a full-time degree level course in England:

I think I searched mainly for schools in England probably because there are other Maltese dancers who have studied in England and I think maybe because it is easier for them with the language [...] and because if you are in the EU you pay 3000 [Pounds Sterling] rather than 10,000 [Pounds Sterling] for international fees which is quite a big difference, and they offer you a loan to pay your tuition fees that you can pay back after you graduate. It makes it much easier... I don't know how I would have gone otherwise.

I didn't know what school I wanted to go to. I knew that I wanted one that had a degree – I think here in Malta we are a bit conditioned to think that a degree is really important. Plus my father had certain expectations of the type of dance school I would attend and the qualification I would be getting. I remember to apply for all the ballet schools you had to take pictures like in arabesque and first position and portrait picture and I didn't have brilliant positions... so I thought maybe contemporary dance, the pictures of the contemporary dance in the prospectuses looked more like what I thought I could do. I applied for two schools – Northern Contemporary Dance School in Leeds and Dartington College of Arts. I had two auditions, so I decided to go and I thought this is my last chance – because of how much money it would cost just to go to the audition.

Attending the auditions at the Northern Contemporary Dance School and at Dartington College of Arts was Rebecca's first time travelling to England, and it was a trip that her father accompanied her on. On several occasions Rebecca reflected upon this experience and the pressure that she felt about the audition experience:

I went to these two auditions, and I was thinking, this is my last chance, really it is [...] Now I think it's really funny because it seems so naive to be so black and white about it all, but at the time it was very real for me, I felt like it was going to be one way or another. Plus I felt that I had to prove something to my parents, because they never believed in what I was doing, so I didn't get any support. I mean, as much as they love me and they protect me but still they don't believe this is something that I should do [...] I had these two auditions one at Dartington [College of Arts] and one at Northern Contemporary [Dance School].

At Dartington the audition was quite open [...] I showed my solo to the teacher and he said, "Ok, now try to do it a bit slower, maybe try to stretch it out, play around a bit," so it was really experimental. I was like, "Wow!" [...] That was my first experience in a more open environment. I felt like my ideas counted more and that I was learning *real* contemporary dance.

Rebecca was accepted into the dance programme at Dartington College of Arts. Rebecca

explained how she was happy to be accepted into Dartington, as she had heard about the institution and dance programme through a friend: “I got a lot of information about Dartington from a friend of mine who was doing theatre there.” Leaving Malta and arriving in Dartington, Rebecca explained that she was initially both excited and overwhelmed with the culture and openness of the environment:

I think it was quite exciting and also really scary [...] Now looking back at my first reaction I think I was quite overwhelmed, even by really simple things like the clothes that people wore, because it was quite different from Malta, it wasn't the norm... the fashion was different, and everyone was freer. I would stare at people and be like, “Wow, these people are so different” – even in their hairstyles and everything. Before going away I felt that I had a really clear identity and I sort of knew where I belonged. Then everything got turned upside down in a way when I arrived in England. I was pretty confused... wondering really where I fitted in and just how to make sense of being ‘Maltese’ and also being a young woman alone in England learning lots of new things – where did I fit in with these new things?

Rebecca shared that she was initially confused about her place at Dartington, particularly because her expectations of the course prior to joining contradicted the actuality that the course was focused on teaching:

As soon as I arrived [at Dartington College of Arts] I was told this is not a dance degree, it's a choreography degree, so if you're here to become a dancer then this is not the right place for you. So I was like questioning it – “ok, please tell me I didn't make a bad choice” – and it raised a lot of questions, like, “Ok is this what I want to do?” [...] For me I was confused... I didn't even know you could do a degree in choreography, I thought I was just doing contemporary dance. At the audition no one really told you much and the information we were given before – ok, in hindsight it probably said something about a choreography degree but at the time you are just looking at the ‘dance’ parts, you only see what you want to see or *can* see maybe. Obviously it all worked out in the end, but at the time it's a bit of a shock.

Rebecca also explained that it took her some time to adjust to the new concepts and ideas that she was encouraged to explore in her new learning environment:

I was trying really hard and wondering why I was not getting good marks [...] At the time I didn't know why, but now I realize that it was because I was not taking my thinking and my work to deeper levels, more abstract and more innovative. I was in a bit of shock at the different approaches, and it took me time to adapt. The approach at Dartington was quite different to anything I did in Malta, like all our bodywork classes were at first release technique and all this introduction to improvisation, contact improvisation and workshops, that were really interesting

but totally unfamiliar and overwhelming. I remember doing contemporary for the first time and there were words like ‘improvisation’ and ‘devising’, ‘creative’ – these were all new words for me and in fact I was really lost. I was thinking just tell me what to do, please. This made me worry a little bit, and I felt totally overloaded with information... plus I was like, “Oh, but I really want to do technique, technique will make me strong”... I just wanted technique. I didn’t want to do improvisation and make a phrase and then share it in front of people, I was just wanting technique, because that’s what I was conditioned to think about from learning dance in Malta. So it was the technique thing, the unfamiliar classes like contact improve and stuff and that it was all happening so quickly.

Other concepts and ideas that took some time to adjust to were regarding the theory that was being taught:

[W]e had some theory classes and in one of my first classes they started from Martha Graham and were talking about dance in the 1960s [...] and I was thinking oh my gosh, in the 1960s? In Malta this is still something new! So I’m thinking Malta is like really behind!

Specific experiences in somatic classes were also highlighted by Rebecca:

By my second year I felt comfortable, I’d caught up a bit... we were having a lot of body work classes in different somatic practices – Alexander [technique], BMC [Body-Mind-Centring], yoga – that then fed into technique classes or were ‘technique’ classes themselves in a way. For me the multi-dimensional approaches to the idea of dancing that really had a big effect on me. These classes – the way it was taught, the atmosphere, the teacher’s expectations were about really offering something from inside, not just movement but more about thinking [...] What was really valuable to me was that there was a lot of visualization, thinking about the fluid systems in the body, the cells – plus there was a really open feeling to the class, there was not a feeling that you’d be judged.

Participating in other academic courses not directly related to her choreography degree was something that Rebecca felt enriched her learning experience and assisted her adjustment to her new learning environment:

I think the most interesting classes almost weren’t the dance ones but the visual arts ones. It gave me more layers to my experience in England; I met some really interesting people who I could collaborate with. So you meet like all these people who do different things, and even just to see what they were doing that opens your eyes to so many other things.

“Opening eyes” was a phrase that Rebecca used a lot within our conversations, sometimes in



reference to her own experiences and work but also when discussing how she feels her artistic practices are viewed in Malta and her intentions for developing understandings of contemporary dance in a Maltese context. Rebecca would also mention how she wished her friends and family who were not involved with the arts would be able to “open their eyes” to new ideas or creative practices. She explained how she found it difficult to share and articulate what she was studying to her friends and family when she returned to Malta during the summer break. Rebecca stated, “I was finding it hard to explain to my friends in Malta what I was doing because also I was questioning it still. I was like, “Is this dance? What am I doing?”

The topic of what Rebecca ‘does’ as a dancer came up in conversation one evening when I was having dinner with Rebecca and two of her friends, who were not dancers but school friends who lived near to Rebecca’s family home. At first the group spoke in English, possibly out of politeness to me and my lack of understanding of Maltese. A friend of Rebecca’s explained that he couldn’t understand why Rebecca still wanted to dance, that surely it was just a phase she was going through. Rebecca tried to explain that it was just like any regular job and she just happened to really love what she did, which is why she continued to dance. As the discussion became a little more heated they switched to speaking Maltese. I was lost, but could tell that there were tensions. After the dinner I asked Rebecca what was being said, and she explained to me that they thought she was wasting her life, that she did nothing ‘serious’ by dancing and was very selfish in her work – that she did not adhere to the traditional role that was expected of her as a Maltese woman. Rebecca explained that these types of assumptions were something she had dealt with frequently, and that it did not deter her from her work. I was interested to know why she might consider people who did not support her work as her ‘friends’, and she explained that she had known these people since childhood, that they were part of her life and she hoped that eventually they might understand her work.

In her second year of training at Dartington College of Arts Rebecca went to Berlin on an exchange, to the Hochschule für Schauspielkunst ‘Ernst Busch’. Rebecca felt that the experience in Berlin prompted her to question many of the ideas she had held regarding life in Malta:

[M]ost of the people in my class in Berlin were in their late-20s, I was the youngest one, and they had all like done other degrees. I was forming like a lot of

questions in my head – how can you study at that age? I started to question a lot of things – like all these subject in Malta, cohabitation, abortion, divorce, single parents, living by yourself, leaving home at 18 are quite taboo. By experiencing life in England and also in Berlin, I realized a lot about how repressed I was in Malta. But also how repressed I might be as a woman I think [...] A friend from Malta came to Berlin and we had a lot of discussions about Malta and about our experiences in general and like his perspective being a male and my perspective being a female one... and all these memories were coming back. I was reflecting a lot. I used to spend moments of silence just thinking, “What is going on? What will happen when I finish my studies? How am I going to be able to continue dance in Malta? Should I try to stay in England?”

It was this experience in Berlin that provoked and informed her final year dissertation titled: *Women’s autobiography in performance: how do women artists use cultural oppression as experienced between Western and Islamic culture to make a socio-political statement?*

Rebecca explained that her dissertation was drawing from her own experiences as a female artist and also investigating others’ experiences of cultural oppression in relation to their artistic practices:

When I was in Berlin I started to question a lot of things about being a woman from Malta and then also being a dancer. I came home and I was wondering how do I fit in here [in Malta]? I’m not like a Maltese woman, but I’m not a European woman like in England or Germany... I’m in-between maybe... It was confusing at first. But then I think it also provides me with ideas and material – this experience ended up influencing my dissertation which was about women artists and how they express their cultural background and how repression affects them. I’m sure it will influence the work I make in the future. It made me realize a lot of things but also made me wonder how I could go back to Malta and continue to make dance, was that even possible?

During the summer of 2009 Rebecca returned to Malta to create a performance called *Grace u Rofflu* in collaboration with a local visual artist and a theatre director. It was the performance of *Grace u Rofflu* that lead the trio to establish an artistic collective called Rubberbodies. Rebecca explained the motivation for developing an artistic collective in Malta and how she felt that some of the themes behind their first production came from the socio-cultural context they were working within:

I was sick of the complaining. I was like let’s do something, actually do something, not just talk about how there is nothing here [in Malta] for us. It is our job, my job to do something here, to change something... so, we thought let’s just create a performance, a story. We started to create this story, and the story was

about relationships and the relationship between two characters. But then we thought that we need to make it more relevant and maybe more accessible to the Maltese, because we didn't want to create something abstract, we wanted to create something that could be understood.

After finishing her studies in England in June 2010 Rebecca made the decision to come home to Malta. She explained that the decision to come home was primarily due to financial concerns: "I didn't have a dance job, I had no money to just do my own work in England – at least here [in Malta] I can live at home with my parents, it's easier – and I had no choice". Rebecca also expressed the feeling of being isolated from her friends and family when she returned, with her dance practice being somewhat misunderstood in her home environment:

I think my mother still finds it hard to understand how this [dance] can be something I do all the time, which I understand because – because she comes from a totally different perspective. Maltese people are always being controlled by a political and religious system – and this system, it determines many people's choices. But it makes me feel like I'm being rebellious, and this is especially bad because my family look at me a little bit like, "What are you doing dancing, can't you do something normal, serious?" [...] I have conflicts now with my friends in Malta and I don't want to make them feel inferior because they are not, it is just different. I want them to see the things that I see. I understand them because I was like that and probably I still am in some ways. Some people here [in Malta] might think my dancing is strange, how I dress is strange, maybe what I say is strange to them – but it's who I am. I don't want to go back to how I was [before going to England]. I just feel that it is so important to see these things – other ways of looking at the world – rather than just staying in your safe zone, where you don't think about anything else... I feel like I have changed and developed whereas my friends haven't in the same way.

Reflecting on her return to Malta and the impact that this may have had thus far on her artistic directions and practices, Rebecca expressed concern over becoming 'stuck' in Malta, explaining, "I don't want to get stuck in Malta at all, I don't want to stop creating and making work and also training and I am afraid that Malta might do that to me." Since returning home after her studies Rebecca and the Rubberbodies collective have created a work called *100*, a piece that she describes as a "visual-dance-theatre performance" which was presented during November 2010 in Malta. Although I was unable to be in Malta for the performance I observed some of the rehearsals and meetings in the developmental stages of the production. The rehearsals were scheduled for three hours, six days a week; however they often extended into four or five hour

stretches. Observing the first studio rehearsal of *100* I noticed how the two female dancers, Rebecca and Ira, were searching for a common ground as a starting point for the creative process. They explored how each other moved and in turn how they could relate to each other's moving, the commonality being their training in Western contemporary dance. Improvisation was used as a tool, with few restrictions and with Rebecca and Ira using bodies, language, objects, clothes and music as they improvised.

After several rehearsals the Rubberbodies collective had decided on the location to perform *100*, using one of the Knight's buildings at Dock No.1<sup>28</sup> in Cottonera, turning it into a temporary theatre. The dock was in an advanced state of abandonment, and according to Rebecca a "thriving pigeon shelter". I went with the group to investigate the space. The cement floor was covered in soot; the windows were covered in a thick layer of dust defusing any natural light creeping in. I did not say anything but I was wondering how they could turn this space into the temporary theatre they were envisioning. Before I left Malta the collective had been hard at work cleaning the floor, setting the space and using the pillars as the frame for the performance to take place.

A month later I watched short Youtube clips that Rebecca had sent me of the performance. As I watched I recalled how she described the performance as "a story divided by two seasons, summer and winter, where in the one hour of watching the piece the themes of love and serenity shift into passion and rage – splintered in 100 different ways". I was surprised at the spontaneity and sparkle of the performance transmitted through the short scattered video clips. The movement vocabulary that the performers were drawing from was varied, from pedestrian to pyrotechnic movements and although it was stemming from a Western contemporary dance paradigm there was a sense of questioning or perhaps even reflection on the way that each movement was performed, which even through the video frame embedded the movement in the location of the once derelict dock site. Rebecca later explained her approach to developing the movement for *100*:

The movement came from a place that Ira and I are familiar with – yes ok, the movement I do is 'contemporary' dance and it's a part of us – part of our bodies

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<sup>28</sup> The Knight's Buildings at Dock No. 1 were built in 1848 for the British Royal Navy.

and histories as dancers, but like it was trying to take that and connect it with our environment more when we were performing, so for us that meant doing research – watching people in the street, just observing our surroundings and bringing in some of this movement that we found in different contexts.

During our final conversations in Malta, Rebecca shared how she had also begun to explore teaching. She explained that this was not something that she had intended pursuing when returning to Malta, but she found that she needed to teach in order to make an income to support her creative work with Rubberbodies. She spoke of how she felt that she needed to have further teaching experiences to feel confident as a teacher:

I'm just winging it. I don't really feel that confident teaching, but I'm seeing what happens in the class, modifying things that don't work, keeping the things that did and thinking about why they might have worked – exploring really. Although my work is really based on release-based improvisation I want to explore lots of movement possibilities.

Through this self-reflection of her teaching Rebecca explained how she felt conscious of what she was teaching:

I think it's important to teach people about their identity through dance, about how they can express themselves and their culture, not hiding that behind some dance technique... Even though they are just doing dance for fun I'm aware about what I'm teaching them, I want to teach creativity over technical things, to explore and have fun. For me that's my responsibility, not to pass on how to stand in parallel or you know, a first position perfectly.

Rebecca also expressed a sense of responsibility to become involved in as many dance related activities as possible in her home environment, and to “make something happen” within the dance community in Malta:

I'm not sure about being back in Malta because in my head I don't want to stay for too long... I feel that nothing ever changes – you go back and the dance is always the same, so I feel that I have to do something, and that it's sort of urgent. So by being back in Malta my fear is not being able to develop as a dancer or artist in the same way as if I was in England or Europe or something where things are happening. Also, I feel like in order to make something happen I have to stay there for a long time and right now I'm not sure that I'm ready to do that because I want to get more experiences. I still feel like I don't know anything and I still want to learn, I still want to learn more and more. And I feel I need to do it with someone else, I can't create this change that I want to see happen for dance in Malta by myself.

Rebecca attended a six-week summer programme at Impulztanz in 2011, and shared that she felt engaging with new dance learning experiences might assist her to develop further dance opportunities in Europe or collaborative working relationships with other artists. She explained how “these experiences will help me find out more about my own work. I need to keep options open, I can’t say for sure how long I’ll stay in Malta, I wouldn’t like to think I would be here forever”.

#### 4.7 Noora Baker, Ramallah



Image 7. Noora Baker

Ramallah was the last city I visited during my fieldwork for this research. Despite spending much of my time in the region based in Amman, less than an hour away from the Occupied West Bank, the logistics of being able to visit a location so rigidly controlled by Israeli regulations meant that I was only going to be able to visit once during my year of gathering research. It could have been the stories I had heard from my supervisor who had lived there for a number of years, or perhaps the idea of venturing into a location that has an almost mythological history, but I was eager, excited and nervous to cross the King Hussein Bridge into the Occupied West Bank. Arriving at the Inbound Tourist Hall into the Occupied West Bank I was greeted nonchalantly by a teenage girl who was working on passport control, dressed in an oversized Israeli army uniform. I noticed that the paper in front of her had doodles of flowers and hearts and that her fingernails were painted bright pink. She didn't ask me why I was visiting; she barely looked at me. Instead, she just looked at my passport and said, "New Zealand – I really

want to visit one day.” While she scrawled on some small pocket-sized documents she told me how she was a fan of New Zealand’s landscape. She then stamped several papers and my passport, handed it back to me and wished me a pleasant visit. I tucked my passport away and noticed that she returned to her doodling of hearts and flowers before the next passport arrived on her counter.

There were several dancers I hoped to interview in Ramallah, and Noora and I had already been in touch arranging the details of some of these meetings. I had met Noora previously, in Amsterdam at the 2009 *Dancing on the Edge Festival*, when she was dancing in a collaborative work called *Waiting Forbidden*. We chatted briefly between various performances and after some of the informal evening debates and presentations, but it was watching Noora perform in *Waiting Forbidden* that really caught my attention. This performance was about being Palestinian and being of Palestinian descent and it was intending to investigate and question themes of displacement, fear, and resistance, issues I was intrigued to know much more about.

Noora had invited me to meet with her at the Popular Arts Centre in Al-Bireh, just a few minutes’ walk down a winding hill from where I was staying. I arrived a little early and took some time to absorb the mural on the wall of the hallway and up the staircase. The large colourful images of children and adults dancing and running beneath a crisp blue sky captivated me; some in the painting are wearing keffiyeh and there are Palestinian flags flying in the painted breeze. I followed the painting up the stairs. Noora warmly welcomed me into her office and introduced me to the many people that came in and out during the first interview we had together. The animated and excited squeals of children arriving for their dance classes in the early afternoon filled the reception area and the muezzin making the call to prayer rippled through the building from the mosque across the street as Noora and I talked. Between our interviews I would watch some of the children’s dance classes, where they were learning to stamp their feet rhythmically and count six stamps to the left, six stamps to the right.

Noora explained that she had started dance in classes just like the ones I spent my afternoons observing:

I was seven years old when I started dancing [...] I was very active always moving



and dancing, so my parents thought it would be good for me to come and dance. It was the beginning of the First Intifada,<sup>29</sup> and my parents were very afraid for me – there was nothing for kids to do [...] the schools were closed, so they were concerned about my education [...] Then they heard about this group called El-Funoun and my cousin was coming here. At this time it was only for boys – in 1986 – and in 1987 they let girls join, and I was one of them... I entered the *Bara'em*,<sup>30</sup> the young group. I was very shy, I wanted to be at the back but I was always very short, so I always got pushed forward towards the front.

Noora recalled how she enjoyed the experience of learning and performing dance as a child; however, “becoming a dancer” was not something she considered seriously until much later in life. Noora explained, “It was in my unconscious, it was not like I said to my parents, ‘I want to be a dancer’ – there was no such thing.” Noora’s experiences of dance were often intersected with recollections of trainers being arrested, memories of travel bans, or simply the words ‘occupation’ or ‘prison’. I felt that Noora never particularly dwelled on any of these experiences but rather they made up the fabric of her life in Palestine. However, there was one story that she shared with me during the first interview we did together that left an impression on me, and was an experience that perhaps informed Noora’s future dance activities and practices:

When I was nine years old it was my first performance. We didn’t have any costumes, but we had t-shirts with the image of Ghassan Kanafani,<sup>31</sup> a Palestinian writer [...] It was banned by Israel at that time to dance and still my parents kept me in this group. Often the dancers would be arrested and the audience would be too – by the Israelis.

This performance was in Jerusalem in Al Hakawati Theatre. I remember that day very clearly. I was supposed to go on stage and I was very excited, but also at the same time very afraid to go on stage in front of an audience. But before we got on stage the Israeli army came and raided the place. I remember Khalid, my teacher, he literally held us all, he grabbed the kids – as many as he could – and threw us in this very small room, to protect us from what was happening. In the very tiny room there was a small window, and I remember my sister opening it and I looked out. I saw the soldiers hitting my mother, and then my sister, and then my father, and then my other sister and then taking them away. Then a soldier doing this must have seen us, so he threw a tear gas bomb at the window so we had to close the window. I then just remember crying.

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<sup>29</sup> The First Intifada took place from 1987-1993.

<sup>30</sup> *Bara'em* means ‘buds’ in Arabic.

<sup>31</sup> Ghassan Kanafani was a Palestinian writer and leading member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was assassinated by car bomb in Beirut in 1972.

My whole family was arrested then, along with many other people. After that experience I wasn't afraid of dancing – even though you'd think after something like that happening you'd say, "I never want to dance again" – but no, it was not an option. I was afraid of the Israelis but that was it. All I had in mind then was that I want to dance.

Not long after this I went on stage again. The moment I was on stage I didn't feel shy, I didn't feel afraid, it was just like it was my own world. It was a place where I could be happy. It was very clear to me that this was where I wanted to be. But it was in my unconscious, it was not like I said to my parents, "I want to be a dancer" – there was no such thing – it was just that I want to be here and I look forward to it. And it wasn't about the audience, because I still remember from that first performance it wasn't about the audience. There were lights in my eyes and it was black, but it felt good – it wasn't about a Palestinian cause or anything. Slowly I realized that this was my place, that this is what I wanted to do.

Over time Noora moved from the Bara'em group to the El-Funoun Palestinian Popular Dance Troupe where she danced and later began choreographing. Noora explained that her initial experiences of dance from abroad were at The Popular Art Centre, where teachers from Europe often visited for short residencies. Noora explained her first experiences of training from abroad and going abroad to train in the following narrative:

My first time with training from abroad was here actually – El-Funoun used to bring some trainers from abroad and we would train with them. I had more opportunities later to train abroad... By the time I was about 14 El-Funoun started to travel – the travel bans on members and restrictions started to loosen up in particular areas, not so many dancers were being put in prison. The prison itself became within Palestine, within the country itself. It is a different reality – we can travel but I cannot go to Gaza or I cannot go to Nablus at times – it's a worse situation, but it's a different prison. It became in a way easier for me to travel abroad than travel within Palestine which is quite an odd situation.

Noora shared how she felt that dancing during her teenage years brought particular challenges. She explained that while some members of her immediate family were supportive of her dancing she felt some pressure from her father and extended family to stop performing:

I had a lot of people telling me that I shouldn't dance – my family as well, not my mother, but my father at many points and my aunts and my uncles. When I hit puberty they were like, "Ok, that's enough." They would ask me, "Why are you still dancing?" [...] For my father, it wasn't about being conservative, he really thinks that I need to build a future and this is not the way to do it, so it was not because he thought it was promiscuous or anything [...] I come from a very liberal family; however, my extended family, it was more because of the conservative

views, so it was like why is she still on stage – get her off – and there was a lot of pressure for me not to dance. But I think with that, it was like when the Israelis came to the first performance I did – it made me want to stay as a performer even more.

Noora spoke of how the group she was dancing with, El-Funoun, played an instrumental role in negotiating the dance practices and performances with her family:

I think that El-Funoun dealt with it [dancing through the teenage years] beautifully. They visited my family many times, speaking with them about how important it is that I am there [in the group]. I had curfews from my parents, and I understand why, because society here does not accept a girl coming home at 12 at night when they are 14... It doesn't fit, and my parents didn't accept it. They were like, "I can't have you coming home at one o'clock in the morning on a school night, what are people going to say?" – I understand it. It was like, "Ok maybe I shouldn't challenge them anymore and get a boyfriend and go to parties – all I have to fight for is El-Funoun."

During her late teens Noora began to travel frequently to England, America and France, taking part in classes, workshops and residencies for varying lengths of time. These experiences of engaging with dance in different cultural contexts lead Noora to reflect on her own motivations for dancing. She explained this in the following narrative:

I went to different training and workshops abroad, and I realized that many of the young dancers that I interacted with and met abroad, when I was maybe 16 or 17, had this very bitter experience with dance because they were technically trained very well, and they wanted to make it, to become dancers, but they didn't really know why. I realized that it [dance] was always related to something so beautiful and so pure. It was never something forced on me, not as a technique or anything, never, it was always free will and whether that was good or bad I don't know.

Engaging with these different cultural contexts for learning and performing dance Noora shared how she began to question the role of 'technique' and how, as someone who was not schooled in Western technical dance training, she fitted in when dancing abroad:

Maybe it's just a different approach... I started thinking about the content and the actual presentation of dances – you start seeing other choreographers from abroad and I sometimes think, well they're restricted in terms of technique, in terms of the discipline of the technique, but at the same time it gives them more freedom with bodies on stage, but then at the same time on the content level how much do you have when you have all this freedom.

Noora also spoke of how she has always been drawn to choreography, and how the use of dabke elements influences her work:

As long as I remember I've wanted to change people's choreographies. I just want to do my own work, and because of this I think choreography was often my focus when training abroad. So then I started exploring more and I started trying things out – you have these ideas of what you want to do, and the past maybe five years here [Ramallah] I've been very interested in women's movement here and how women dancers move here – in El-Funoun – and you know we move, the bodies move – because in dabke the women can do her movement plus the men's movement so to me they are very well rounded in terms of really using their upper bodies, their eyes, their hair, all their senses, and it's interesting. I feel sometimes that I want to push that a bit forward and see where I can push that movement, and I've been trying to do that – but to make choreography about this outside of a Palestinian context might just seem confusing or conflicting.

Noora expressed how she felt that her practice as a choreographer had developed through her experiences abroad, which in turn fostered her creative work within El-Funoun. Noora explained that her experiences abroad enabled her to view how various environments and locations might influence her choreographic practices:

When I started choreographing for El-Funoun I started questioning: “Do restrictions I have here [in Palestine] give me more freedom? More ways to think, or doesn't it? Because I've worked within boundaries here all my life and this is what creates my work and inspires me, do I want to get rid of them or do I want to keep them?”

Noora also expressed how what she needed and wanted from dance education abroad changed over time:

I would go for the summer to London... I applied for residencies in Paris and I found a lot of valuable experiences doing this... but over time my interests changed. Like, when I was 17 all I wanted to do was take classes and dance, dance, dance, and then at age 21 I wanted to do residencies, that sort of thing... At age 26 I wanted have my own experiences and work with other people.

Noora's work with El-Funoun, as a dancer and the public relations manager of the group, as well as her involvement with independent productions, has enabled her to travel abroad on a regular basis to gather diverse dance experiences and training. When I met Noora in October 2010 she had recently returned from performing with El-Funoun as part of the Shanghai Expo 2010. Meeting with Noora and some of the other El-Funoun dancers at a local café one evening, they

recounted their journeys to and from Shanghai for me. They explained that while they had enjoyed the experience of visiting China, they were frustrated with the difficulties of travelling on Palestinian travel documents. One of the men in the group told me that it had taken him three extra days to get home to Ramallah, explaining that he was stranded in airport transit lounges and waiting rooms as visa issues were dealt with. Noora rolled her eyes and chuckled, saying that this is what made staying abroad a very appealing option. Although this was said as a joke, I felt that there was some honesty within her statement. Returning home between these frequent experiences abroad raised issues for Noora about negotiating the term ‘contemporary dance’ in her home context. She also spoke of how, having experienced dance in Western cultural contexts, she would like to resist applying Western modes of dance teaching and learning in her home environment. She explained this in the following statement:

I feel that over many years we’ve been a bit trapped in that because for years we’ve been like we don’t want to be like the West and it has been an issue... so sometimes I just drop it. I don’t care what you want to call it, if it’s strong and expresses what I want to express, they can call it folklore, they can call it contemporary, I don’t care... The contemporary work allows the space to express and there are less boundaries, so dabke is a tool and it doesn’t negate the idea of having contemporary dance, but it [dabke] is also a tool and can be put in a contemporary setting [...] There are so many people, especially in the Arab world, working with the development of the body in different ways, working with a body that is not trained technically, and how the body can tell a story and this is very interesting for me. Like, if I want to work with dancers, I want to work with dancers in Palestine and there are not technically trained dancers here, and if I want to work within the Arab world there are many dancers who are technically trained in the wrong way, and this is the worst – I would not want to work with them. So I’m really interested in working with people who do not have a dance background, or working with dancers like in El-Funoun who have a dance background, but not in the sense of being Western dancers.

The resistance towards being “like the West” was an issue raised when discussing the developments of dance in her home environment:

We need to work more technically on the body and not necessarily in the European sense. I don’t know, maybe we need to research it more, but if we want to work with bodies we need them to be strong; we need to have strong physical bodies, to have the maximum out of them... So we need to develop stronger bodies that we can really reach the maximum.

While learning from her experiences abroad Noora explained that she is sometimes reluctant to

work with artists who may be drawing on colonial ideals and promoting Eurocentric dance paradigms. She explained this in the following statement:

I choose not to work with some Europeans artists, not because they are European, but because I don't like their ideas and they have very colonial views – for instance. If you like it then fine, but I'm working, doing my work and if you like it and are interested then you are welcome to come... I want people who are interested in my work to come, and not in just my history or interested in changing my future. I don't want people coming in and saying what's best for me, and this is very much happening. People dictate mostly – European minds, dictating what they want – and I don't want to generalize and it's usually not with artists... but it's not black and white... So, I've done some co-productions [that are cross-cultural and internationally collaborative] and people have come and said, "How can you let this happen, how can you let them [foreign artists, groups and organizations] do this here, to us?" This makes me cautious now, cautious not to let colonial perspectives override the culture here, the strong identity we have as dancers.

As someone who is actively involved in the dance community in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Noora shared how she feels certain social responsibilities in her home environment and how training abroad might have challenged her artistic directions in her home environment:

There is a lot of responsibility, in this tiny little country [Occupied Palestine] [...] I feel this huge responsibility and then I leave and it's like a weight has been lifted – I can go get drunk and have fun. But the more you see [abroad] the more you question your work at home. It's very easy to be just in this bubble here, and I have been for many years, in my own bubble thinking that I am the world's greatest – at times. Probably between the ages of 19 and 23 I was in that box, that bubble – where you think you own the world, and you're a dancer and everyone loves you, but then what? The bubble bursts and you're quickly back to reality. I've learnt that it's good to go abroad – because you have to come back and give. My belief is that if people give back to their community the community itself will be more involved.

I asked Noora if the next generation of dancers from the Occupied Palestinian Territories might engage with dance training abroad, and if so, does she feel that they will return? And if they return how does she think they will approach dance? She cites specific issues that she feels dancers will face, particularly when returning to their home environment:

It is very difficult because... say they go abroad, when they come back will there be this opportunity for them to continue the work they were doing abroad here? Will we be able to contain them? There are no jobs here. Things need to come together, so when they come back [to Palestine] they can not only depend on El-Funoun [...] I want to be ready for when a young dancer comes to me and says, "I

want to go and study abroad,” and I will be able to say, “Go” – with confidence... We need to create opportunities for young people to have the chance to go and study dance professionally and have their own experiences and come home to opportunities.

Noora explained in detail that she perceives her self-identity to be something inherently informed by both her experiences abroad and in Palestine. She shared that she feels this comes through within her artistic work, regardless of the location in which she is performing:

The word ‘identity’ for me is tricky... because it can also trap you, in one place or another. I think me being on stage, being Noora, the way I look, I carry my history and identity in my flesh and blood. This doesn’t go away when I’m in a different location, I don’t have to say anything more. If I’m there people will ask why – it’s presence... and it could be that in my work, yes, it might reflect who I am and my reality, and it could carry, it will probably carry something political or social because this is who I am.

An example of Noora carrying her history and identity through into her creative work appeared evident to me when I watched her perform in *Waiting Forbidden*, a co-production between El-Funoun, Le Grand Cru, Al-Balad Theatre and the Dancing on the Edge Festival (2009). The small black-box theatre was full to overflowing, and as the lights dimmed the hum of the audience became a still silence. The relationship to oppression, the motion of time and the dancers’ personal stories were focal points of the work, layered through a rhythmic dabke pulse and movement stemming from what seemed to be a common vocabulary that morphed into frenetic flurries of movement, skimming the floor, the walls and each other. At one point Noora stood motionless under a shadowy light filtering across the stage. I felt that watching her perform, her identity appeared to be clear, as a woman, as a dancer, and as a Palestinian.

## **Chapter 5: Dancing away: Why did they choose to go where they went?**

The seven women who shared their narratives for this research trained in contemporary dance in Western cultural contexts for varying lengths of time, and in diverse locations such as Paris, New York, Frankfurt, Cannes, Dartington and London. Why did they choose to train in particular institutions and in particular cities, and what motivated them to pursue studies outside of their home environments in the first instance? Many scholars have posed this question when investigating motivations for students pursuing studies of a variety of disciplines outside of their home environment (Altbach, 2004a, 2004b; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Chen, 2007). Philip Altbach and Jane Knight (2007) describe students wanting to engage with ‘high quality’ tertiary education offered in the West. Alternatively, Altbach (2004a) suggests that international students are ‘pulled’ to study abroad with the “aim of staying in the host country to work and make a career” (Altbach, 2004a, p.4). Altbach also describes how international students are lured to study in Western cultural contexts by the opportunity to live in “the globally disseminated” (2004a, p.4) cultures of Western countries. The motivations proposed by Altbach might be of relevance for some international students; however, the motivations shared by the dance practitioners who provided their narratives for this research were somewhat contrasting, as the following sections of this chapter will illustrate.

This chapter discusses key themes identified regarding why and where Dalia, Meryem, Nada, Mey, Nesrine, Rebecca and Noora chose to train abroad. Firstly, the influence of artistic ideals on their decisions is investigated, and is followed by an exploration of the theme of cultural hegemony in relation to these ideals. Secondly, their desires for particular learning situations and qualifications are considered, accompanied by a discussion of the native intellectual (Fanon, 1952/1967a, 1961/1967b) in relation to these experiences. Thirdly, the influence of non-artistic ideals (finances, travel restrictions, colonization, foreign cultural hegemony, conflict, political tension, cultural familiarity, chance opportunity) on the women’s decisions to train abroad is presented. Finally, notions of place and home are explored in relation to the influences and motivations to train abroad.



## 5.1 Artistic ideals

Some of the women had particular artistic ideals they were searching for. These ideals were often Western contemporary dance practices, based on modern dance techniques and styles from the United States of America, such as those developed by Alvin Ailey or Martha Graham, or the work of choreographers such as Twyla Tharp or Yvonne Rainer. Alternatively, they were seeking European aesthetics based on the work of choreographers such as Mats Ek or Pina Bausch. Some motivations to train in certain locations were also based on artistic ideals informed by dance classes and performances the seven dance practitioners took part in prior to training abroad, the influence of particular dance educators or watching dance videos of a specific dance company or style of dance.

Mey explained how until she left Syria to study in Germany she had only studied classical ballet. However, she made the decision to study contemporary dance when she went abroad “because I saw something here [in Damascus] about Martha Graham, Mats Ek and Alvin Ailey and I thought, ‘Oh great this is contemporary dance!’” Dalia had a similar experience of encountering practices of contemporary dance in her home environment that in turn led her to seek out such practices abroad, sharing that she “found a load of videos on dance, post-modern dance, of Twyla Tharp and Yvonne Rainer”. She expanded on this by explaining, “I was so impressed and I knew that I wanted to dance like that.” Nada also explained how through watching dance videos she felt drawn to pursue the particular aesthetics that she observed. She shared, “I saw a movie in the Russian Cultural Centre in Beirut – it was *Romeo and Juliet* with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev [...] I decided then that I really wanted to be a dancer [...] I realized that I had to travel; and maybe it was because of seeing that video.” However, Nada later explained that she felt that “ballet seemed like this far away thing that only really existed outside of Lebanon.” It could also be understood that the sense of isolation illustrated within Nada’s comment contributed in some way to her feeling the need to train outside of her home environment.

Prior to leaving their home environment many of the women were partaking in dance education asserting European dance paradigms. For some of the dance practitioners the influence of a

dance teacher who taught a particular artistic ideal and/or who had connections to dance in Western cultural contexts, contributed to the location they then went to for further dance education. In Nada's experience the influence of her dance teacher's connections led her to leave Beirut to continue her dance training in Cannes. Nada explained that her ballet teacher "had a lot of influence at Rosa's [Hightower School] – that she had some connections to it, because one day she told me that she got me a place at this school". Meryem also shared how a dance teacher visiting Casablanca from France provided the connections and encouragement for her to pursue her dance studies in Paris. Meryem explained, "This teacher for me was very important, she is the one who really told me that a dance career is possible." Nesrine cited several occasions where foreign dance educators influenced her dance practices and directions, explaining; "it was with a teacher who had trained in France I discovered this contemporary dance". Nesrine shared another experience, revealing that a meeting with a visiting dance educator from France influenced her decision to continue her dance education in Paris. She stated, "This teacher, she was French [...] she saw my performance and was very encouraging of my work and ideas." Nesrine went on to explain how she felt that this support led her to enrol in a doctorate in dance studies at Sorbonne University, Paris.

From the experiences shared by Nada, Meryem and Nesrine it appears that international interventions, where Western dance practices were learnt from a foreign dance teacher or were observed through videos provided by foreign cultural centres, had influence over their decisions to train abroad. Such influences raise notions of cultural hegemony in relation to international education in dance. The experiences shared by Nada, Meryem and Nesrine illuminate how these cultural interventions might motivate dance students to seek dance education outside of their home environments. It could also be asked, are these interventions only perpetuating processes of colonization? Within the review of the literature, it was discussed how explicit cultural agendas do not appear to be predominantly directing contemporary international tertiary education (see 2.1.1), and may not be explicit motivating factors for dance institutions to recruit international dance students. However, through some of the individuals' narratives subtler cultural agendas and processes of colonization are emerging. This is specifically through exchanges between Western dance educators and institutions and non-Western dance students,

positioning Western dance practitioners as teachers and non-Western dance practitioners as learners, potentially exacerbating existing cultural hegemony (Martin, 2011). As the world becomes more interconnected through processes of globalization, with international dance education exchanges occurring frequently, a repercussion might be that these encounters motivate dance students to look abroad for dance opportunities before looking within their home environments, or that these experiences encourage dancers to feel that receiving dance education abroad is the most viable option when pursuing a dance career or to study contemporary dance.

In some of the dance practitioners' narratives, concerns over cultural hegemony were not overtly stated in their articulations of motivations for training abroad. However, within Noora's reflections on why and where she trained abroad, apprehensions over colonization were raised, rippling through her narrative. Noora shared, "I choose not to work with some European artists, not because they are European, but because I don't like their ideas and they have very colonial views." From this statement it can be seen that considerations of cultural hegemony and colonization influenced Noora's choices about where to train. Noora's awareness of these cultural influences could be a result of her home environment (the Occupied Palestinian Territories) being under colonial occupation, therefore possibly generating a greater sense of resistance towards cultural hegemony. More implicit concerns of foreign cultural hegemony could be viewed in Meryem's reflections on her dance experiences prior to training abroad. Meryem shared how prior to training abroad she felt resistance towards a particular mode of instruction she experienced in Casablanca, a pedagogical approach that she considered to be based on Western pedagogical principles. She explained,

I had a Russian teacher, but she was really rigid and strict. It was all about the individual dancer and creating a perfect aesthetic – a European body not a Moroccan one. I got frustrated with this way of thinking about dance.

This experience in turn led her to pursue "a dance programme that was more open" and a dance style and practice where she was "artistically free, where I could decide the aesthetics I wanted to create and not have them forced upon me".

## 5.2 Particular learning experiences and qualifications

Some of the women spoke of searching for particular learning situations or qualifications when choosing where and when to train abroad. Some individuals sought specific learning environments or dance programmes. For example, some were interested in particular short-term dance learning experiences such as dance workshops, summer programmes or residencies. Others were seeking learning experiences that were longer, spanning two, three or four years, such as university dance programmes offering liberal arts models of education or conservatoire dance programmes. Experiences shared by Nesrine, Meryem, Rebecca and Noora offer specific examples. Particular dance workshops or residencies were expressed by Noora as motivation to train in particular locations and in particular types of dance programmes in Western cultural contexts. Noora spoke of how she sought out particular dance learning and creating experiences abroad that were short yet frequent. She also shared how over time what she needed and wanted from dance education abroad changed. She explained,

Over time my interests changed. Like, when I was 17 all I wanted to do was take classes [...] and then at age 21 I wanted to do residencies [...] At age 26 I wanted have my own experiences and work with other people.

Some of the dance practitioners were motivated to pursue dance education abroad to meet new people and to have new dance experiences. The desire to “work with other people”, previously articulated by Noora, was often an additional motivation for pursuing dance training abroad when the participant was feeling alienated at home. Nada explained her decision to pursue dance studies in France was partly because she felt alienated and isolated as a dancer in Lebanon. She shared, “I was frustrated with the small community of dance people.” Similarly, Mey expressed how dancing in relative isolation with few dancing peers acted as a form of motivation for her to pursue training abroad. She explained that “it’s hard when you are in a class with maybe one or two other people and you want to learn new things and improve. I think that’s what sort of planted the seed for me to go abroad.” This experience of isolation within a learning environment has been explored within the writings of scholars such as Alfred Rovai and Mervyn Wighting (2005) and Shane Dawson (2006); however, the focus has often been on particular learning situations such as distance education or on-line learning rather than on learning contexts where few individuals are participating in the discipline.

Receiving specific qualifications from training institutions was an issue that appeared to influence some of the dance practitioners' choices about where to train. The desire for a dance programme that provided a degree or diploma was an important factor for Meryem, Rebecca and Nesrine. Rebecca explained the importance gaining a degree had in her decision to train at Dartington College of Arts: "I knew that I wanted one [a dance institution] that had a degree – I think here in Malta we are a bit conditioned to think that a degree is really important." Meryem shared that selecting an institution that provided a qualification was influential in her decision of where to train, explaining that the school she went to "was like at a university. I chose it because [...] I had to get a diploma, this was important to my family."

The expectations of family, as seen in Meryem's narrative, appeared to be influential within some of the women's experiences. As Rebecca explained, her father "had certain expectations of the type of dance school I would attend and the qualification I would be getting". Rebecca's comment relates to the experience previously shared within the literature review by Xiong Xi (2009), who explained that the decision for her to travel to New Zealand to further her dance education was made by her father (see 2.1.2). The role parents play within educational choices and academic achievement has been explored within a variety of scholars' work (see for example: Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Khattab, 2003; Raty, 2006). Nonetheless, within some of the dance practitioners' experiences it appeared that it was not *only* parents and immediate family members who sought to influence the decision that they made about where to train, but friends and extended family members also became involved. This experience could be seen within Dalia's narrative where she recounted leaving to train in New York and how she felt her immediate family as well as extended family was trying to influence the choices she made. Dalia recalled how prior to leaving for New York various family members were offering their opinions about why she should stay in Cairo. Dalia also explained how friends were trying to influence her decisions about where to train and the relevance of pursuing further dance education. She explained that "a friend said to me, 'Why don't you just get a video and learn the movements that you want to know?'" The feeling that dance was viewed by family and friends as a 'frivolous' activity and not something worth pursuing, was expressed within some of the

women's narratives. This could be understood as something that contributed towards feelings of alienation or isolation in their home environment thus motivating them to seek dance encounters abroad.

From investigating the seven women's narratives and the feelings of alienation that were expressed by some, some of the individuals could be considered to be "native intellectuals" (Fanon, 1961/1967b, p.35) even prior to receiving their dance education abroad. For example, Dalia received a significant amount of her early schooling in England, something that appeared to influence her attitudes and ideas when she returned to Cairo as a teenager. She explained, "I came back to Cairo as a teenager and was completely out of it – I was from another planet and couldn't understand why everyone was so backwards." This experience of alienation possibly motivated her to then pursue dance education within a Western cultural context, a context that she explained she felt comfortable with. For others, developing as a native intellectual could have emerged from studying foreign dance methods and knowledge in their home environment before training abroad, as all seven women had experiences of 'Western' dance education before leaving their home environments to train abroad.

While Fanon (1961/1967b) claims that the native intellectual can become disengaged and alienated within their community on returning after time abroad, it seems that prior to leaving their home environments some of the women felt alienated from aspects of their home environment. This raises the idea of how, if they already had established feelings of isolation before leaving to train abroad, it is perhaps inevitable that this isolation is only exacerbated after time spent in a different cultural context. Conversely, some of the other women's experiences illustrate how they seemed to be conscious of the native intellectual concept and purposefully sought to avoid this occurring to them within their international education in dance experiences. As Noora explains, "I don't want people coming in and saying what's best for me, and this is very much happening. People dictate mostly – European minds, dictating what they want." From Noora's statement it could be understood that a desire to learn foreign knowledge might not be the only influence on why and when to receive dance education in a different cultural context. What other influences are there, and how do they influence the dance practitioners' choices

about where and when to train abroad?

### **5.3 Not only artistic and learning ideals**

Perhaps one of the most salient issues to emerge from the seven dance practitioners' narratives of why they chose to train in particular locations and institutions is that they did not always make decisions about where to train based *solely* on artistic and/or learning ideals. The women were influenced by concerns or issues related to travel restrictions, conflict or political tensions in their home environments, finances or familiarity with a particular language and/or cultural environment.

#### *5.3.1 Conflict, political tension and travel restrictions*

Conflict or political tensions influenced some of the individuals' decisions to train in Western cultural contexts. Nada explained how the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) made regular dance education difficult; "we could not have very regular training [...] you'd just start learning something – and then it would stop because of the War". It could be viewed that this conflict was a motivating factor for Nada to travel to France to further her dance studies. She went on to share that it was again the Lebanese Civil War that influenced her decision to remain in France for several years after completing her training.

For some of the other women the travel restrictions they faced – often in place because of military occupation in their home environment – resulted in the experience of feeling that they could travel abroad for dance education opportunities with more ease than if they were to travel locally within their home environment. Noora explained how as a dancer living in the Occupied West Bank she has been (and still is) severely restricted in her ability to travel, not only within the Occupied West Bank, but also within Israel and Gaza. Despite locations in Israel such as Tel Aviv, Jaffa and Jerusalem having contemporary dance institutions<sup>32</sup> that are teaching various practices of Western contemporary dance, it could be considered nearly impossible for Noora to

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<sup>32</sup> Well known contemporary dance institutions in Israel include Batsheva Dance Company and School, Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre and Kibbutz Dance Company and School.

participate in these programmes due to travel restrictions.<sup>33</sup> Also, for a Palestinian living under Israeli occupation, it may be viewed that it would be highly unlikely that there would be a desire to participate in a programme that has been established by and for a population perceived as colonial (Kaschl, 2003; Rowe, 2010). This relationship further highlights the role of dance in the ongoing dynamics of cultural hegemony.

### 5.3.2 *Finances*

For Rebecca, Mey and Meryem the issue of finances partly determined where they would train abroad. Rebecca explained how because of Malta's acceptance into the European Union (EU),<sup>34</sup> training in other EU countries was a financially viable option. Therefore, Rebecca was directed towards studying in EU locations rather than locations (such as the United States of America) where she would be paying higher fees as an international student. Rebecca felt that without such financial assistance she would not have been able to pursue her studies abroad, expressing, "I don't know how I would have gone otherwise."

Receiving a scholarship from the Goethe Institute led Mey to train for three years in Frankfurt. As discussed previously, Mey explained how her stimulus to seek out dance training in a Western cultural context was fuelled in part by feeling alone in her dance training in Damascus, with few dancing peers. Nevertheless, it was receiving the Goethe Institute scholarship that seemed to be vital to her being able to engage in studies abroad. She said that "it would have been too much money, there was no way that my family could afford it". She also explained that she "wasn't that keen on Germany, but I couldn't turn down the scholarship". Similarly, Meryem stated that in her situation, receiving a scholarship was the only way that she was able to train abroad. She explained that "this was the only way I could go [...] the teacher helped me fill in the [scholarship] form and she sent it for me".

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<sup>33</sup> Israel enforces restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement within the Occupied West Bank, Gaza and into Israel. There are frequent closures of checkpoints and crossings from the Occupied West Bank to Israel. During closures, all travels permits issued to residents of the Occupied West Bank and Gaza to travel into Israel are frozen, whether they are for purposes of work, trade or medical treatment (Baltzer, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Malta joined the European Union on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2004.



### *5.3.3 Foreign cultural organizations*

Just as the encounters with foreign dance teachers and artistic practices affected some of the dance practitioners' choices about where and why to train abroad, foreign funding, cultural centres and embassies also appeared to influence some individuals' experiences. For example, Mey, Nada and Dalia all highlight such influences within their narratives. Initially when I heard people speaking about foreign cultural centres I did not fully comprehend their role or influence within the arts in the region. It was only after talking to many more people in various dance and artistic communities and visiting some of the foreign cultural centres that I began to comprehend that these centres offer both constructive and unconstructive experiences and opportunities for dancers, teachers and choreographers.

One view could be that cultural centres provide a sanctuary of sorts for dance practitioners in the region and offer them the financial support, connections to institutions and exposure to dance materials (such as music, DVDs, magazines and books) that they often seek. Alternatively, it could be viewed that the support foreign cultural centres provide perpetuates colonial relations and cultural hegemony, where local dancers are actively engaging in dance exchanges and projects that may offer more benefits to foreign institutions rather than fostering and developing local dance communities to be independent, sustainable and self-directed (Rowe, 2008).

Scholarship programmes, such as the Goethe Institute Scholarship Programme continue to provoke questions and highlight issues of such cultural exchanges. Observing the predominance of these organizations and their influence on dancers' decisions to study abroad opened up further lines of enquiry for future studies: are these institutes aware of their potentially hegemonic impact? If so, how do they navigate through or around this issue?

### *5.3.4 Cultural familiarity*

There was also frequent reference by some of the women to the familiarity of a particular language and/or cultural environment that influenced their decisions about where to train abroad. Nada explained a reason why she chose to go to France was, "I speak French and I felt that I was a bit familiar with France. I knew people there and I'd been there before [...] There was no way I would have gone to study in an English [speaking] country." Similarly, Nesrine also felt that

language and cultural familiarity contributed to her decision of going to Paris, explaining that,

I speak Arabic and French so if I was going to go somewhere outside the Arab world to study it would be France; it is a familiar language, a familiar place for me [...] I have been there many times before.

In Meryem and Rebecca's experience it was also the perception that studying in a particular Western cultural context was a 'common' or 'normal' choice for those from their home environment who wished to pursue higher education. Meryem explained that "to go to France, it was not a strange choice – many people from Morocco go there to study for their university". Rebecca extended this specifically to dance, while also citing the familiarity with the language as something that was potentially influential in her decision to train in England. She stated, "I think I searched mainly for schools in England probably because there are other Maltese dancers who have studied abroad in England and [...] it is easier for them with the language." Are these relationships between countries (for example Morocco and France, Lebanon and France, Malta and England) perhaps hangovers from colonial pasts, with the ability to influence decisions about where to train abroad? Did the women select these locations due to their wider acceptance at home, or are they participating in a cultural habit of perceiving the 'West' as a knowledge base for *all* knowledge? None of the dance practitioners spoke of seeking extensive dance training in India, Africa or East Asia for example. From investigating various artistic and non-artistic motivations for training abroad, and the diverse learning experiences and qualifications the women were seeking, it could also be asked, were their choices about where to train influenced by notions of place and home?

#### **5.4 Leaving home, arriving home, where is home?**

Exploring the ideas surrounding 'sense of place' (Heidegger, 1973) in relation to the dance practitioners' narratives it can be viewed that some felt 'at home' in certain ways in their home environment. It could also be seen that in other ways some felt disassociated from a sense of place in their home locations. Some of the women's narratives revealed that they were leaving a home environment where they felt somewhat alienated or excluded and this experience acted as a motivating factor for them to seek dance education abroad. For example, Mey's experience suggests that she felt alienated in her home environment prior to leaving to train abroad and that

she felt some resistance in her home environment towards pursuing dance practices:

Almost all of my friends – not almost, *all* of them, they stopped [dancing] [...] I felt like I was the only person who wanted to dance and no one understood why I wanted to do this [...] in this society, these are sometimes issues about women dancing – taboos and stuff.

Similarly Dalia explained that “I was different, I was a little bit strange at home”. The experiences shared by Dalia and Mey connect with ideas explored in the writings of Natalie Smolenski (2007) and Laura Chakravarty Box (2008) (see 2.3). It has been previously discussed within the review of the literature that home could be viewed as a significant type of place, one that is embedded in personal meanings (Easthope, 2004). Looking towards concepts of home, the conceptual understanding of what constitutes home has been outlined by Ann Dupuis and David Thorns (1996), where home is positioned as a location where people feel in control of their lives, a spatial location where routines are carried out and that home is a site of consistency. These conditions appear to be challenged within the experiences shared by some of the women. For example, Dalia’s narrative illuminates the feeling of the uncontrollable in her home environment, particularly in relation to her family restricting or governing her choices surrounding her dance education. Likewise, in Noora’s situation her home environment is a location where control is exerted by a foreign military, in turn resulting in some aspects of Noora’s life in her home environment not being in her control nor always consistent.

However, Dalia also shared that while feeling alienated, isolated and overly ‘governed’ in Cairo, she simultaneously felt ‘at home’ in her dance classes. Similarly Noora revealed that she “realized that this was my place [the dance class], that this is what I wanted to do”. For Dalia and Noora the place in their home environment where they felt most comfortable or ‘at home’ was in dance classes or dancing situations. Within Noora’s narrative this understanding could be viewed in her desire to seek out shorter dance learning experiences, with the intention of returning ‘home’, with ‘home’ being a place where she had a specific responsibility, in contrast to when she was ‘abroad’ and where she could “leave and it’s like a weight has been lifted”.

From some of the individuals’ narratives it appears that a sense of place and home can simultaneously exist with notions of alienation and isolation from place and home. This reiterates

that these concepts are not static; rather, they are feelings that can shift and potentially contribute to dance practitioners' decisions to receive dance education abroad. From the exploration of such ideas it could be asked, do the dance practitioners' notions of place and home shift when they are training abroad, and how are feelings of alienation, place and home dealt with when learning dance in a different cultural context?

## **5.5 Conclusion**

From the analysis and discussion of the seven women's experiences of why and when they chose to train in a Western cultural context, a multiplicity of reasons that contribute to these decisions is revealed. There was often not one singular deciding factor, but rather many reasons that overlapped in their experiences. While some of the individuals had specific artistic ideals they were searching for, others had particular qualifications or dance learning experiences they were seeking. For some, feelings of isolation or alienation influenced their decisions, for others, concerns over cultural hegemony contributed to where and when they trained abroad.

It emerged that the artistic ideals and dance learning experiences the dance practitioners were looking for were frequently influenced by learning a specific dance form, training with a particular dance teacher or through watching dance videos of a certain dance company/style that in some cases they sought to emulate. Often this involved learning or watching Western dance practices, raising concerns over the influence cultural hegemony might have on the choices dance practitioners make about where and when to further their dance education, and why they might be motivated to train in a Western cultural context. However, what is perhaps a key finding through these women's experiences is that they did not always make decisions about where to train based *solely* on artistic and learning ideals. From their experiences it appears that along with artistic and learning ideals, issues related to travel restrictions, colonization, conflict or political tensions in their home environment, as well as pragmatic issues such as finances, or a familiarity with a particular language and/or cultural environment often influenced where the dance practitioners received their training abroad. Frequently it was a combination of these issues that compounded and led a dancer in a particular direction.

## **Chapter 6: Learning abroad: Alienation and transformation**

Two key findings emerged from the dance practitioners' experiences of training in contemporary dance in Western cultural contexts. The first being the feelings of alienation that some individuals felt in their new learning environment, and the second was the variety of transformative dance experiences they expressed when recalling their dance experiences abroad. The two concepts are not mutually exclusive, and as this chapter identifies, one often contributes to the other.

The first section of this chapter examines experiences of alienation when training abroad. Feelings of culture, language and academic/study shock, cultural disorientation and alienation from peers and community that the women expressed when reflecting on training abroad are presented. Various perspectives of international students' experiences documented in the literature are explored, investigating how they might connect with dance specific experiences shared by the seven dance practitioners. The challenges and feelings of alienation the individuals raised in regard to the somatic, the choreographic and the pedagogic dance practices they experienced is then presented alongside critical discussions of these themes in relation to the literature.

The second section of this chapter investigates transformative dance experiences expressed within the dance practitioners' narratives. The term 'transformation' in relation this discussion refers to a marked shift of thought, perspective or practice, which on the most part could be considered to be positive. The women's transformative learning experiences when training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context were often through somatic practices, choreographic processes and pedagogical encounters. Through investigating examples of transformative dance encounters shared by the seven women, it can be viewed that these experiences alter understandings of dance, offering new ways of teaching, creating or performing. Provocations regarding the influence these transformative encounters might have on the artistic directions and dance practices Dalia, Meryem, Nada, Mey, Nesrine, Rebecca and Noora take when returning home will also be provided.

## **6.1 Alienation**

To varying degrees many of the dance practitioners explained how they initially felt alienated from the foreign arts education they were receiving abroad and the socio-cultural environments they were living within. Feelings of alienation, isolation and disconnection when learning dance in a Western cultural context can be seen within the experiences provided by all seven women. Frequently the challenges the individuals shared about their time spent abroad were similar to those documented within existing literature regarding the international student experience, where notions of alienation, culture, language and study/academic shock, confusion over pedagogical styles and learning expectations have been articulated (see 2.1.2). For example, Mey expressed, “I felt like I was out of place, I felt like I was from another planet,” and Nada described how she felt “really different, especially at first”. Likewise Meryem explained, “I felt so weird, like really different and could not understand what we were being taught and why”. Existing literature on the international student experience might go some way in exploring how alienation can be addressed within international education in dance (see for example: McInnes, 2001; Prescott & Hellstén, 2005; Sovic, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). While the suggestions from the literature predominantly focus on broad spheres encompassing diverse disciplines, there are some suggestions that could be taken into consideration within dance learning environments.

There have been multiple suggestions for the development of programmes and activities for international students (Klomegah, 2006; Marginson & Sawir, 2011; Mori, 2000; Sawir, Marginson, Devmert, Nyland & Ramia, 2008). Suggestions include activities such as mentor programmes, host family programmes, language services, cultural events that expose institutional communities to diverse cultures, cultural orientation, and social activities that are not isolated to the international student group, but rather are integrating this group with other student populations. It has been noted that such activities might not only be beneficial for international students, but the student body in general. Balancing support for international students as individuals with particular needs while also “explicitly promoting positive contact between different cultural groups” (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009, p.470) has been reiterated within many scholars’ assessments of support for international students. Future investigations could

explore how dance institutions are facilitating intercultural experiences, and what measures they have in place to support international students.

The concepts presented above are not new suggestions, and may need to be adapted to become specific for those studying dance; however, they provide a starting point for institutions to consider what provisions they currently have in place to support international students. Nonetheless, there are also some concerns surrounding the incorporation of such programmes and activities within institutions and the care that needs to be taken with the philosophical perspectives in which such programmes emerge from. As Sawir et al. (2008) express, the transference of the pastoral responsibility to students or same-culture groups is “a lazy strategy that allows the institution to go on without changing itself” (p.159). Sawir et al. go on to suggest that the idea of international students having the sole responsibility to ‘adjust’ to new learning environments negates the concept that local cultures and educational environments are also changeable. It is therefore not enough to merely implement programmes for international students. To reduce feelings of alienation any programme implemented must provide for and successfully support international students through their learning experience and such a philosophy needs to be carried through all aspects of a student’s education and the curriculum they are experiencing.

The dance class, for example, is a situation where there are opportunities to implement strategies to assist international students with feelings of alienation. Nyama McCarthy-Brown (2009) investigates culturally relevant dance education, citing that there is a need for culturally responsive dance teachers. McCarthy-Brown asserts that a culturally responsive dance teacher is someone who includes culturally relevant material in classes; aims to learn the culture and communication styles of the students; makes any cultural expectations clear; works to construct a class culture that incorporates other cultures while also establishing new customs; encourages an open dialogue about the impact of stereotypes in dance; and, provides space for reflection on culture in both the dance studio and dance practice. Meeri Hellstén and Anne Prescott (2004) share how cultural responsiveness within teaching can be developed not only through inclusive teaching practices, but also through professional development and opportunities for teachers to

communicate and reflect on the teaching of international students. While alienation has emerged as a key issue in the seven dance practitioners' reflections of training abroad, there are more specific elements of this experience that can be explored. Discussing these issues may further illuminate why the women in this research faced certain challenges when learning dance in a Western cultural context.

Interwoven with the dance practitioners' experiences of alienation were concerns over culture shock, language shock and academic/study shock. For example, language shock was an experience that Mey expressed when recounting her training in Frankfurt. She explained, "I had many difficulties to read some words [...] I remember that I was there thinking, 'What is con-tac-t im-p-ro-v?'" Mey went on to share her reflections on these classes and the feelings of isolation she experienced in part due to language difficulties: "The teacher was just like blah, blah, blah in German and I'd just understand a word here and a word there [...] I spent a lot of time avoiding having to talk or ask any questions." As suggested within the literature, some international students are hesitant to speak in class when they are either unfamiliar or do not feel particularly confident with the working language. Mey's experience appears to support this concept (Burns, 1991; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Sovic, 2008a, 2008b). Feelings of 'guessing' what to do in classes was another issue raised by Mey, who stated "I'd copy my friends, I had no idea what I should be doing, I didn't understand the teacher or what he wanted me to do". This experience connects with Prescott and Hellstén's (2005) research articulating that international students are frequently guessing instructional content in various learning situations because of the language difficulties they may be encountering and the different instructional modes and methods used.

From the reflections shared by some of the women it appears that academic/study shock (Goodwin, 2009) was present within their experiences of learning dance in a foreign environment. Rebecca and Nesrine shared comments about the initial shock and confusion they felt when learning dance in a Western cultural context. Rebecca explained, "I was trying really hard and wondering why I was not getting good marks [...] it was because I was not taking my thinking and my work to deeper levels, more abstract and more innovative." Rebecca's comment



relates to Sovic's (2008b) notion that there are specific issues for international students studying creative disciplines. Sovic specifically cites the challenge of understanding the emphasis of learning an art form being placed on the process rather than product. However, there could be other reasons why Rebecca felt this way. It could have been because this was her first experience of tertiary dance education and this shift in itself could cause feelings of confusion, regardless of the cultural context in which the learning is taking place. It could also be viewed that the learning environment that Rebecca was in (Dartington College of Arts), a liberal arts programme within a university setting, possibly illuminated process and theory more than if Rebecca had been training within a conservatoire institution where the emphasis may have been placed more on the physical practice and performance of dance.

Another issue raised is the way in which theory is integrated with practice and the challenges that this might bring for international students (Sovic, 2008b). It has been claimed that Western approaches of integrating theory and practice in the creative arts often results in students from foreign contexts feeling concerned that they are not gaining enough practical skills (Sovic, 2008b). This notion can be viewed in Rebecca and Nesrine's experiences. Rebecca expressed how she initially felt frustrated with the theoretical classes she was taking and she "just wanted technique". Nesrine's experience of adapting to training in Paris, while on the most part appearing to be smooth, also brought this issue to the fore. Nesrine explained,

I was taking practical classes outside of university just to feel like I was still dancing... the classes I was taking in preparing my doctorate were [...] so heavy with theory that the dance became forgotten about almost. I could not see how these things could work together [...] I saw them as two things, separate [...] I almost left Sorbonne. I thought, "This is not my place" – but then I thought, well, Tunis is not really my place either... so I was sort of homeless.

The notion of place emerges from Nesrine's narrative particularly through her comment of feeling 'homeless', where she felt a sense of dislocation from the dance practices she engaged with in Paris and also alienation towards dance practices in Tunis. This raises the question: what repercussions might alienation have on the dance practitioners' sense of place and self-identity? For some of the women the alienation they felt abroad resulted in a feeling of disconnection from place and confusion over belonging in their new environment. Mey shared that "I was out of

place”. Similarly Nada stated that “I was the odd one out, it was not my place, but someone else place, I had to try so hard to fit in”. Conversely, others felt a sense of place that they had not experienced before. Dalia explained that “finally I found a place where there were people like me, people who were 100 percent into dance”. Similarly Nesrine expressed how she felt comfortable in Paris: “I never really felt out of place but maybe I was just so enthusiastic to learn everything that nothing else mattered.”

Some of the dance practitioners expressed how they felt a different cultural context offered a new found awareness of identity. For example Meryem explained that she felt that she was noticing her “background in this new environment” and that “being Moroccan” was something that she discovered to be problematic in her new environment, stating that “I was not French, and so getting a job was harder”. It could be understood that Meryem’s awareness of identity when abroad emerged from a sense of self in relation to Other, situating herself as ‘Moroccan’ and the Other being ‘French’. Likewise, Mey shared how being ‘Syrian’ dominated people’s perceptions of her: “I became the ‘Syrian’ girl, that’s who I was to people.” Conversely, Dalia shared that she often felt “more English than Egyptian” when training in New York, perhaps referencing her childhood growing up in England. The intricacy of negotiating national identities within educational settings has been explored by Thea Renda Abu El-Haj (2007) who investigated the complicated identity dynamics of Palestinian youth studying in the United States of America and the challenges of being both ‘Palestinian’ and ‘American’, illuminating feelings of obligation to preserve or reject national identities and labels. Ideas surrounding the complexity of identity explored by Abu El-Haj were also expressed by Noora:

The word ‘identity’ for me is tricky [...] it can also trap you in one place or another. I think me being on stage, being Noora [...] I carry my history and identity in my flesh and blood. This doesn’t go away when I’m in a different location, I don’t have to say anything more.

Self-identity and sense of place were also illuminated within Rebecca’s reflections of training in England. She explained, “Before going away I felt that I had a really clear identity and I sort of knew where I belonged. Then everything got turned upside down in a way when I arrived in England.” Rebecca then shared how this confusion led her to question both her identity and sense of place. She stated that she was “wondering really where I fitted in and just how to make sense

of being ‘Maltese’ and also being a young woman alone in England [...] where did I fit in with these new things?” Viewing Rebecca’s narrative in relation to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s writings, taking the perspective that the non-Western dance practitioner training in a Western cultural context could be a subaltern (Spivak, 1988), it appears that there was disjunction between the women’s identity at home and their identity when abroad, essentially resulting in some becoming caught in translation between identities. If this is how identities can be affected when training abroad, how might they be affected of shift when returning to home locations? This is an issue that will be further explored in chapter 7 of this thesis.

It also appeared that feelings of confusion and alienation were often a result of the dance practitioners feeling unsure of why they were being asked to take particular approaches to dance or to engage with certain techniques. Through exploring the various facets of alienation experienced by the women and to deepen the critical analysis of the seven narratives, it can be asked, what challenges and feelings of alienation were experienced specifically in relation to the somatic, choreographic and pedagogic aspects of dance training in a Western cultural context?

### *6.1.1 Alienation from somatic practices*

The seven dance practitioners frequently expressed how they found somatic methods initially alienating, disorientating and perplexing. In classes where imagery was used, Mey explained that she would be “looking at my friends and just imitating something”. Rebecca expressed similar feelings explaining that “all our bodywork classes were at first release technique [...] improvisation, contact improvisation and workshops, that were really interesting but totally unfamiliar and overwhelming”. For some it was a particular aspect of a somatic technique that they felt uncomfortable with. Nada explained that “contact improvisation for me was just not good – I wanted to cry in that first lesson – it was like I was in the class naked!” Correspondingly Mey shared that “contact improvisation was a no-no, a real taboo”. The challenges of contact improvisation have been explored within the writings of scholars such as Sara Houston (2009) and Cynthia Novack (1990), with issues surrounding the physicality and trust of this practice and the ‘taboos’ that touch illuminates being mentioned.

Such experiences shared by the women raise the issue of the cultural encodings of dancers' bodies and how these might be encountered, challenged and negotiated within somatic practices of dance education, as Susan Foster (1996) articulates, "the study of bodies through a consideration of bodily reality, not as natural or absolute given but as a tangible and substantial category of cultural experience" (p.xi). Likewise Elizabeth Grosz (1994) states that the body "can be regarded as a cultural and historic product" (p.187). It was apparent that engaging with some somatic practices, particularly those involving physical touch or contact with another dancer, were initially the most perturbing.

Scholar Ann Cooper Albright (1997) refers to Grosz's (1994) work and writes of "profound somatophobia" (p.6), and while Albright applies this term to the discussion of bodies being "marginalized through gender stereotypifications" (Mitra, 2005, p.10), it could also be applied to bodies that are marginalized in dance due to cultural alienation. Some of the dance practitioners' experiences of alienation from somatic practices are similar to those previously discussed by Royona Mitra (2005) in the review of the literature. Mitra explained that,

During my physical theatre training, I was hit hard by the cultural context of the West that was so diametrically opposite to my own reality [...] I did not feel comfortable in this mode of practice. It seemed inappropriate to share physical contact with another body (p.9).

Within accounts shared by some of the women and also articulated within others accounts of learning dance in a different cultural context, Albright's (1997) notion that somatic practices can become 'lost-in-translation' could be applied. Albright asks, "What happens, then, when people who are already marginalized as being *only* their bodies enter an artform that is similarly positioned as physical, intuitive, emotional and non-intellectual?" (p.7). It could be considered that translating somatic practices and acknowledging the possibility of somatophobia in international education in dance is something that requires critical consideration.

Finding somatic practices initially confusing or challenging is something that has been mentioned by various scholars. The discussion has often been in relation to the cultural sensitivity that should accompany somatic approaches to dance learning and how cultural histories and experiences might inform understandings of somatic practices. Dance scholars such

as Martha Eddy (2002), Sylvie Fortin (2002) and Jill Green (2002) offer valuable discussions surrounding this issue, warning of the problems that might arise from aiming for universality in the application of somatic principles in dance, and the importance of acknowledging that bodily experiences are not neutral or value free, but rather they are shaped by histories, experiences and socio-cultural understandings. The bewilderment expressed by my research participants concurs.

### *6.1.2 Alienation in creative and choreographic experiences*

Creative and choreographic experiences brought specific challenges and raised feelings of alienation. Noora shared how she felt misunderstood in choreographic experiences abroad, partly because the subject matter she explores in her choreographic work is drawn from her home environment and therefore potentially misinterpreted. She shared that “I’ve been very interested in women’s movement here and how women dancers move here – in El-Funoun [...] to make choreography about this outside of a Palestinian context might just seem confusing or conflicting”. Noora’s experience relates to the statement offered by Pacific dancer and choreographer Lemi Ponifasio (2002): “[t]he body in this sense is the site of difference. Different peoples have their own history to access. The performance is the unveiling and the uncovering of layers that are continued in this history” (p.54).

It appeared that choreographic encounters abroad also led Noora to question her own creative work. She explained, “When I started choreographing for El-Funoun I started questioning: Do restrictions [...] give me more freedom? More ways to think, or doesn’t it?” Meryem also questioned the freedom dance offered:

I had learned here in Morocco that dance was a freedom for me, but when I was abroad I discovered that most people do not understand this, it is all about the body, all about technical things, so it is a very restrictive way of teaching.

Certain techniques also created feelings of restriction and alienation in new learning environments. Meryem explained how she felt confused over why she was being asked to learn particular techniques, and that she felt “like there was some secret reason why it was good to do Graham technique [...] no one explained to me why these techniques are perceived to be important”. Alternatively, others felt that the technique of particular dance forms was what they

were seeking. Rebecca explained, “I just wanted technique,” while some individuals expressed how they felt learning a certain technique provided a sense of freedom over their dance practices and artistic choices. Dalia explained how learning Graham technique “opened up my body, it gave me a sense of control over how to use my body in a way I’d never had”. She expressed that she felt this gave her “freedom to be able to make choices about movement and how to say certain things through a movement”.

While several scholars have explored the notion of dance being a practice of ‘freedom’ (Anttila, 2004; Sluder, 1998), in the literature review of this thesis the question was asked, do the women interviewed for this research feel more or less liberated when dancing in certain environments, institutions or situations? While Dalia’s experience illustrates a sense of freedom in her new dancing environment, the statements from Noora, Meryem and Rebecca reveal that some felt that their new cultural contexts and learning environments restricted their freedom in dance, particularly in relation to the codified techniques that might be enforced and valued within particular learning environments.

Some of the dance practitioners also felt difficulties when asked to participate in improvisational tasks or create movement with a choreographer in a more collaborative relationship than perhaps what they had been accustomed to. This can be observed through Rebecca’s comment where she states that “there were words like ‘improvisation’ and ‘devising’, ‘creative’ [...] I was thinking ‘just tell me what to do’”. Rebecca explained how in her new dance learning environment she was not initially interested in classes in improvisation and composition, and she felt this was informed by her prior dance experiences in Malta, “I didn’t want to do improvisation and make a phrase and then share it in front of people, I was just wanting technique, because that’s what I was conditioned to think about from learning dance in Malta.”

Mey also discussed how improvisation was initially overwhelming for her: “But what was really horrible for me was... improvisation in general because like when they come and give you a task and then you have to do something for like two minutes on your own – this was horrible.” Mey related this to her previous learning experiences in Damascus and how she felt this mode of

pedagogy conflicted with the style of pedagogy and creative practice in her new learning environment. An alternative perspective was shared by Dalia who explained that “when we had this improvisation class I was like, wow, you’re kidding me, I get to just do whatever I want and say, ‘that’s my dance’ – incredible”. This may, however, point to the contrasting dance learning environments experienced by the seven women. For example, Dalia’s experience at the Alvin Ailey Dance School, where the overall focus of the programme appeared to be on learning dance technique, might mean the experience of choreography for her was quite different to that experienced by Rebecca at Dartington College of Arts or Mey at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts.

### *6.1.3 Alienation from pedagogical modes and methods*

Some of the dance practitioners also revealed feelings of alienation from pedagogical modes and methods. Some discussed experiencing authoritarian modes of pedagogy when learning contemporary dance in Western cultural contexts. For example, while Dalia had expressed feelings of freedom in relation to the techniques and choreographic practices she was learning, she shared how she simultaneously felt restricted and controlled by some pedagogical approaches she encountered. She stated that “it was like I was being told off all the time [...] In technique class it would just be doing things over and over and over”. However, she also explained, “I was used to it after a while, this became normal and for me this was actually how I improved”. A Foucauldian understanding could be applied to this statement shared by Dalia. It could be said that over time Dalia became ‘docile’ in a dance environment where her dance practice was constantly under ‘surveillance’ (Foucault, 1977). While it could be viewed that Western dance pedagogy has by tradition followed a transmission mode of teaching that encourages docility and power/knowledge relationships between teachers and students, reiterating conventional hierarchies (Green, 2003), it is now widely acknowledged that the transformation of dance content knowledge into knowledge for teaching and learning can engage more than authoritarian attitudes (Buck, 2003; Fortin, 1993; Hong, 2000; Shapiro, 1998). Acknowledging that Dalia’s experience of learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context took place some time ago (from 1996-1999), it is likely that approaches towards dance pedagogy have shifted somewhat since her experiences. However, awareness of such

experiences could act as reminders to dance educators and institutions when assessing and reflecting on current pedagogical approaches and programme structures.

Some of the women also encountered conflicting pedagogical methods when abroad. Examples can be seen in experiences shared by Mey, Meryem, Dalia and Rebecca. These individuals explained how they were experiencing pedagogical approaches that they found initially confusing. Nada explained, “In ballet it was actually the most open, more relaxed style to the classes. The modern was where it was like being in the army”. Nada’s narrative reveals that an authoritarian approach towards teaching is not something exclusively confined to ballet classes, as is often articulated within the literature (Lakes, 2005; Wulff, 1998); rather, an authoritarian style of teaching could be occurring in a variety of dance learning settings. This is a notion supported by Susan Stinson (1998) who maintains that “in most technique classes the teacher is the authority and the only recognized source of knowledge” (p.27). Nada’s experience might also reflect other political struggles continuing within tertiary dance institutes in the West, where newer and more emerging dance techniques may employ authoritarian approaches to teaching in the effort to be acknowledged as valid disciplines.

The seven women’s narratives highlighted how they arrived in Western dance learning contexts with their own dance knowledge and experiences. However, for some this prior knowledge was not necessarily valued. In Nesrine’s narrative she shared how “in some of the first classes it was like people thought I knew nothing, but it was just that maybe I knew different things from them”. This is a comment that connects with Deidre Sklar’s (2001) notion that “movement knowledge is intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge” (p.31). Many of the women came to their new learning environments with the perspective that dance was not driven by the need to learn Western dance techniques, but rather to develop techniques that are more culturally relevant. Noora explained that she was interested to “work more technically on the body and not necessarily in the European sense”. It can be viewed that the notions shared by Noora and Nesrine connect with Jill Green’s (1999) exploration of how bodies are habituated, inscribed, and influenced by culture, and that this inscription of culture on dancers’ bodies is something that needs to be acknowledged within teaching and learning dance. Perhaps pedagogical



practices that focus on individuals' experiences and histories would go some way to assisting this awareness to develop. Such a concept has been presented within the writings of Äli Leijen, Ineke Lam, Robert-Jan Simons and Liesbeth Wildschut (2008): "it is simply crucial to learn about the very personal and subjective characteristics of an individual in addition to the more objective principles of a subject area" (p.236). This view is in line with those expressed by other researchers and practitioners who have called for more attention to the inclusion of somatic techniques in dance education, and for educators to listen to students' voices by encouraging personal storytelling and biographical learning in the context of education (Christensen, 2007; Garrett, 2006; Veri et al., 2006).

The issue of how to incorporate prior dance knowledge in different cultural contexts was also raised by Mey, who expressed confusion about how to apply prior dance knowledge in her new learning environment at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. She explained how she felt her understandings of dance pedagogy conflicted with the pedagogical methods that she was encountering:

In the first class the ballet teacher came in and explained to us how we are to stand in the first position, and the second position, and how to do a tendu and a pli  , and I was like, "What the fuck is this? I've already finished with the ballet repertoire." [...] I couldn't understand why the teacher wanted us to do something; I thought, "This is not a real dance school."

Meryem also expressed confusion over learning particular techniques, such as Graham technique, wondering "like why we were doing them". Meryem also raised an interesting point about how she felt the atmosphere of her dance class in Casablanca was based around the collective group of dance students whereas in France the emphasis was on the individual dancer. She explained that "the classes are more about the individual [in France]; is the individual doing the right movement?" Meryem's comment illuminates a potential challenge when learning dance in a different cultural context, when a student is shifting to an environment that values individual learning over collective group learning, or vice versa. Some scholars have noted that individualistic cultures tend to be locations such as Europe and North America and collective cultures tend to be in Asia, South America and the Middle East (Hofstede, 1980, 1983; Matsumoto, Yoo & Fontaine, 2008). An individualistic society is viewed to place value on

personal achievements, competition and endorsing concepts that serve the self, contrasting to the ideals of group goals, cooperation and collective achievements valued by collectivist cultures (Auyeung & Sands, 1996; Veenhoven, 1998). Pak Auyeung and John Sands (1996) suggest that in a collective society learning environment “uniqueness and individual interpretations are relatively unimportant” (p.265), whereas in an individualistic society learning environments encourage “an emphasis on the personal relevance of information and learning” (p.266). The experience shared by Meryem and the perspective raised by Auyeung and Sands invoke salient issues for dance practitioners learning dance in different cultural contexts and also for dance educators and institutions providing international education in dance. For a dance student with such a collectivist cultural background it may be initially challenging to offer individual perspectives and ideas, while it could also be difficult for the dance student to find personal relevance of the material they are learning within an individualistic learning environment. It can also be recognized that Meryem trained in Paris over 20 years ago. No doubt methods of teaching dance have shifted over that time, with dance pedagogy perhaps no longer being so clearly defined through the binary opposition of individual or collective approaches to dance education. Instead, there is likely an acknowledgement that approaches to teaching dance are fluid, not fixed to one location or culture and with diverse benefits and challenges.

The comments highlighted through the dance practitioners’ narratives regarding alienation from pedagogical modes and methods can again be connected to the research of Silvia Sovic (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). An emphasis within Sovic’s work has been on how there might be a dilemma for international arts students when they are faced with the concept of the process rather than the product of an artistic work within a Western learning environment. While some of the women mentioned this shift within their narratives it appeared that they adapted to this new concept relatively quickly. For others it was not an issue raised or even perceived to be a ‘new’ concept for them to negotiate. It could be viewed that the dance practitioners were experiencing more concerns over why they were learning particular techniques and ideas in their new learning environments.

Issues pertaining to alienation appear to reverberate through the individuals’ experiences of

training abroad. However, from experiences of alienation also emerged narratives of transformation that impacted on the dance practitioners' approaches and understandings of dance. What were these transformative moments? How were they triggered, and how might experiences that are initially alienating become experiences that are transformative?

## **6.2 Transformations**

Through the seven women's narratives it can be seen that as they became more accustomed to their new learning and living environments, feelings of isolation often transformed into feelings of belonging. In some cases the dancers became somewhat acculturated to the somatic approaches, choreographic practices and pedagogical methods they were experiencing. Viewed through Susan Foster's (1996) articulation of corporeality it could be seen that "the body is capable of being scripted, being written" (p.xi) through these experiences of dance learning in different cultural contexts. For some, the dance learning experiences that were initially alienating ultimately became transformative. The experience of a particular dance class, a teacher that offered an alternative way to view dance, a certain technique, creative encounter or concept all had the potential to become transformative dance learning moments. This section of the chapter explores the somatic, choreographic and pedagogical encounters that the dance practitioners' felt were transformative when learning dance in Western cultural contexts.

Scholar Jack Mezirow (1997) explains that transformative learning "is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference" (p.5). Mezirow perceives transformational learning to involve restructuring assumptions to think differently about a particular subject or issue, defining the notion as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (2003, p.58). While Mezirow's perspective that transformation is of "problematic frames of reference" could be questioned and viewed as somewhat narrow, with perhaps a more suitable definition of the concept needed to more broadly describe a transformation from one frame of reference to another, it offers a starting point for the experience of transformations through dance learning to be discussed.

Transformations through learning have been explored deeply within the work of Mezirow, particularly in relation to adult education, while transformations specific to the international learning experience have been articulated within the writings of scholars such as Constance Ellwood (2009), Xingsong Shi (2006) and Feng Su (2010). Karen Bond and Susan Stinson (2000-2001), Susan Graham (2002) and Paula Salosaari (2001) have explored dance specific transformative learning experiences; however, it can be reiterated that these discussions have not been focused on the experiences of those participating in dance as international students. The transformations the seven women experienced when abroad appeared to shift how they viewed, understood or practiced dance, in turn influencing their dance practices and artistic directions at home (see chapter 8). These transformative encounters emerged through various dance experiences such as somatic, creative and pedagogical experiences. These experiences were not always explicitly stated by the seven women, but rather could be detected in the way they exclaimed their feelings of a particular moment or memory in a surprised or excited tone of voice, or reiterated the importance of a particular choreographer or teacher's approach. These transformative experiences were also revealed when they described the feelings (mental and physical) they experienced when dancing.

### *6.2.1 Transformative somatic experiences*

Some of the women explained how they had transformative experiences when engaging with somatic methods when learning dance in Western cultural contexts. Through experiencing somatic practices some shared how they felt their experience of dance shifted from 'showing' dance to 'feeling' dance. This included moments where they described somatic sensations of dance that they had previously not experienced, or an awareness of intentions and motivations for movement that until that point they had not encountered. For some this was most easily described as an 'ah-ha' moment, with examples of such experiences being described by Mey, Dalia and Nesrine. Mey shared her experience of a particular performance in Frankfurt where she felt that she found a deeper and more somatically engaged understanding of her dance practice. She explained how this was a performance where she "was not thinking about what comes next", but rather she felt as though she was "in a trance". Mey offered the following

description of how she felt her body “from the inside, like every single muscle in me and every single cell in me – everything – was alive”. After this experience Mey was eager to seek out this feeling again, stating that “this was the ‘ah-ha’ effect [...] I didn’t know up until then what I was looking for – and this was it”. This experience propelled Mey to additionally invest in her dance learning experiences in Frankfurt, which until this point she had felt somewhat confused about and alienated from. She explained how in response to this experience she was motivated to seek out more somatic approaches to her work. She explained that “I really started to go, ‘Ok – let’s understand this more. I want to feel this dance thing, take it to a deeper level.’”

Like Mey, Nesrine expressed how she felt somatic practices had been transformative for her. She explained that through engaging with somatic practices she developed a stronger connection between her personal history and her dance practices, allowing her to investigate ways of expressing this history through movement. Nesrine shared that she is “interested in the internal voice and how we individually imagine it”. Nesrine went on to explain how this concept of the ‘internal voice’ is something that has acted as an initiator for her movement and choreographic work. She shared that this concept encourages her to create movement emerging from the ‘inside out’, rather than the ‘outside in’. She explained, “For me, as someone with hearing difficulties, this is like exploring my own world and sharing it with others. I never would have considered this before experiencing my body in a more somatic way.” Nesrine’s experience connects with research by Leena Rouhiainen (2008) who argues that the addition of somatic activities can develop a student’s self-understanding within a variety of fields, or as Karen Barbour (2009) states, “students can experience empowerment in the process of exploring their own embodied identity” (p.8). This notion seemed apparent within a number of the individuals’ articulations of somatic experiences, describing that they perceived it to create a sense of self-understanding and bodily awareness that they had not experienced before. It could also be understood that these experiences of transformation offered opportunities for the seven women to develop their practices, a concept that connects with Ann Cooper Albright’s (1997) notion that “dancing bodies simultaneously produce and are produced by their own dancing” (p.3).

In some of the women’s experiences a particular somatic method was influential and

transformative. This included experiences of practices such as improvisation, contact improvisation, Pilates, Alexander technique, Feldenkrais method or release-based contemporary dance techniques. Some of the dance practitioners' descriptions of their work and creative influences illuminated that somatic methods they engaged with when studying abroad continued to inform their work in their home environments. For example, Rebecca describes her movement as "release-based improvisation"; while Mey feels that she relies on "kinesiology, Pilates and Alexander technique" as a foundation for her movement.

When describing transformative moments the women frequently recalled experiencing specific feelings and sensations, for example that movement felt "light" (Mey), "easy" (Meryem) or "natural" (Nesrine). Some also described an awareness of counter-forces in movements or spiralling twists in the body through engagement with somatic methods. Mey explained that "all of this Alexander technique made me feel as though I could do anything, my legs were spiralling, I felt really grounded but light". The transformative somatic experiences shared by some of the dance practitioners connect with Jess Allen's (2009) investigation of encounters with somatic practices within postgraduate dance training, and with Paula Salosaari's (2001) study of multiple embodiment in classical ballet, where dancers also spoke of movement 'revelations' through embodied practices of dance.

While some felt somatic practices were physically transformative, others felt such practices provided the opportunity to reflect on dance more generally in their home environments and also abroad. For some, there was the realization that in Western dance learning environments an emphasis was frequently placed on the stylization of the body into a particular dance technique. For these individuals, they did not always feel that technical and somatic practices were connected within the dance education they received abroad. Meryem explained that when she was in France she felt that "it is all about the body, all about technical things, so it is a very restrictive way of teaching, too rigid for me". Even though Meryem was simultaneously learning somatic practices and techniques such as ballet and modern dance she felt that less value was placed on somatic practices and that they were not connected to the technical dance classes. Meryem explained that "we took improvisation, Feldenkrais [...] they were the 'rest' classes, not

serious. There was really nothing about relating it to anything else we were doing”.

Some of the dance practitioners viewed somatic practices as transformational methodological strategies, which in turn affected the way they approached pedagogy both as learners and teachers. Rebecca explained how taking a somatic class during her second year of training shifted how she felt about teaching and learning dance. She shared how it was “the multi-dimensional approaches to the idea of dancing that really had a big effect on me”. She explained that “the way it was taught, the atmosphere, the teacher’s expectations were about really offering something from inside, not just movement but more about thinking”. Rebecca expressed how there were specific somatic methods used that she felt contributed to her transformative experience, stating that “there was a lot of visualization, thinking about the fluid systems in the body, the cells”. Rebecca’s experience of new dance ideas and ways of understanding the body also led her to question the dance education she received in Malta. Sherry Shapiro (1998) suggests the “shift from disembodied knowing to embodied knowing calls into question traditional dance pedagogy” (p.14). Rebecca’s experience relates to this view. She explained that “there was a really open feeling to the class there was not a feeling that you’d be judged”.

Dalia explained how incorporating somatic methods in her dance practices led to transformative dance learning experiences. She described how somatic modes of viewing the body acted as pedagogical tools that she could use to take responsibility over her own learning:

I had gathered enough tools to understand my body, what it should be feeling like and looking like in particular movements, inside out thinking about breathing and connection with breath [...] I thought, “Dalia you know what you can do, you do not need the teacher to correct you. Pay attention to what the teacher is saying, listen to the corrections and apply these to your work – you be the teacher.”

Dalia’s experience connects with Jill Green’s (2002) writings on somatic knowledge in dance education, where Green articulates that somatic practices allow a “student to share in the responsibility for their own learning” (p.117). From some of the women’s accounts of transformative somatic experiences it could be viewed that the somatic practices they were engaging with were not necessarily replacing other movement skills they were experiencing, such as ballet or Graham technique. Rather, somatic practices allowed for different movement

goals to emerge and for alternative approaches towards dance to be considered, with the emphasis shifting from being solely focused on performance to being placed on process and performance as well. Through the women's reflections on transformative somatic experiences it can be acknowledged that Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory fails to include other ways of knowing (a concept previously explored within the writings of Inglis, 1997; Taylor, 1997). The dance practitioners' experiences of transformative somatic encounters suggest that somatic learning has considerable implications for the theory of transformative learning and somatic practices could potentially contribute to the expansion and understanding of this philosophy.

Many of the women felt that over time somatic methods offered alternative ways for them to understand their bodies and movement; for some this resulted in experiences that could be considered transformative. However, from the reflections of alienation felt towards somatic practices (see 6.1.1) it is to be acknowledged that there is still the necessity to frame somatic approaches within the socio-cultural construction in which they have emerged. For educators working in international education in dance situations it is valuable to have awareness that there are multiple kinds of body knowledges, while also remembering that an intention of somatic practice is to teach an individual to live in their own body. This therefore inculcates that these experiences are not the same for each individual.

### *6.2.2 Transformative creative and choreographic experiences*

Creative and choreographic practices also provided transformative experiences for some of the dance practitioners. Some shared how they were purposefully seeking experiences that engaged with choreographic practice when participating in dance training in Western cultural contexts. For example, Noora stated that "choreography was often my focus when training abroad". For others the transition from the role of dancer to the role of choreographer was not something they had considered prior to leaving their home environment, but rather something that emerged from their dance experience abroad. This can be viewed within Mey and Rebecca's experiences where they expressed how their experimentation with choreography emerged from their dance training abroad and continued when they returned to their home environments. Alternatively, others



shared how their choreographic practice transpired when they returned home, even though they encountered classes and workshops when training abroad that introduced them to various choreographic practices. This can be seen within the experiences expressed by Nada, Meryem and Dalia.

Some of the dance practitioners' narratives illustrated how in Western cultural contexts they had opportunities to take on diverse roles in choreographic practices. Drawing on Jo Butterworth's (2004) outline of dancer-choreographer relationships, these roles included the creator, author, facilitator, co-owner or contributor within the creative process. The diverse roles they experienced contrasted to the 'dancer as instrument' role that is a frequent approach within choreographic processes and relationships (Hämäläinen, 2002). Realizations that as dancers they could also be contributors to dance making processes appeared to impact on how some of the women perceived choreography. This can be viewed within Nesrine's narrative where she explained that "different choreographers made me realize how different making dance can be. Until that point I was certain that there was the dancer and then the choreographer – no in-between". Others explained how they experienced methods of devising choreography that went beyond instructional or interpretive approaches to choreography that they had previously encountered; rather, they were experiencing experiential, interactive and collaborative approaches in dance making. As Nada explained, "I wanted to be told what to do, but instead I was asked for ideas [...] I found it confusing why the choreographer would ask me to make up his dance". Nada went on to explain that "in the end I sort of understood [...] I felt like the dance fitted me better because I was more involved in the making of it". It could be viewed that this mode of choreographic practice creates a shift of ownership of the dance, from belonging solely to the choreographer to a co-ownership or contributor relationship (Butterworth, 2004). As Nada's experience illustrates, a dancer might feel that they have shared more within the choreographic process when engaging with choreographic practice in this way, gaining a sense of contribution and ownership of the dance work.

For some of the women transformative experiences in relation to creative or choreographic work did not always stem from their own practice of choreography, but rather through the observation

and exposure to other choreographer's work. For example Noora explained that,

You start seeing other choreographers from abroad and I sometimes think, well they're restricted in terms of technique, in terms of the discipline of the technique, but at the same time it gives them more freedom with bodies on stage.

This reflection on creative process could be likened to Larry Lavender's (1996) model of critical evaluation. This model encourages students to observe, write, reflect, talk about and evaluate a dance piece in order to develop individual aesthetic ideals for viewing, creating and performing dance works. It could be seen that Noora's experience led her to question technique and freedom within dance. She explained, "I realized that it [dance] was always related to something so beautiful and so pure. It was never something forced on me, not as a technique or anything." These were issues that Noora later expanded on in relation to her work in her home environment (see 8.3).

From the transformative experiences of learning choreographic practices and engaging in creative work in different cultural contexts, several issues emerged that require further attention. Firstly, within international education in dance there seems to be a need for curriculums that not only assist students to understand how to develop movement from raw material, but also encompass pedagogy and practice that allow students to be confident about their aesthetic choices and clear about the contributions they bring to negotiated choreographic processes (Odhiambo, 2006). Secondly, there appears to be a greater need to develop what has been described by Nicholas Rowe and David Zeitner-Smith (2011) as "creative dexterity" (p.42) (see 2.1.3) with reference and consideration to diverse cultural contexts and exchanges. Finally, collaborative learning through discussion and dialogue in dance education needs to be further explored, a concept that Jo Butterworth (2004) and Larry Lavender (1996, 2006, 2009) point towards.

### *6.2.3 Transformative pedagogical experiences*

Sylvie Fortin, Warwick Long and Madeleine Lord (2002) state, "how one teaches is inseparable from how one learns" (p.176). Some of the seven women's narratives reveal that they experienced transformative pedagogical moments and shifts in pedagogical knowledge when

learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context. Pedagogical knowledge could be understood through the definition offered by Sylvie Fortin (1993) as, “a body of general knowledge which refers to such features as academic learning time, classroom management, classroom climate, and general principles of planning, instruction, and evaluation that may be applied to any content field” (p.34). Shifts in the women’s pedagogical knowledge were often through experiencing a transformative learning moment, usually in relation to an influential pedagogical style or approach. Transformative pedagogical experiences for some of the dance practitioners also included realizations that there were sometimes different motivations and values when learning contemporary dance in Western cultural contexts than perhaps they were familiar with.

Examples of transformative pedagogical experiences can be seen within the narratives shared by all seven women. Nesrine expressed how she experienced transformative pedagogical encounters when receiving her dance education in Paris. She explained how experiencing a particular teacher’s approach towards dance pedagogy influenced her own thoughts about teaching dance. She explained:

I have got a lot of good information from Dominique Dupuy’s way of working. He approaches the class like it’s a group of friends, more informal and that it’s an open space to explore movement [...] I was thinking, this class is not going to work, nothing will happen, we won’t learn much. Later I realized, well, it didn’t have to be strict – we were still learning a lot, maybe even more because it was an open environment.

Another teacher also impacted on Nesrine’s understandings of dance pedagogy. She shared how a particular teacher in her new learning environment provided her with confidence to continue her studies in Paris, and this shifted how she perceived the role of the dance teacher. Nesrine stated that she needed “someone who believed in my dancing, and this teacher, she did [...] it made me want to be like that in my own teaching – caring about individuals”.

Mey also shared transformative pedagogical experiences within her narrative. She expressed how experiencing different methods of pedagogy transformed her ideas about how dance could be taught. Mey shared an experience of a ballet class in Frankfurt when she felt frustrated over the

ballet teacher's approach towards ballet technique, that it was "relaxed", "a bit lazy" and "not what I was used to". However, she went on to explain how over time her perspective changed. Mey described that this teacher's methodology allowed her to understand how ballet could be approached in diverse ways, sharing that she "realized that the teacher wanted to achieve different things, not just do the steps, but understand them too, like to understand the ballet technique in a different way".

Like Nesrine and Mey, Rebecca also felt that she experienced a more relaxed and open learning environment when she was training in Dartington. She shared, "I showed my solo to the teacher and he said, 'Ok, now try to do it a bit slower, maybe try to stretch it out, play around a bit,' so it was really experimental, and I was like, 'Wow!'" This transformative experience led Rebecca to explore dance learning in "a more open environment" where her "ideas counted more". Through these individuals' narratives it could be viewed that inclusive and student-centred pedagogies were implicit influences within their transformative pedagogical experiences when learning dance abroad. Some of the women felt they were encouraged to questioning the 'how' and 'why' of the content they were being taught, rather than being solely focused on content with the emphasis on 'what' they were being taught. As Mey explained that "for once it was not about doing millions of turns, kicking your leg high – it was more about *how* are you doing the turn?" From these women's narratives it appears that there were diverse transformations through pedagogical encounters. The experiences illuminate transformations through engaging with inclusive or student-centred modes of dance learning, which in turn offered alternative perspectives of how dance could be practiced.

Through the seven dance practitioners' experiences it can be seen that there are certain issues regarding pedagogy that are to be acknowledged when encouraging transformative encounters over alienating encounters of dance pedagogy. Perhaps it is Penelope Hanstein's (1990) perspective on the future of dance education that needs to be reiterated, where she cites that dance education is to be characterized by openness, exploration, discovery and integration. Alternatively, Larry Lavender (2009) recommends,

Teachers take down the pedagogical ladder (artistic laws, teacher enforcers, obedient choreographers, instrumentalized performers, and silenced viewers) and

create a pedagogical web of dialogue between and among the components of the artistic transaction: ideas, performers, rehearsal strategies, dance structures, viewers, provocations, choreographers, dance-craft conventions, and so forth. There is nothing to worry about; everything that ever was on the table will still be on the table, but everything on the table will have a chance to speak, and to be heard (p.407).

It is perhaps Lavender's approach towards dance pedagogy that could be more widely applied when engaging with international education in dance. This would involve educators and institutions alike aiming to create an atmosphere where positive pedagogical transformations occur rather than confusion or conflict, an environment where pedagogical approaches are highly considered and students are prepared with pedagogical skills and a reflexive practice that they can carry into their own dance careers, teaching, performing or creating dance either in their home locations or abroad.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

Dalia, Meryem, Nada, Mey, Nesrine, Rebecca and Noora's narratives reveal how experiences of alienation and transformation are interwoven with learning dance in different cultural contexts. Some felt a sense of alienation in their new learning environments. Experiences of culture shock, language shock and academic/study shock intersect with literature documenting the challenges faced by international students. Feelings of alienation also impacted on their self-identity and sense of place. Some of the women revealed how they became aware of their identity being associated with nationalistic labels; conversely, others experienced a sense of belonging that they did not feel in their home environment. There were also particular feelings of alienation towards some dance practices, creative processes or pedagogical styles that they were engaging with.

There were various accounts of transformative learning experiences for the dance practitioners when learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context. Transformative moments were experienced through somatic methods and approaches, creative and choreographic encounters and diverse pedagogical experiences. What for some were considered transformative encounters, for others were confusing or concerning, and what could initially be considered an alienating experience could ultimately be considered transformative. Whilst transformative experiences had

the ability to shift perceptions and understandings of dance, they also presented challenges and occasionally acted as obstacles when learning dance in different cultural contexts.

From the critical analysis of the seven women's experiences of training abroad questions can be presented that might segue into the discussion of their experiences of returning home. If teachers are often replicating how and what they were taught as dance students (Rist, 1994; Salosaari, 2001), will the women choose to replicate dance practices and pedagogical methods they learnt abroad when they return home, or will they take a different approach? Is *what* and *how* they teach even something that is a conscious choice, or is it something that becomes embedded within corporeal reality and self-identity? How do the seven women engage with somatic practices when they return home? For those who found certain practices or ideas to be profoundly transformative, will they teach them in a similar way that they themselves experienced when abroad, or will they find ways to adapt these practices to their local environment? If they choose to adapt them, what aspects are they choosing to keep and what components are they choosing to disregard and why? Finally, how do they approach choreographic processes when creating work at home? The following chapters of this thesis intend to pursue these questions further.

## **Chapter 7: Dancing home: Motivations, challenges and alienation**

This chapter presents the seven women's experiences of returning home after learning dance in Western cultural contexts. Firstly, their motivations for returning home are explored. Issues related to these motivations are investigated, such as new artistic and creative opportunities, family relationships, visas and finances, homesickness and social responsibility. Secondly, the experiences these dancers encountered when arriving home to teach, perform or create dance are discussed. This section of the chapter illuminates the theme of alienation, along with notions of identity, place, home and Frantz Fanon's concept of the native intellectual in relation to their experiences.

### **7.1 Motivations for returning home**

From the dance practitioners' narratives it emerged that each had diverse reasons for returning home after their time abroad. Some made conscious decisions to return home. Others were reluctant to return home and certain situations, such as family commitments, drew them back. Like the decisions the women made about where and why to train abroad, their decisions about when and why to return home were not always based on artistic ideals. For those who made the decision to return home based solely on artistic ideals, this was frequently related to the desire to pursue new, often independent, artistic opportunities, such as establishing a dance company or school. Frequently their decisions about when or why to return home were determined by pragmatic issues such as family relations, finances, visas or homesickness as much as artistic ideals. Some also explained how they felt a sense of social responsibility to return home and develop dance practices in their home environment.

#### *7.1.1 New artistic and creative opportunities*

Some of the women were drawn home by the desire to pursue new artistic and creative opportunities. Often these artistic opportunities connected with feelings of social responsibility (see 7.1.5). In Nada's situation, her decision to permanently return to Beirut gradually developed over the multiple visits she made to Lebanon over several years. Nada explained how during these visits she began to develop her own artistic identity as a teacher and choreographer, and

sought to create a dance company that allowed her the space to pursue her own artistic directions. Nada cited the multiple returns she made to Beirut where she worked with a group of local dancers, as an experience that cemented the idea for her to return and establish a dance company. She explained that she had decided that she “could make a company here. It took me time to build up the dancers and the courage, but I wanted to share my own work here at home”.

Conversely, Mey’s situation was more spontaneous, yet still driven by the desire to develop an artistic direction in her home environment. She explained,

I came back [to Damascus] and I was like, “Ok, so I am here, now what?” I thought, “Ok, I will start a company.” A company was something I always wanted to do, make my own work, influence the dance scene here.

Others described how they always felt they would return home. As Meryem expressed, “Of course I sort of always felt that I was going to come back and do something for dance here.” Meryem’s feelings connect with Frantz Fanon’s articulations of the native intellectual returning home, where the native intellectual brings knowledge gained in one cultural context to another with the intention of ‘educating’ those in their home environment. It has been noted that the native intellectual frequently aims to develop their home environment through such colonial processes. According to Fanon (1961/1967b) “the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation” (p.199). Fanon also explains how this desire by the native intellectual to ‘build up’ their home environment in various ways can also create feelings of foreignness and alienation, articulating that “the native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner” (1961/1967b, p.180). This in turn raises questions over how this foreign knowledge is applied and how it is received in the different cultural context (see chapter 8).

### *7.1.2 Family relationships*

Family led Nesrine, Meryem and Dalia to return home. Nesrine explained her motivation for suspending her studies in Paris and returning home: “I was married [...] but then I got divorced – it was a very short marriage of only seven months. My husband was a little bit aggressive and was not ok with me dancing.” After her divorce Nesrine returned to France to continue the



doctoral studies she had suspended. Meryem returned to Morocco primarily because she was pregnant with her first child. It is perhaps of interest to note that while Meryem explained that having a child was a motivation for *when* she returned home to Casablanca, she had previously articulated that she had always felt that she would like to return to contribute to the local dance environment in some way. Meryem's narrative illustrates the complexity of the dancers' experiences, illuminating how multiple motivations and feelings can co-exist and contribute to dance practitioners returning home after time abroad.

It was perhaps Dalia's memory of departing from New York and returning to Cairo that was particularly dramatic. She explained how her parents came to New York to bring her home because "they thought I'd done enough of that dancing". She recalled her feelings when leaving New York, sharing, "I was thinking, 'You can still run.' [...] but as soon as I stepped on the plane I felt that a door closed, I couldn't go back, it was too late. I just burst into tears, crying, just crying." Through the dancers' narratives it appeared that those who did not choose to return home, but were instead forced or pressured by family situations or particular circumstances, expressed descriptions that recounted trauma and distress. Examples of such experiences can be seen particularly within Dalia and Meryem's accounts of returning home.

### *7.1.3 Visas and finances*

Issues regarding visas and finances were other reasons why some of the women returned home. Rebecca shared, "I didn't have a dance job, I had no money to just do my own work in England – at least here [in Malta] I can live at home with my parents [...] I had no choice." Along with family circumstances Dalia also cited the difficulty of obtaining a work visa after completing her studies as a reason why she returned to Cairo. She described her situation in the following statement: "I had to change my visa [...] you have to be making \$20,000 [US] dollars per year to have your visa extended. I wasn't making enough money."

Like Dalia, Nesrine found that visa issues were influencing her stay in abroad, leading her to question if she should stay abroad or return to Tunis. She explained how she wanted to stay in France, however, "to stay in France you need to have papers, to get papers you need to be

enrolled in studies”. Through enrolling in a doctoral programme Nesrine was able to secure a visa to remain in France for the duration of her studies. Nevertheless, she was concerned about remaining in France once her studies finished, sharing, “I might be able to apply for another visa [...] but there is no guarantee that I will get it. I have a Tunisian passport – that means nothing here [in France], they [the French government] don’t want us [Tunisians] here.”

In light of the experiences shared by Dalia and Nesrine, questions can be raised regarding the responsibility that institutions providing international education in dance might have in assisting international students with post-study visas and employment. Is this viewed by institutions as a responsibility that they have towards their international students? Conversely, what are international students’ expectations of life once their studies are completed – do they expect assistance from the institution they have been studying at when obtaining visas and employment? In taking on international students there is surely some level of obligation from an institution to assist international students in the transition from study to employment, at least preparing them for understanding the bureaucratic processes for obtaining post-study visas, attending auditions and interviews and applying for funding and writing grant applications. Alternatively, if international education in dance is indeed market driven, focused on obtaining international student numbers (and in turn the revenue of international fee paying students), then it is possible that assisting students with such processes may not be a current concern within institutional agendas. With the perspective of developing more holistic approaches towards international education in dance, such issues in themselves are worthy of further investigation.

#### *7.1.4 Homesickness*

Homesickness was another reason that appeared to influence why some of the seven women chose to return home. Mey shared how after several years in Germany she decided to return to Syria in part because of the feelings of homesickness she experienced, explaining that “I always felt pain when I left Syria. So at a certain point in Germany I said, ‘Ok, I need to go home’”. Nesrine also felt homesickness affected her time in Paris and influenced her initial return to Tunis. She shared that, “I feel when I’m in Paris that I am missing part of me... that I am 90 percent in Paris but the other 10 percent is in Tunisia. I feel quite homesick for Tunis.” The

experience of homesickness could also be connected to notions of place, home and identity (see 7.2).

#### *7.1.5 Social responsibility*

Social responsibility was also a motivation for many of the dance practitioners to return home. This can be seen within the previous experience shared by Nada (see 7.1.1), where along with artistic ideals she also explained that she felt a need to contribute to dance in her home environment. Some of the women discussed how regardless of the reasons they returned home and the length of time they spent abroad they felt a need to contribute to dance in their home locations. For example, Dalia expressed a responsibility to share the dance knowledge she gained abroad, stating that “I sort of feel a bit responsible, to actually do something with dance and to share what I’ve experienced”. Nada articulated a responsibility to develop the contemporary dance community in Beirut, explaining, “I wanted to do something to help build the dance community, especially contemporary dance... it was kind of like a goal I suppose.”

Noora also spoke of community within her narrative; however, it appeared that Noora’s feelings of responsibility extended beyond the dance community in her home environment, encompassing the wider social community she was living within. She explained that “there is a lot of responsibility, in this tiny little country [Occupied Palestine]”. Rebecca revealed that she felt a sense of responsibility when she returned to Malta, and this acted as motivation for her to produce dance works. She shared,

I was sick of the complaining. I was like let’s do something, actually do something, not just talk about how there is nothing here [in Malta] for us. It is our job, my job to do something here, to change something.

Nesrine also spoke of responsibility towards contributing and ‘changing’ dance in her home environment. She shared, “I need to contribute something to dance in Tunisia. There are many people dancing the same dance as me in France, in Tunisia I think I can change something.” From the seven women’s narratives it appeared that to varying degrees they felt social responsibility in both dance communities and wider social communities they were engaging with. Sometimes these feelings of responsibility motivated the development of their artistic

work. For others there was a sense of responsibility to contribute to change within their dance communities, and for some there was a responsibility to ‘change’ how dance might be viewed or perceived in their home locations.

For some of the dance practitioners the feelings of social responsibility and the desire to create dance in their home locations, have been somewhat heightened with the Arab Spring uprisings. Mey described how the events in Syria have led her to reconsider her role as a dance practitioner in her home environment, and the responsibility she has as an artist to make statements through her choreographic work that are relevant to the socio-political situation. She explained, “But I want to use that tension as a way of making my statement towards the issues we are facing.”

While it may be too soon to fully comprehend the repercussions the Arab Spring events might have on dance practitioners lives and artistic work, it has been noted that the roles artists play during such upheavals are significant (Curran, 2011; El Nabawi, 2011; Fayed, 2011c). As Jordanian performance artist, Lana Nasser (2011) explained when reflecting on the role of artists within the regions uprisings: “Artists are the makers of new myths, and it is time for us to create new myths” (personal communication, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011). A number of other artists have also shared how they feel it is a necessity for artists to speak the unspeakable of these events, to look towards new ways of disseminating social issues through the arts and the importance of performative acts such as protesting and occupying public spaces (MacFarquhar, 2011; Moussaoui, 2011; Sultan, 2011). Future studies may investigate artists’ experiences of the uprisings and the effect that this has had on dance and creative practices in the region.

The dancers’ narratives revealed that they all returned home for a variety of reasons. While artistic ideals and directions acted as a motivating reason to return home for some, this was not a motivation expressed by all. For some of the women there was a strong intention to return to their home environment to share artistic practices they learnt abroad. Others returned home due to specific situations influenced by family, finances, visa issues and homesickness, and were not particularly driven by personal motivations to explore creative and artistic opportunities, or to purposefully bring dance knowledge to their home locations with the purpose of ‘educating’

those in their home environment. From exploring the seven women's reasons for returning home, it can be asked, once they returned what were their experiences, and how might these experiences further intersect with notions of alienation, place, home and Fanon's concept of the native intellectual?

## **7.2 Returning home: Dancing with alienation, isolation and responsibility**

The feelings each dance practitioner encountered once they returned home varied, yet were often consuming. Many of the women's narratives included memories of various challenges they experienced upon their return, including isolation, alienation, social responsibility, and confusion over identity, place and home, as well as feelings of limited personal, social and financial support for their work. This section of the chapter explores these experiences in further detail.

### *7.2.1 Alienation at home*

Some of the women spoke of how they felt alienated and isolated from family and friends, local dance communities or wider society when they returned home. For example Dalia explained, "Here [in Cairo] you feel isolated, like you might be the only person who does something related to modern dance." It also appeared that this feeling of alienation led some of the women to question their dance practices once they returned home. Meryem, Rebecca and Mey's narratives illuminate this experience. Meryem revealed that "I was asking myself big questions, sort of interrogating myself about whether I should continue to dance or asking myself, 'Should I stop?'" Another example can be seen within Rebecca's narrative. She stated that "I was questioning it still. I was like, 'Is this dance? What am I doing?'" Rebecca went on to explain her confusion about how to continue her dance practices at home in Malta: "I used to spend moments of silence just thinking, 'What will happen when I finish my studies? How am I going to be able to continue dance in Malta? Should I try to stay in England?'" Mey also questioned her dance practices when she returned to Damascus. She explained, "Sometimes you really start thinking, 'What are you doing? Why are you doing contemporary dance in such a fucking society?'"

Some individuals who were questioning their dance practices at home were also expressing a sense of personal guilt about the act of dancing in their home locations (as can be viewed within

Mey's narrative presented above). This issue of guilt and the sense of importance some of the women placed on dance in their lives, reiterates the argument that the situation for teaching, learning and performing dance in the southern Mediterranean may be more multifaceted than the opinions presented within some previous research investigating dance in the region.

Several women also discussed the vacuum they felt engulfed them when they returned home after time abroad, contributing to feelings of alienation. Meryem expressed her feelings in the following statement: "I felt that I was returning to a desert. There was no dance, contemporary dance like I was used to in France, nothing dynamic [...] so it was very frustrating for me." Nada expressed frustration when recalling her initial experiences of returning to Beirut, explaining that she felt alienated in her home environment, particularly when asked what her occupation was: "If people asked me what I did [...] I would get strange looks. Sometimes people would say things, negative things. Others might just ignore you and pretend like they didn't hear you." Dalia also explained feelings of alienation within her home environment, expressing the disconnection she felt between her own ideas and those she was surrounded by: "It was awful and I felt so alienated... I couldn't connect with the people, I couldn't connect with the people at home, with my family, I couldn't connect with what I was reading [...] I couldn't connect with anything."

It can also be viewed that the experience of returning home was most difficult for those who felt that they did not choose to return. An example of this is Dalia's experience of arriving home, and her subsequent struggle adapting to Cairo after a lengthy time abroad. This could be seen as a result of essentially being forced to return to Egypt by her family. In Egypt she explained how she found herself surrounded by her family, who she resented for pressuring her to come home to Egypt, and a dance environment that she felt disconnected and alienated from, partly because her ideas and perspectives of dance did not necessarily correspond with those within the local dance scene. The notion of alienation shared by the seven dancers connects with the literature documenting the experiences of other dance practitioners who have engaged in international education in dance and then returned to their home environments. Some of these experiences have been shared previously within the review of the literature (see 2.1.2).

### 7.2.2 *More responsibility*

Several dance practitioners expressed a responsibility to contribute significantly to the dance community in their home environments once they returned home. This is an issue previously explored in relation to the motivations and decisions of why and when to return home. Some of the women revealed the social pressure and expectations they felt about their creative work as well as their social actions and behaviours in their home environment. Examples of such experiences can be seen in the narratives shared by Noora and Mey. Noora explained, “I feel this huge responsibility [at home] and then I leave and it’s like a weight has been lifted.” Mey also felt that she was under scrutiny in her home environment, particularly by those who were involved in the local dance community. She explained, “I felt like everyone was afraid of me, the people at the Higher Institute [in Damascus], everyone was afraid of their position, like thinking that ‘she might come and take my position’.”

### 7.2.3 *Questioning identity and confusion over place and home*

The experiences of returning home shared by the dancers can be viewed in relation to Kariamuwelsh-Asante’s (1990) research (see 2.1.2). Welsh-Asante asserts that an African choreographer returning home is viewed as a stranger, bringing with them a foreign language of choreographic practice. Building on Welsh-Asante’s concept it could also be said that the southern Mediterranean choreographer (or dancer or teacher) returning home is viewed as a stranger too, and perhaps this ‘strangeness’ emerges from the various approaches towards dance that these artists might take in their home environment, and the ways in which the foreign dance languages may be articulated or translated within a different cultural context (further discussed within chapter 8). Welsh-Asante’s notion and the women’s reflections can be connected to Fanon’s (1952/1967a) concept of the native intellectual’s response to returning home and the questioning that might take place around themes of identity, place and home. In the following statement Fanon articulates, the conflict and confusion the native intellectual may encounter:

A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself in me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world (1952/1967a, p.83).

Some of the dance practitioners explained how they felt torn between the emotions of wanting to return to a place that felt like home and wanting to remain engaged with the dance community and atmosphere that they had become accustomed to abroad. The experience of alienation and disconnection, in relation to the experience of moving from one culture or environment to another, has also been discussed within a number of texts (Bhugra, 2004; Bhugra & Becker, 2005), with the experience of alienation being frequently discussed in reference to the experience of migrating from one's own 'home' to another new 'home' (Bhugra, 2004; Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Dinesh Bhugra and Matthew Becker (2005) explain that through migration an individual may feel "isolated from his or her culture, unaccepted by the 'majority culture'" and if the individual lacks social support they may feel a "sense of rejection, alienation and poor self esteem may occur" (p.19). In Dalia's situation it was the return to her previous home environment that stimulated the feelings of isolation and alienation. Through an experience such as Dalia's it can be seen that the description offered by Bhugra and Becker is also relevant to the return to one's own home after an extended period abroad.

Some individuals' narratives also revealed how moving between locations and cultures, along with experiences of alienation and cultural adaptation can shift one's self-identity. As Rebecca explained, "I came home and I was wondering how do I fit in here [in Malta]? I'm not like a Maltese woman, but I'm not a European woman like in England or Germany... I'm in-between maybe." Rebecca's confusion over identity could be further understood through a Fanonian lens that cites colonialism as something that influences such shifts in identity in a particular way.

Fanon (1961/1967b) asserts:

Because it is a systematic negotiation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?' (p.200).

Fanon's statement also relates to the perspectives shared by Nawal El-Saadawi (1997), Edward Said and Bonnie Marranca (1991) and Farha Ghannam (2009). Views from these scholars highlight the complexity of how aspects of an individual's identity can merge in different ways at different times, and how facets of identities are often somewhat fragmented, fractured and fluid over time (Hall, 1996). Roseanne Saad Khalaf's (2009) description of the "suspended



betweenness” (p.111) of identity that can arise from the experience of moving between cultures and locations is also relevant to the discussion of the seven women’s experiences of how identity can be affected by training in a different cultural context, and an idea that seems to be inherent within Fanon’s articulation of the native intellectual’s experience. For example, Meryem expresses her experience in the following statement:

I was questioning the state of freedom we have here [...] you are free but not as free as in other locations [...] For me this was connected to how to express my identity as a dancer, as a Moroccan. For me it was a bit of an identity crisis [...] I started to think that maybe I am not as French as I thought [laughs], so, I decided that I just wanted to get rid of the occidental or Western model that we rely on here, try something that is just me, maybe a mix of things, maybe not ‘Moroccan’, maybe not ‘French’, maybe just something that is me, here, now.

Through Meryem’s narrative the notion of self-identity is raised in relation to her experience of returning home. Meryem’s narrative also illuminates particular issues regarding the approach towards dance she has taken since returning home. The idea that Meryem discusses, of rejecting that occidental model of dance education that she herself was educated within abroad, raises questions about the other individuals’ approaches towards dance in their home environment.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter various motivations for returning home have been revealed, ranging from the desire to pursue new artistic and creative opportunities, to issues related to visas and finances that propelled the dance practitioners to return home. Returning home brought specific challenges for the women, most notably the experience of alienation. Many questioned notions of identity, place and home and negotiated feelings of social responsibility in their home locations. From the dance practitioners’ narratives of returning home, their approaches towards dance at home can be further explored, investigating questions such as: how have these women, who could be considered native intellectuals, approached teaching, performing or creating dance in their home environments? What pedagogic, somatic and choreographic approaches did they take when they returned home? How were the transformative or alienating dance experiences they encountered abroad then approached when they returned home? Were any of these approaches problematic? The following chapter explores these questions further, investigating how the seven women are approaching dance in their home environments.

## **Chapter 8: Approaches towards dance at home: Pedagogic, choreographic and somatic practices**

The seven women returned home to take on diverse roles within dance communities: some became more involved in teaching, others in performing or choreographing. However, they frequently took on multiple tasks, including roles as dancers, teachers, choreographers, artistic directors and arts administrators, with these roles also appearing to be changeable over time. Some of the women arrived home with the intention of being solely a dancer, a choreographer or a teacher; however, they frequently found that these tasks were not so clearly defined. For example, some of the women revealed that teaching dance was often required to maintain their choreographic or performance practices, or alternatively choreographic work sustained their performance and pedagogical practices in their home environment. Therefore, the pedagogic, choreographic and somatic elements of the dance practitioners' work have developed in different ways, often depending on what they have pursued in their home locations. It can be noted that this chapter focuses on the behaviours and practices articulated in the dance practitioners' narratives and displayed within the classes, rehearsals and performances that were observed. Rather than aiming to subliminally categorise these individuals as 'rebels' or 'conformists', the intention of this chapter is to place an emphasis on the various strategies they have employed when approaching dance at home and the motivations for taking such directions.

While there is much exploration of Western dance practitioners borrowing from non-Western cultures (Chakravorty, 2000-2001; Desmond, 1993-1994; Grau, 1992, 2008), there is little documentation of how non-Western dance artists negotiate Western dance practices that they might have been educated within when working as artists in non-Western contexts. This chapter explores the approaches the seven women have taken towards dance since returning home, and how international education in dance in Western cultural contexts may have affected their dance practices, while identifying processes of cultural hegemony, anti-hegemony and counter-hegemony occurring through these approaches. Cultural hegemony in relation to dance could be viewed as a replication or emulation of foreign practices, with the perception that they are superior forms of knowledge. Counter-hegemony in relation to dance can be defined as a

rejection of foreign dance ideas and practices because of their ‘foreignness’ and the perceived threat of such practices on local environments, and anti-hegemony can be understood as an approach where no single form dominates or is held up as the ‘ideal’ (Rowe, 2008).

The first section of this chapter discusses the women’s approaches towards dance pedagogy at home. The second section examines their choreographic and creative practices in their home environment. The third section of this chapter explores their approaches towards somatic practices when they returned home.

### **8.1 Approaches towards pedagogical practices**

Reflecting on teaching dance at home, the seven women expressed diverse approaches that shifted and evolved over time. Some explained how replicating the knowledge they gathered abroad was the first pedagogical strategy they adopted when they arrived home. For example Meryem said, “At first I was just repeating what I learnt abroad.” Likewise, Mey stated that “I felt like I was just repeating what I had learned in Frankfurt, I was not sure of myself as a teacher”. The motivation for taking this approach could possibly be due to the lack of confidence and experience some of the dance practitioners had in teaching, as highlighted within Mey’s narrative. A lack of confidence in teaching was a feeling that was reiterated in others experiences. For example, Nesrine expressed, “I did not really get taught how to teach [...] I didn’t have much experience and I didn’t have much information to make the classes.” Similarly, Rebecca explained, “I’m just winging it [teaching]. I don’t really feel that confident teaching.” However, both Nesrine and Rebecca revealed that while feeling a lack of confidence in their teaching, they were cautious not to directly replicate the dance practices and pedagogical strategies they encountered abroad. Nesrine explained, “I cannot just repeat my lessons from Paris because they are not so relevant [...] they are not connected to the place or the people I might be teaching, unless they are maybe going to Paris!” Rebecca also spoke of prioritizing local dance practices and an individual’s self-expression over the replication of foreign dance practices within her teaching. She expressed; “I think it’s important to teach people about their identity through dance, about how they can express themselves and their culture, not hiding that behind some dance technique.”

The issue of confidence in teaching potentially relates to what the dance practitioners learnt or experienced regarding pedagogy when they were training abroad. Were they explicitly taught pedagogical skills within their training or were they taught solely performance and choreographic skills? Many of the women found themselves in teaching situations when they returned home, frequently teaching dance to sustain their own creative practice; however, they appeared to be ill-equipped with pedagogical skills and lacked confidence in their teaching abilities. It could be viewed that replicating practices and methods learnt abroad could be the most straightforward and instinctive approach for some of the dance practitioners to take when teaching at home, especially when they appeared to be unprepared to critically consider how to approach dance in an alternative way or equipped with adaptive pedagogical skills. The approach of teachers replicating what they learnt and encountered as dance students has been articulated within the work of several scholars (see: Fortin & Siedentop, 1995; Lakes, 2005; Robson, Book & Wilmerding, 2002; Sims, 2010); however, such an issue has not been examined specifically in relation to international dance students' approaches towards teaching in their home locations. Therefore, it could be of benefit for dance institutions training international students to consider how they are preparing international students to return home to take on a variety of roles within their dance communities; are students being equipped with skills to teach confidently and competently within diverse cultural contexts and groups?

Some individuals explained how their approaches towards teaching dance have shifted over the time they have been at home. For example, Meryem explained that while she felt her initial methodology towards teaching in Casablanca involved replicating foreign dance forms and pedagogical strategies, her pedagogical approaches had since shifted. She articulated how she was working to develop a new dance language to teach and perform in her home environment, an approach that she perceives to be more culturally relevant:

[I] started to ask more questions about what I was teaching and how I was teaching it. I questioned what I had learned say when I was 20, and now 15 years later how do those same ideas work, why don't some of them work? [...] Why might they work in France but not here [in Casablanca]? I was trying to see what was helpful to keep – pedagogically – but also what material was relevant to what I wanted my students to be able to achieve and experience [...] making a new language to use here, not just relying on the old way and wondering why we might not be able to

express ourselves so well in another dance language.

The shift from replicating practices learnt abroad, to adapting or discarding them could occur for a variety of reasons. It could have been due to being distanced from foreign dance practices and ideas. It could have been driven by reactions from students, as illustrated within Meryem's narrative, where she revealed that "I was not feeling that I was making such a connection with the students, not like in France. Something had to change, and it was what I was teaching and how I was teaching it". Alternatively, it could be through the desire to gain particular pedagogical skills to become a more effective teacher, as explained by Mey in the following statement: "I had to learn more about how to be an actual teacher, and a teacher in a Syrian environment." These examples also reveal how transformative experiences through dance teaching might be occurring in encounters of teaching dance at home, an issue that could be of interest for future studies to pursue further.

Some of the dance practitioners explained how they felt they had a particular dance 'knowledge' to share, expressing that they perceived this could contribute to change in their local dance communities. This is a concept that connects with notions of social responsibility that some individuals had previously expressed (see 7.1.5). Frequently this knowledge was connected to teaching a certain dance technique, or passing on a certain contemporary dance philosophy. Mey's narrative revealed how a particular knowledge she was teaching involved replicating a certain dance technique she learnt abroad. Mey explained how she teaches Pilates classes at HIDA in Damascus, and that she has often felt some of the students do not fully appreciate the knowledge she shares with them. She expressed; "I did one hour on the floor Pilates [...] they [the students] were like, 'What did you do to us? Why do we have to do this? How is this going to make us better?'" She continued by explaining, "For me it was obvious [to include Pilates in a dancers training] [...] but I thought that's it, we have very different ideas of what you need to do to train to be a dancer." Mey's expectations of what constituted a 'good' dancer appeared to be overtly informed by her experiences abroad. She went on to clarify these expectations: "For me a dancer has to be dedicated, be able to perform technically, physically well – for me this is the technique, and that is what we don't have here." While Mey claimed that she felt technique was something dancers in her home environment were lacking, from a concern over hegemony it

could be understood that it was only that they were lacking the techniques that Mey valued.

Another example can be viewed in Dalia's narrative:

I find it very hard because for me Graham technique is Graham technique, some parts of it should not change [...] teaching these aspects, I hope in a small way this might just change how they [the students] see things, they might question something, they might be able to develop their bodies to become real dancers... this is what we need. Sometimes I think they get bored quite quickly with Graham [technique], they don't realize that you have to have a secure technique. I don't want to force them to do it, but it feels like I do at times.

Within Dalia's narrative it seems that she perceives cultural development within Western conceptions of cultural progress and that 'cultural progress' could be achieved through the incorporation of Western models of dance education and aesthetics. Observing and participating in several of Dalia's classes at the Cairo Opera House, I noticed how she taught Graham technique meticulously, almost as though she was replicating every breath from her memory of learning the form in New York. I sensed that she was trying to hold onto the dance form she learnt abroad dearly. It seemed that she genuinely felt it was important for her students to experience this technique in what she considered an 'authentic' way. In discussion with Dalia about her approach towards teaching dance she articulated that "I either teach this technique or I don't, there's no half way for me". From Dalia's narrative a binary perception of pedagogical approaches was occurring, where foreign ideas seemed to be critically followed, with the alternative option appearing to be to completely reject these practices. Through this perspective it could be viewed that notions of foreign cultural hegemony are being reinforced, reaffirming Rowe's articulation that the influences of cross-cultural dance education activities may contribute "to issues of cultural hegemony" and the "subjugation of culturally diverse populations by a politically dominant group" (p.5, 2008). However, within Dalia's narrative there were also contrasts. While there appeared to be an approach of replication and reinforcement of cultural hegemony through her pedagogical strategies, Dalia simultaneously spoke of the desire to adapt some aspects of these Western dance practices to her home environment:

When I teach my students, I look at how I can adapt things for them from what I was taught in America, bridging the gap a bit between that world and the world here. I try to maybe change the music to something more local, sometimes incorporate some moves that are more relaxed and not so 'technique' based but

this is about as far as I can take it.

Such changeability in perspectives reveals that within a single dance practitioner's approach towards teaching there may be multiple strategies being employed and negotiated, some of which could be viewed as hegemonic, anti-hegemonic or even counter-hegemonic, co-existing and overlapping within dance teaching. Dalia and Mey's approaches appeared to be caught between the ideas and expectations of dance pedagogy at home and abroad. Through some of their statements and the observation of their teaching practices, it could be viewed that at times they were emulating foreign pedagogical approaches in their home environments, possibly to reaffirm their self-identity and a sense of belonging to a particular 'place'. However, the issue is perhaps more complex. While some of the women, such as Mey and Dalia, appear to be reinforcing cultural hegemony through various facets of their pedagogical approaches, it is possible that this is not an explicit agenda within their teaching; rather, they could be perceived as carriers of "insidious" cultural hegemony (Rowe, 2008, p.3), where their dance knowledge and practices are inseparable from their self-identity and indistinguishable from knowledge gained abroad. The role that transformative pedagogical encounters had within their dance learning experiences abroad could also be questioned: are the dancers approaching dance teaching in a particular way based on the transformative pedagogical experiences they had when they were abroad?

Contrasting to the approaches taken by Dalia and Mey, other women approached dance pedagogy at home with attitudes of rebellion and resistance towards the dance practices that they encountered abroad. For example, Nada expressed the need to resist 'importing' pedagogical practices, dance teachers and institutional models. She stated that "it is important for us not to import [...] why to import teachers and how institutions should run [...] why to put this energy in importing rather than developing what we have here already?" Nada's comments reflect the notion raised within Fanon's (1952/1967a, 1961/1967b) writings, where it is acknowledged that there is frequently a desire for a 'model' for various institutions and structures. Fanon states, "it is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring" (1961/1967b, p.252). However, Fanon then poses the question, "Have we not got other work to do than to create a third Europe?" (1961/1967b, p.252).

Some of the other dance practitioners reiterated Nada's perspective, specifically citing the need to resist foreign dance teachers who are teaching foreign dance forms in their home locations, expressing frustration and counter-hegemonic attitudes over the high regard some in their home environment held for foreign dance teachers. These feelings of counter-hegemony emerged even when they contradicted the individual's own practices. For example, Mey, who had previously expressed her replication of foreign dance practices at home, explained that "teaching Western contemporary [dance] here is not seen to be a positive thing, people would rather foreigners teach it". She expanded on this understanding in the following statement:

The Higher Institute [of Dramatic Arts, Damascus] Director is like, "We have a teacher from Holland and we have another teacher from Greece," and he is telling this to everyone... So what! [...] It is this complex – from abroad – it's always this complex and it's so awful.

Mey expressed such attitudes despite also demonstrating pedagogical practices that could be viewed as strengthening cultural hegemony in her home environment. This again highlights the complexity of approaches and perspectives within one's experience and understanding of teaching dance. Situations such as those expressed by Mey, that position dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean region as learners, and dance practitioners from Europe and North America as teachers, could be seen to extend foreign cultural hegemony within dance education environments in the region (Martin, 2011). This is an issue that could be pursued within future investigations, further questioning the repercussions of cultural interventions and encounters of cross-cultural dance education.

Other individuals explored how they felt the foreign dance practices they engaged with when abroad did not have the same validity and relevance in their home environment, explaining that this is why they have chosen to exclude them from their teaching practices. For example, Nada expressed that "you cannot take the European model and put it here [...] you cannot tell people things in the same way as you tell them in Europe". While Nada might be assuming that groups of people have homogenous ways of thinking and learning, it appears that this belief informs her approach towards dance teaching in her home environment. However, while she spoke of rebelling against certain dance ideas she learnt abroad, Nada also articulated how she chose to approach her teaching at home in a more culturally relevant way; "I might not always use ballet



music to do ballet to – why not use Arab music? [...] it is a way of connecting it to the local environment more”. From Nada’s narrative, and also from observing her classes, it appeared to me that the content she taught and the pedagogical methods she applied were lodged between established approaches to teaching the traditional, codified vocabulary of ballet and Western modern dance, while also negotiating the needs of the students in a more culturally relevant, student-centred, democratically orientated way (Dyer, 2009). Nada’s teaching could be an example of an anti-hegemonic approach towards dance pedagogy, where she selectively ‘fused’ ideas from diverse learning and cultural contexts creating a situation where one dance form or approach was not overtly privileged more than another.

From the statements expressed by Nada, and also previously from Mey and Meryem, the issue of culturally relevant dance education is illuminated. Reiterating the importance of culturally responsive dance pedagogy, dance educator Elizabeth Melchior (2011) states that “teachers should become aware of, and understand, their personal biases, their own cultures, and more importantly, the biases and cultures of their students” (p.119). Mey discussed the approach she had taken teaching a duet to students at HIDA in Damascus. Mey acknowledged that she had taken a different pedagogical approach than if she had been teaching the same duet in Europe. She stated, “It’s not even something I think about – I just know. I can’t teach contact here like I would in Germany, but it’s not like I’ve sat down for hours and thought about how to do it differently here.” She went on to explain that she had made this decision in part because of her familiarity with her home environment: “For me I know my home, I know what works, what won’t. Here I can’t just get them to roll all over each other at first, it just won’t happen.” Mey’s perspective connects with Jane Desmond’s (1993-1994) concept of “bodily bilingualism” (p.46), and is a notion that also relates to Cynthia Novack’s idea (1995) that “dance may reflect and resist cultural values simultaneously” (p.181), thus, reiterating the view that a multiplicity of bodies are produced through dance learning in different cultural contexts. While there might be an awareness of culturally relevant approaches to dance teaching articulated by some of the women, it could be asked, is it actually being implemented within their teaching practices? This raises the question: how can dance practitioners, who might be working in relative isolation in their home environments, learn the skills to approach dance teaching in a culturally relevant way

if they have not been taught this within their dance education abroad? Does a culturally relevant approach towards dance equate with an anti-hegemonic approach towards dance?

Nada's narrative also highlights the translation and hybridisation occurring in pedagogical approaches. Some of the dance practices the women are teaching could be considered 'cultural hybrids' (Frühau, 2009, p.136). Alternatively, referring to the work of Homi Bhabha (1990b) it could be viewed that some of the dance practitioners' work is emerging from a 'third space', a space where new perspectives have the potential to transpire. Bhabha explains that "the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (p.211). The following statement made by Bhabha within the writings of Paul Meredith (1998) illuminates how this third space can further empower one's hybridized reality. Bhabha explains this as "a form of liminal or in-between space, where the cutting edge of translation and negotiation occurs" (p.2).

Through these individuals' narratives a process of transculturation can also be observed. *Transculturation* is a term coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1995), with the term being used to describe the process of one culture impacting on another. In relation to dance this might mean that forms, traditions and pedagogical methods are shared, excluded, borrowed, represented or ignored in this process (Chin, 1989; Taylor, 1991). Applied specifically to dance and the dance practitioners' narratives, transculturation can be perceived as processes by which various dance traditions, histories, aesthetics and knowledges are transformed as one community or group's dance practices change through engagement with another. Examples are Nada's approach to teaching ballet to Arabic rhythms, or Meryem's synthesis of Western modern dance with more local dance practices drawn from the students own dance vocabulary.

While some of the women, such as Nada and Meryem, appeared to be consciously seeking ways to blend aspects of Western dance forms with non-Western creative practices, others were encountering this process in a more unconscious fashion. This unconscious transculturation and dance fusion appeared to be occurring through the translation and transference of dance between bodies, space and time, echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) suggestion that the

subaltern must always be negotiating processes of translation, between Western ideas and languages and their own. For example, Mey spoke of and demonstrated replicating some foreign dance ideals in her pedagogical practices, yet this replication was not consistent and there were occasions where her teaching practices seemed to blend the dance knowledge she gained abroad and knowledge of the environment she was working in. I noticed this observing her work with two students at HIDA. Mey was choreographing a duet that had several complex partnering phrases requiring close physical contact between two dancers. After she discussed the theme and interpretation of the duet with the two students Mey began to work on the choreography. She asked them to 'feel' and 'imagine' some of the movement before creating any steps. She then encouraged them to emulate some movements that she presented to them, and then led them to explore these movements as a starting point for individually developing movements of their own, offering suggestions to initiate the movement with a particular body part or momentum. Mey then asked the students to improvise with movement ideas they had developed, directing them to work within close proximity of each other, starting side by side. She invited them to find ways to connect or interweave their movement together, which evolved into the dancers giving weight to each other, arms connecting or movement rebounding between their bodies. Mey was gentle in her approach, focused on allowing the students time to become more accustomed to being in each other's personal space, letting them explore what the movement would become rather than prescribing it.

The approaches towards dance pedagogy that some of the women have taken when returning home could be seen as examples of both overt and insidious cultural hegemony, with some expressing the assumption that the 'expertise' they gathered abroad or the foreign dance practice that they are teaching is 'required' to add value and significance to dance in their home environment. Others' practices illustrate a more anti-hegemonic approach towards dance teaching, revealing a fusion of dance ideas and approaches where transculturation of practices learnt abroad with those gathered locally is occurring. However, throughout many of the women's narratives it is shown that there is contradiction between the pedagogical practices that they have employed at home, revealing that the translation of pedagogical strategies and dance ideas between cultural environments can be confusing. The dance practitioners' experiences

demonstrate that there are feelings that they are caught between ideas, resisting while also representing, innovating and invigorating while also prescribing and preserving dance within their pedagogical practices.

## **8.2 Approaches towards choreographic and creative practices**

Like approaches towards pedagogical practices, the seven women's choreographic and creative work took diverse directions when they returned home. Some of the dance practitioners expressed how they felt their initial approach towards choreography was through replicating what they had experienced and learnt abroad. Nada explained; "I was inspired by the work I had been around in Cannes, in Paris; I was taking that and using that as a starting point here [in Beirut]." For others the approach of replication became the foundation for their choreographic and creative work at home, raising questions over the cultural hegemony that could develop from such practices. Mey described how she looked towards choreographic practices from abroad; "I think certain choreographers' works need to be seen here [...] This is how we are going to develop our work here."

Instances of cultural hegemony also appeared to permeate some of the women's creative work through collaborations and exchanges they were participating in at home. This was frequently where foreign choreographers or foreign cultural institutions had influence over the dance practitioners' choreography or creative directions. For example, Meryem reflected on her experience of working with Belgian choreographer Fatou Traoré. She said, "Without this exchange I'm not sure how my work would have developed, I think it gave me confidence initially." Dalia also expressed how she felt her encounters with foreign cultural interventions had a positive influence on her dance practices when she returned home. She expressed,

I applied to do this collaboration with this French dancer [...] I felt because I was working with a French woman on the performance it would be a lot stronger [...] it was going to be successful because of this.

Through collaborating with the French Cultural Centre and with a French choreographer, it appears that Dalia perceived her position as a dancer and choreographer would be validated, positioning her work as 'European' and therefore 'valuable'. As explored within the review of

literature (see 2.1.1), there is the possibility that within the re-presentation of Western contemporary dance practices within non-Western contexts the accompanying cultural values and understandings might consciously and unconsciously convey cultural agendas that influence and infiltrate local cultural environments, regardless of whether this is the dance practitioner's or foreign choreographer's intention, or the intention of the cultural institute that might be supporting them.

Certain individuals' narratives and creative work revealed that there were also approaches of rebellion towards specific choreographic practices and ideas. Some of the women seemed to pursue counter-hegemonic intentions within their creative work at home, expressing the need to find ways to purposefully resist Western practices of choreography to avoid estrangement from the cultural identities of their home environments. For example, Noora explained that "I've done some co-productions [that are cross-cultural and internationally collaborative] and people have come and said, 'How can you let this happen, how can you let them [foreign artists, groups and organizations] do this here, to us?'" She went on to explain, "This makes me cautious now, cautious not to let colonial perspectives override the culture here, the strong identity we have as dancers."

Beirut dancer and choreographer Khoulood Yassine echoed Noora's perspective when sharing her thoughts for the *Our Dance Stories: Southern Mediterranean* book (see 3.4.1). Khoulood expressed how she felt that some Western contemporary dance practices and choreographic approaches that were presented in her home environment had the ability to isolate and alienate local audiences. She revealed how she felt the influence of foreign dance practices discouraged local audiences from attending or participating in dance activities, and exacerbated the scepticism some held towards contemporary dance. This is a notion that connects with Rowe's (2007) findings that modern dance practices in the Central West Bank have faced opposition by some in society, as they appear to threaten local cultural practices and social values. Khoulood explained:

I think people feel like strangers watching a contemporary dance here [...] On the artists' side there is this pretension, 'I know better than you' feeling – even I have this feeling from a piece sometimes when I go to performances, and I am an artist! It makes you feel excluded and I think this puts people off contemporary dance.

We don't need these copy-cat European performances, or European artists coming to show us what dance is, we have our own [dance], we will be fine without it [Western dance practices].

By eliminating and excluding certain dance ideas or practices within choreographic and creative work, as highlighted by Khoulood, essentially because they are from a different cultural group who might also be considered the oppressing and/or colonizing culture, there is the possibility of “a burdensome relational basis for local cultural identity” (Rowe, 2008, p.6). Applying theories by Homi Bhabha (1994) to dance, Rowe (2008) states that “the compulsion to both criticize and disregard the colonizing Other can [...] become a major problem for cultural growth” (p.6), with such a counter-hegemonic relational basis having the potential to become as limiting and extraneous as the foreign dance practices and ideals that were being resisted in the first instance (Rowe, 2008).

The viewpoints shared by Noora and Khoulood could be understood from a variety of perspectives. It could be seen that they are rebelling against foreign ideas purely because the ideas are foreign, and could be perceived to be ‘corrupting’ their local cultures. Or they might be enacting counter-hegemonic approaches out of concern over how others in their local environment might perceive their work and allegiance to local ideals and issues. Alternatively, a reason why they might purposefully be choosing to rebel against particular dance practices could be related to the history of their home environments and the socio-cultural reality in which they are living and working in. The refusal to participate in foreign cultural activities and employing counter-hegemonic strategies could be for political rather than artistic reasons. For example, Noora's home location (the Occupied Palestinian Territories) is under foreign military occupation. This could be seen to contribute to her feelings of rebellion and refusal to partake in furthering colonizing processes and cultural hegemony through the replication of foreign dance practices. Noora explained, “I choose not to work with some Europeans artists, not because they are European, but because I don't like their ideas and they have very colonial views.”

Some of the women expressed how they perceived it to be important to develop choreographic practices that were connected to their home environments and local artistic practices. For

example, Rebecca explained how she felt she wanted to create work that was relevant and accessible to a local audience. Recalling the creation of a collaborative work she was involved in she expressed that “we thought that we need to make it more relevant and maybe more accessible to the Maltese”. Similarly, Noora explained how a vital element of her choreographic work is the use of dabke, viewing it as a tool that has enabled her to create work based on material she is culturally connected with. She articulated that “dabke is a tool and it doesn’t negate the idea of having contemporary dance, but it [dabke] is also a tool and can be put in a contemporary setting”. She went on to explain how she is most interested in connecting with dance experiences that are developed in her home environment when creating work: “So I’m really interested in [...] working with dancers like in El-Funoun who have a dance background, but not in the sense of being Western dancers.”

Looking at Noora’s experience further it is of interest to note that she has spent her time abroad in frequent but short time periods. This contrasts to the long periods of time that some of the other women spent away before returning home permanently. The multiple returns Noora has made, each time having new experiences abroad and new experiences of adaption when returning, may have influenced her approach to dance at home. Perhaps frequent returns home foster counter-hegemonic approaches towards choreographic and creative practices, or alternatively it may allow opportunities to adapt dance practices between different cultural contexts, providing the chance to reflect on what aspects of foreign dance practices to discard and what to incorporate at home, pursuing a more anti-hegemonic strategy where one dance practice or idea is not privileged over another.

Some of the women appeared to be cautious or wary about what foreign practices were presented in their creative work at home, others were not so antagonistic towards allowing foreign dance practices to become incorporated into their work, taking what could be described as an anti-hegemonic approach towards choreographic and creative practices. For example, Nada explained:

I discovered that there is a certain style that I need in my choreographies – the structure of the bodies, the muscular way of using the body [...] I need techniques in my choreographies – but I hate the very classical style, I am not interested in prescribing exactly the same as what is being done in France for example.

An anti-hegemonic approach towards choreography and creative practices appeared to be consistent with Nada's pedagogical approach, while her narrative also acts as a reminder that these practices are not independent activities; rather, they are informed and formed by each other. Nada explained how she felt reluctant to label her choreography, saying that "I don't try to create anything under a specific label, European or anything else". Similarly, Nesrine also raised the problem of 'labelling' her work: "I hate to label the dance I do as 'Tunisian' or 'Western'; it is not either, it is a mix and they are just labels." Nesrine also articulated perspectives that highlighted anti-hegemonic views towards her creative work at home, expressing that "people at home might not understand my choreographies or how I like to dance, but for me this is the way I move. I have what I learnt at home, what I learnt abroad".

Another example of synthesis, and what might also be considered an anti-hegemonic approach towards choreography, was observed in Meryem's work *Kelma... un cri a la mere* (2011), where aspects of Western contemporary dance practices were synthesised with movements, music, ideas and themes drawn from her home location. Stamping her feet, Meryem's unlaced leather boots pounded out a clear *Gnawa* rhythm,<sup>35</sup> over and over. I noticed how the movement Meryem was performing in one aspect of this solo work morphed from subtle shimmies of the torso, into rippling fuller movements that extended into her limbs, seemingly inspired by release technique ideas. While there were hints of the local emerging within the work, the use of the bendir, some rhythmic patterns and subtle movement cues, there was simultaneously a refusal to enter the popular construction of an 'Arab' dancer or 'Arab' woman, or alternatively a 'European' dancer or 'European' woman, working to resist any simplistic categorization. I felt that Meryem's performance provided an example of how an anti-choreographic approach could be taken within choreographic work.

However, it can be noted that an anti-hegemonic approach might not always translate on an aesthetic level, with insidious cultural hegemony emerging in choreographic practices even if the dance practitioner's intention was a synthesis of forms. An example I observed was Dalia's

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<sup>35</sup> *Gnawa* music is a mixture of sub-Saharan African, Berber, and Sufi religious songs and rhythms. In *Gnawa* music, one phrase is often repeated over and over (Kapchan, 2007).



performance, *I don't know what this dance is about, but it must be about something* (2011), during the Arab Dance Platform in Beirut (see 4.1). Before the performance Dalia had described to me the ideas that had informed this work, particularly the concept of using the vocabulary of Graham technique in a performance setting that aimed to reject a Western theatrical proscenium arch approach. Dalia performed this work in an intimate dance studio in central Beirut; there was no proscenium arch to separate the audience space from the performer's space, with the audience seated and standing around all four walls of the room. Dalia appeared to purposely avoid presenting her work to a single 'front', choreographing movement that often travelled in circular patterns through the room. However, the movements were presented in a way that created four 'fronts' rather than one, and Dalia employed the conventions of Graham technique in her choreographic choices, 'showing' this technique to the audience.

The observations of Meryem and Dalia's choreographic practice have similarities to observations made by others of the work of choreographers who are moving between cultural contexts. For example, Ann Cooper Albright (1997) provides reflections on the work of dancer and choreographer Zab Maboungou, and specifically Maboungou's choreography and performance of *Reverdanse* (1991). Albright explains how Maboungou's work draws on diverse dance practices and her histories of learning, performing and teaching dance in France, The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Canada, exposing a dilemma that "many contemporary minority artists face" (p.23). Where they find themselves "splayed between different communities, these artists must negotiate a minefield of strategic alliances and shifting identities" (1997, p.23).

Others articulated how they felt that their home environments intrinsically shaped the creative work that they make. For example, Noora stated, "Because I've worked within boundaries here all my life and this is what creates my work and inspires me, do I want to get rid of them or do I want to keep them?" The idea of working within boundaries, and the influence that environments might have on choreographic and creative work and choices, is something that Mey also expressed. For Mey these boundaries were often defined by censorship regulations, and within her narrative she reflected on several encounters she had experienced at home (see 4.4). Government censorship and surveillance is something mentioned by various artists across the

southern Mediterranean region. For example, Jordanian performance artist, Lana Nasser, posed the question, “Does censorship actually create more creative art, more innovative ways to say something? You just have to look at Iran<sup>36</sup> as an example” (personal communication, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011). This was an idea also raised by Dalia who explained that because of censorship it is “in the back of my mind that I have to be careful in the ideas or movements I choose, nothing too risqué. It’s not like a complete freedom of artistic work, it’s artistic work within boundaries”. It appears that the censorship some of the women experienced in their home locations has contributed to their approach towards choreographic and creative practices and ideas, contributing to their artistic choices of what to present and express within their work.

The seven women’s narratives reveal there are assorted approaches towards choreography and creative practices being taken when they return from training abroad. Some approaches the women have taken towards choreographic and creative practices at home often seem connected to the parameters of the cultures they are working within. With these parameters often dictating what work the individuals could (or felt they should) create. Some individuals’ narratives also reveal that elements of their choreographic and creative practices include the replication of methods and material learnt abroad, or through the influential relationships they develop with foreign choreographers and institutes, which in turn perhaps perpetuate cultural hegemony. There are also instances where the women were questioning particular modes and methods of dance they experienced in Western cultural contexts. For some this included taking a counter-hegemonic approach towards aspects of choreographic practices in their home locations, looking to work with local dance practices as a starting point for their creative work and resisting foreign models to base their work on. The women also spoke of looking for ways to adapt various dance practices to their home environment, or alternatively to create entirely new dance paradigms, with the synthesis of dance practices being considered an anti-hegemonic approach towards choreography and creative practices.

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<sup>36</sup> The work of Yaser Khaseb, Atefeh Tehrani, Crazy Body Group and Black Narcissus are examples of contemporary Iranian dance and theatre makers who have explored the boundaries of censorship in Iran within their creative work.

### **8.3 Approaches towards somatic practices**

The seven women have taken various approaches towards somatic practices in their home locations, with somatic practices being understood as a way of approaching dance from the 'inside-out' rather than from the 'outside-in' (Hanna, 1986), or through the incorporation of various somatic techniques and methods in pedagogical, movement and choreographic strategies (Fortin, 2002). Some chose to explicitly employ somatic practices they learnt abroad in their pedagogical, choreographic and creative work when they returned home. Others disregarded these practices or selected certain aspects to incorporate into their work at home. It can be noted that the dance practitioners experienced somatic practices in varying degrees when training abroad. For some it was a central part of their studies, for others it was not a focus of their learning abroad. These diverse experiences of learning somatic techniques and ideas therefore could contribute to the practitioners' choices to include or exclude somatic practices in their work when they returned home.

From some of the dancers' narratives and the observation of their work, it can be seen that transferring somatic practices learnt abroad in their home locations raises specific challenges. For example, observing Mey's Pilates class I noticed how some of the female students were reluctant to place their hands on their sternums as Mey had instructed. Instead, they were lifting them high up towards their collarbones, or lowering them towards their mid-ribcage, avoiding touching the area of the body where their sternums were situated. It is possible that they were unsure of where exactly their sternum was in their chest, but it is also possible that there was an aversion to place their hands on their breasts. The privileging of an area of the body as a category of difference that was occurring in this class might be no different to how dance students of a similar age in a Western cultural context would approach the same task. However, it reiterates that there are specific considerations to be taken into account when taking a somatic form from one cultural context and placing it in another. I found it fascinating that the somatic form of Pilates appeared to be so embedded in Mey's corporeal reality that it had not been particularly adapted to the environment in which she was teaching, and that this resulted in a process of insidious cultural hegemony occurring through aspects of her work. I also began to wonder if the positive transformations Mey encountered through somatic practices when training abroad

contributed to her replication of these practices at home; was she hoping that others would also experience such transformations?

In contrast to the observations made in the previously mentioned class taught by Mey, I also observed Mey teaching an Alexander technique class to a group of third year students also at HIDA. These students had a very different response to the somatic method being taught and Mey's pedagogical approach. In this class the students seemed focused, hanging off every word Mey said. The task of standing in parallel, eyes closed, with their hands on their lower back while imagining their cervical spine lengthening up towards the ceiling and their tailbone down towards the ground, led the students to experiment with different breath patterns and imagery to facilitate the movement in different ways. The students willingly shared the sensations they were experiencing and related the feelings and imagery to exercises in their modern dance class. This occurred with little prompting from Mey, and the provocations and imagery she provided (similar to those she offered to the first year students) seemed to resonate with the students in this class. The observation of such a contrasting response to very similar material perhaps adds weight to Sylvie Fortin's (2002) suggestion that the inner authority provided through somatic practices has the ability to make somatics a transcultural experience.

Such diverse responses to somatic methods and classes could be due to a variety of reasons. Perhaps a different response was incited because the third year students had experienced Mey's classes for a longer period of time, they were possibly more mature in their approach to movement and understanding their bodies, and maybe they had become familiar with the ideas Mey was sharing and the movements that she was asking them to explore. Future research could pursue the students' perspectives of these classes and the development of the classes over the various years they are taught. It could be viewed that Mey's approach of replicating a form that she learnt abroad, with limited adaptation to the socio-cultural context, reiterates the role a dance practitioner can play as a native intellectual or the cultural hegemony that can occur within a particular approach towards dance, overtime imprinting a foreign form on a group of students who then carry it into diverse dance situations that can potentially infiltrate wider cultural environments.

Contrasting to the approaches of replicating certain somatic practices taken by Mey, some of the women have attempted to resist the 'ideal' dancing body frequently presented within Western cultural contexts (Albright, 1997; Green, 1999). This perception connects with earlier comments made by some of the dancers regarding experiences of somatic practices when training abroad (see 6.1.1), where this resistance emerged as a result of the alienation from somatic modes that some were experiencing. Noora articulated how she felt the need to resist conforming to Western ideals of what a dancing body should be. She explained that "we need to work more technically on the body and not necessarily in the European sense", elaborating that "if we want to work with bodies we need them to be strong; we need to have strong physical bodies, to have the maximum out of them". Noora's comments relate to Sylvie Fortin's (2002) notion that dance practices have the ability to inscribe bodies, yet simultaneously challenge this inscription. Similarly, Ann Cooper Albright (1997) has written how the dancing body "can at once enact and resist its own representation" (p.12). For example, Nada said, "People say I don't look like a Lebanese dancer – that I'm too tall, too long, too athletic – but I am Lebanese. I don't try to avoid this when I dance." It could be said that a 'culturally-neutral' dancing body is something that is unattainable, just as a 'culturally-neutral' form of teaching and learning is also not attainable (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Fanon, 1952/1967a, 1961/1967b; Freire, 1970). It could be understood that these seven women will inherently have foreign dance practices inscribed on their bodies, despite attempts to resist such representations, illuminating how the cross-cultural dancing body is "a body that is written upon" (Foster, 1995, p.15) with the various dance forms it has encountered.

Another example of resistance towards representation can be seen in Noora's narrative. She explained, "My work, yes it might reflect who I am and my reality, and it could carry, it will probably carry something political or social because this is who I am." The relationship between politics, social issues and one's corporal reality that Noora articulates could be understood to be part of her role as an organic intellectual in her home location. As James Petras (1990) notes, an organic intellectual's actions are "linked directly to political and social struggles against imperialism and capitalism" (p.105). This relates to Gramsci's (1929-1935/1971) perspective of

the organic intellectual being concerned with maintaining connections with the social issues and struggles of a community, with an individual using their position as an intellectual to develop strategies for building their community without perpetuating or reinforcing colonial values and ideals, rather purposefully resisting them (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995).

For some of the dancers their somatic perception informed some of their approaches towards dance at home, and this somatic understanding seemed to be connected to notions of self-identity and belonging, with some expressing how they felt a particular foreign dance form was *their* dance. As Mey explained, “I learnt the dance I do in Europe; I can’t just stop doing it this way because I’m home. But this is my dance, this is part of who I am.” Mey expressed the feeling of these dance practices being inscribed on her body despite simultaneously feeling frustrated and despondent over how these practices were perceived within her home environment. She said, “Sometimes you really start thinking, ‘What are you doing? Why are you doing contemporary dance in such a fucking society?’” Nesrine also described a similar feeling of certain dance practices being an intrinsic part of her body habitus; nevertheless, she explained that these practices came from diverse locations and experiences of dance, expressing that “this is the way I move. I have what I learnt at home, what I learnt abroad – I have both, that’s who I am”. Rebecca explained the inscription that she felt ‘contemporary’ dance has on her body; however, she also spoke of trying to connect this practice to the socio-cultural context of Mata where she is creating and performing work, stating that she was “trying to take that and connect it with our environment more when we were performing”.

These experiences from Mey, Nesrine and Rebecca connect with Ann Cooper Albright’s (1997) articulation that “the body is implicated in our notions of identity” (p.5), with the body always being in a “paradoxical process of becoming – and becoming undone” (p.5). While Jill Green’s (2002) suggestion that “our bodies are constructed and develop in a particular place at a particular time” (p.118) offers an alternative way to understand these experiences and the relationship between the dancing body and self-identity. The replication of certain dance practices could be a way for the women to reinforce their self-identity as dancers, teachers or choreographers, with some appearing reluctant to shift these identities that they had developed

when abroad, despite the ways in which bodies and identities become “habituated by the culture in which we live” (Green, 2002, p.118). It is also possible that reinforcing self-identity through the replication of foreign dance practices is part of a native intellectual’s identity. For example, Rebecca stated, “Some people here [in Malta] might think my dancing is strange [...] but it’s who I am. I don’t want to go back to how I was [before going to England].” Similarly, Nada explained how she felt that she “did not fit into the regular society here. I had to accept that, find a way to cope. I suppose I created my ‘dance haven’ – the studio, the company – as my way of dealing with feeling odd here”.

Nada’s creation of what she describes as a “dance haven” in Beirut could be seen as her way of coping with feelings of alienation, while also preserving her identity as a dance practitioner. Nada’s approach towards dance in her home environment seemed to include constructing a foreign atmosphere to introduce her new dance knowledge. This is an idea that can also be connected to the experience of a native intellectual. Fanon (1961/1967b) has explained how the native intellectual uses an inaccessible language to the ‘native’ group, and this is partly why there is a sense of alienation and dislocation felt by the native intellectual in their home environment, with this in turn propelling a native intellectual to teach others in their home environment this foreign language. It could be understood that the ‘language’ Fanon speaks of extends beyond written and spoken language to include the languages of movement and dance (Welsh-Asante, 1990).

Like approaches towards pedagogical, choreographic and creative practices, the ways in which the seven dancers approached somatic practices were contrasting, at times contradictory and not always in line with the approaches they have taken in other aspects of their work. The issue of replicating somatic practices highlighted specific challenges connected to cultural-hegemony, just as rebellion against certain somatic concepts also reiterates concerns surrounding cultural hegemony occurring in relation to these practices. Further investigations of notions of somatic perceptions and self-identity could potentially assist understandings of why the dance practitioners have taken specific strategies regarding somatic approaches in their home environments.

## 8.4 Conclusion

When returning home the seven women's pedagogical, choreographic and creative, and somatic practices have incorporated various hegemonic, counter-hegemonic or anti-hegemonic strategies. These processes are occurring either deliberately or insidiously within the dancers' practices. There are many overlaps and occasionally contradictions in the approaches they have taken. For example, a dance practitioner who employs a practice of synthesis in one element of their choreographic work may also demonstrate rebellion against a foreign choreographic idea in another element of their choreographic practice. An individual, who speaks of working to synthesise dance practices and pedagogical approaches, might also demonstrate replication of certain foreign pedagogical methods within their teaching.

Building on the conceptualization of hegemony through dance encounters, it could be said that international education in dance can contribute to issues of cultural hegemony. Through the replication of dance practices – somatic, pedagogic or choreographic – cultural hegemony has the potential to permeate the artistic landscapes of the seven women's home locations. Insidious cultural hegemony seems to be emerging from the embodiment of dance practices that are inscribed on bodies and informing self-identities. The rejection of particular aspects of foreign dance practices appeared to be partly due to the perception that foreign dance practices threaten local cultural practices, rather than viewing them as something that could potentially expand local practices. The anti-hegemonic strategies some of the women have taken seem to be encouraging processes of transculturation. Such an approach is not new; however, as a result of the ever increasing globalization we are experiencing, the development of international education in dance, and the various cultural interventions and exchanges occurring, it is perhaps inevitable that there is a greater cross-over of dance forms being performed outside of their 'traditional' cultural settings. The women's approaches towards dance explored within this chapter reiterate the relationship between dance and politics, culture and environment, with such factors overtly and covertly influencing their dance practices and the artistic choices they make in their home locations.



## Chapter 9: Conclusion

Shortly after I returned home to New Zealand the Arab Spring uprisings began to spread across the southern Mediterranean region. From the quiet calm of my lounge room in Auckland I watched stilted live streaming footage of a group of women performing the most magnificent choreography. They waved banners, faces painted, bodies swaying side to side, letting out cries for freedom as Tahrir Square became alight with emotion. It was the early morning in New Zealand and the cicadas were singing in the background, almost as though they were cheering on the women in Tahrir. I closed my eyes and wished, with every ounce of my being, for them to succeed in obtaining the freedom they were asking for. I thought of Dalia in Cairo, was she amongst the crowd in Tahrir? Nesrine posted images on Facebook of her ink stained finger after voting in the first free election held in Tunisia since the country's independence in 1956. As the protests and violence escalated in Damascus I was concerned how including Mey in this thesis might impact on her opportunities as a dance practitioner in Syria. When I finally received a response to my email asking her if she would like to withdraw her narrative she replied with a bold 'no', and over the following months, when technology allowed, shared updates and a flow of the events unfolding, reassuring me that she was alright.

As I continued to write up the final chapters of this thesis from my office in Auckland I often felt incredibly far away from the seven women whose narratives are the heart of this study. When I encountered these moments of distance, I gathered the pile of notebooks I filled during my time in the region that had etchings of the stories the dancers shared with me. I would leaf through each notebook slowly, sure I could smell shisha smoke and coffee infused in the pages. Through these fragments I had jotted down – ideas, observations, reflections, names, addresses – I revisited glimpses of the lives that were opened up to me. Usually, I felt as though I was transported back to Ramallah, Cairo, Damascus, Casablanca, Malta or Beirut in an instant.

This research has investigated how training in contemporary dance in a Western cultural context has affected the dance practices of seven female dancers from the southern Mediterranean region. The women's journeys illustrate a multiplicity of experiences, offering several new

contributions to various fields of knowledge and illuminating some novel and noteworthy findings that in turn provoke questions and possibilities for future investigations. In this chapter an overview of the findings is offered. Firstly, key findings related to the research method of this study are articulated. The seven dance practitioners' experiences of choosing where and why to train in Western cultural contexts are then presented. Thirdly, conclusions drawn from the women's experiences of training abroad are shared. Following this, findings from their experiences of returning home are discussed. Conclusions surrounding the individuals' approaches towards dance and artistic practices in their home environment are then illuminated. The ramifications and repercussions of these findings are then explored, particularly in relation to dancers pursuing international education in dance, dance educators and institutions engaged with international education, and artistic environments, communities and practices. Finally, recommendations are provided, indicating future research possibilities and emerging questions.

## **9.1 Research method**

The research method employed in this study has made a contribution to the practice of narrative studies in multiple locations. While the use of narratives within ethnographic investigations is by no means a new research method to apply to a study of international education, this research has taken the focus away from a single institution or location and placed it on individuals' experiences in assorted locations. Through specifically focusing on the experiences of seven dancers who have encountered international education in dance, and then returned to their home locations, rather than focusing on a group of participants who attended the same dance institution abroad or who have remained abroad after completing their studies, a broad foundation is provided for future studies to develop and extend upon. While the investigation of a specific institution or of women who were still dancing abroad after receiving international education in dance may have been a more straightforward research choice and provided an insight of the 'abroad' experience, the 'home' aspect of the dancers' experiences might not have been incorporated into the discussion in such depth. Also, in creating parameters to concentrate on the narratives of dancers who have experienced one particular institutional setting or returned to the same 'home' location, the dialogue surrounding the dynamic socio-cultural perspectives may have been abridged. While future studies could explore experiences of international education in

dance in more specific ways, this research acts as a seminal starting point, whilst highlighting the richness of narrative studies and their relationship within multi-sited ethnographic research processes.

## **9.2 Dancing away**

From the seven dance practitioners' experiences of choosing where and why to train in Western cultural contexts it emerged that decisions were not made based solely on artistic ideals; rather, some women revealed that they were motivated by diverse and often compounding issues ranging from the aesthetic to pragmatic. While particular artistic ideals, teachers or cultural interventions motivated some, such as Nada, Nesrine and Meryem, others such as Rebecca and Noora were seeking specific types of learning experiences or qualifications. Motivations for training abroad also shifted over time with multiple motivations co-existing. For example, Nesrine and Meryem were motivated by artistic ideals and the opportunity to receive certain qualifications. For some the motivation to train abroad was influenced by conflict, political tensions or travel restrictions in their home environment. For example, Nada explained how the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) contributed to her decision to train in France, and Noora highlighted how the travel restrictions she faced made training abroad a more realistic possibility than training in her home environment. Others cited factors such as finances or cultural familiarity as reasons that influenced their decisions about where and when to train abroad. Exploring the women's motivations for training abroad raised notions of place and home. Some, such as Mey and Dalia, shared how they felt alienated in their home environment prior to training abroad, particularly because of their involvement in dance. Such experiences illuminate how a sense of place and home can co-exist with feelings of alienation.

The seven dance practitioners' experiences contrast with much of the literature regarding international students' motivations to study abroad, particularly regarding students' intentions post-study. The women expressed how they felt the need to return home; for some this was after a short experience abroad, for others it was several years after leaving their home environment. Contrary to much scholarship on the issue, the motivation for some of the seven women was not to engage with dance education in a Western cultural context because they sought to remain in

the country after completing their studies. Some expressed that they felt opportunities to pursue a professional dance career in their home environment were limited, or because they saw Western dance as superior. Others did not consider Western dance knowledge as more advanced, but that dance institutes in the West had more complex educational structures to teach dance knowledge.

### **9.3 Learning abroad**

When learning dance in Western cultural contexts the women had experiences of alienation and transformation. Some felt alienated when training abroad, often because they were experiencing confusion over what they were learning and why. Experiences of alienation and transformation frequently related to specific somatic practices, creative and choreographic notions or pedagogical approaches. It was also observed that what were considered transformative experiences for some of the dancers were alienating for others, and vice versa.

For some individuals somatic experiences presented various difficulties and were alienating, daunting or perplexing. For example, Rebecca shared how the multiplicity of somatic practices and ideas she was introduced to were initially overwhelming. For others, such as Mey, particular aspects of somatic practices, such as touch, caused confusion. The women recalled confusion towards somatic methods that did not necessarily align with their expectations of dance education, or that conflicted with understandings of how to approach movement or perceptions of dancing bodies. These experiences raised issues surrounding the cultural encodings of the body in dance education, the potential for somatophobia through cultural alienation and illustrated how somatic practices are not culturally neutral or value free. The feeling of being somewhat marginalized through somatic practices appeared to incite further cultural alienation.

Alienation was also experienced in creative and choreographic encounters abroad. Some dance practitioners, such as Noora, felt misunderstood in choreographic and collaborative creative processes in Western cultural contexts. For others, such as Rebecca and Mey, alienation was felt in certain creative processes such as improvisation or when generating movement for choreographic tasks. There were also feelings that as dancers they were expected to take on roles such as co-author or contributor within choreographic processes, roles that some felt initially

unprepared for. These experiences highlighted the body as a site of difference within choreographic practice, the notion of ‘freedom’ in dance practices meaning many things to many people, and the potential for creative dexterity (see 2.1.3 and 6.2.2) to be developed within international education in dance.

Pedagogical modes and methods were also alienating for some of the women. Some shared how they encountered conflicting pedagogical methods when training abroad, and negotiating these new and diverse approaches caused confusion and frustration. The dance practitioners arrived in new learning environments with their own dance knowledge and histories. However some, such as Nesrine and Mey, felt that this prior knowledge was discounted. Others, such as Dalia and Mey, shared how their feelings of alienation subsided over time, revealing how they became acculturated to the environment, dance styles and pedagogical methods they were experiencing.

From the women’s narratives it was also revealed that many had transformative dance learning experiences when training in Western cultural contexts, with these experiences having the ability to shift perceptions and practices of dance. Like alienating dance learning experiences, transformative experiences were also often related to encountering specific somatic practices, creative and choreographic notions or particular pedagogical approaches.

Some of the dancers had transformative experiences through somatic practices. Such practices appeared to allow opportunities to reconsider how to approach movement, view the body or experience process versus product methodologies of dance learning. Applying the notion of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) in relation to the transformative somatic experiences, it appears that Mezirow’s theory does not include a multiplicity of ways of knowing. There is potential that somatic practices could contribute to expanding Mezirow’s theory. This provides additional justification for the argument that somatic practices should be further incorporated within arts education programmes, with the potential for such practices to create a sense of self-understanding, bodily awareness and responsibility for one’s own learning.

Creative and choreographic practices also provided transformative dance experiences. A key

transformation the women expressed was the realization that dancers and choreographers can take on diverse roles in dance making processes. For some, such as Nesrine, this involved discovering that as dancers they could also be contributors to choreographic processes. This in turn offered a sense of contribution and ownership of the dance work that they had not previously felt in more instructional approaches towards choreography. Others, such as Noora, expressed the exposure to diverse choreographers' works to be transformative, shifting how they perceived dance making. This exposure resulted in some of the dancers questioning their choreographic practices, states of freedom in dance making and motivations to create dance works. From some individuals' narratives it was revealed that tools such as improvisation and somatic practices had the potential to allow for further creativity to emerge. Issues such as collaborative relationships in choreographic practice and the development of students' readiness to adapt to creative tasks and approaches were also illuminated.

Transformative experiences were also revealed in relation to pedagogical encounters. Transformative pedagogical experiences, such as those shared by Nesrine and Mey, were encountered through particular pedagogical styles or approaches, where assumptions were challenged and motivations questioned. For many, this revealed the numerous ways that dance could be taught and learnt. Transformative pedagogical experiences, such as those discussed by Rebecca and Mey, were also related to dance learning environments where the focus was placed on the *how* and the *why* of the content being taught. The experiences shared by the seven women go some way to address the pedagogical assumptions held by some dance educators, where groups of international students are viewed as a homogenous whole, rather than as individuals with complex dance histories and experiences that have the possibility to contribute to the dance learning environment.

#### **9.4 Dancing home**

The women's narratives revealed that decisions about when and why to return home were not always based on artistic ideals. For those motivated to return home because of artistic ideals, such as Nada, Mey and Meryem, it was frequently to pursue new, often independent, artistic opportunities that were connected to feelings of social responsibility and the Fanonian concept of

the native intellectual. It appeared that in certain situations, such as those shared by Dalia, Nesrine and Rebecca, decisions about when and why to return home were based on more pragmatic issues, such as family relationships, visas, finances, homesickness or social responsibility. However, artistic ideals and pragmatic issues were frequently interwoven, compounding and contributing to the dance practitioners returning home. Regardless of their motivation for returning home, social responsibility was expressed through their narratives. For some of the women, such as Noora, feelings of social responsibility extended beyond dance communities to wider social communities. Social responsibility also acted as a motivating factor within some of the dance practitioners' artistic work, particularly in light of the Arab Spring uprisings, where some felt the need to use artistic practice as a medium to address socio-cultural issues and provide alternative forms of social commentary.

The women expressed feelings of isolation, alienation and responsibility when recalling their experience of returning home, explaining that this feeling of alienation engulfed them when they arrived home. Some shared how they felt their self-identity had shifted, experiencing 'suspended betweenness' of identity and confusion over meanings of home and belonging. Many expressed feelings of alienation from family and friends, local dance communities or wider society when returning home, explaining how they felt as though they were within a vacuum in which they had no peers. Some recalled experiencing guilt around the act of dancing, or were querying how and if they should continue their dance practices.

### **9.5 Approaches towards dance at home**

From the dance practitioners' narratives diverse approaches towards pedagogic, choreographic and creative, and somatic practices have been taken when they returned home. The approaches the women have taken are fluid and potentially transformative over time; however, aspects of their teaching, creating and performing work have highlighted elements of cultural hegemony, counter-hegemony and anti-hegemony in various ways, with these processes occurring either deliberately or insidiously within the dancers' practices.

Reflections and observations of the seven women's pedagogical approaches at home revealed

concerns over local dance education being modelled on Western artistic practices and institutions and the influence of foreign dance teachers teaching foreign dance forms, even if these concerns contradicted the individual's own teaching practice. Some of the women spoke of questioning *how* and *why* certain dance practices should be taught in their home environments. Some explained that they felt replicating foreign dance education had little relevance in their home locations, and spoke of their aim to develop culturally relevant dance education, which appeared to involve anti-hegemonic ideals. This sense of inquiry and reflection on the how and the why particular aspects of dance are taught could be related to the transformative experiences the women expressed when recalling their training in Western cultural contexts. Perhaps learning in environments that encouraged a philosophy of inquiry and reflexive practice equipped some of the women to ask such questions when they arrived home. Alternatively, the disjuncture between contemporary dance practices and pedagogical approaches in a Western cultural context compared to their home environment may have brought these issues to the fore, exacerbating the feelings of confusion and questioning that some expressed. This approach contrasted with other pedagogical strategies being utilized, particularly the notion of passing on a certain dance 'knowledge' where cultural hegemonic approaches emerged.

The approaches towards choreographic and creative practices that some of the women spoke of revealed how there are situations involving replication of the choreographic and creative ideas experienced abroad, potentially exacerbating processes of cultural hegemony. There were also approaches of aligning choreographic work alongside foreign practitioners and institutes to provide a sense of validity to choreographic and creative choices. Within other aspects of the dance practitioners' choreographic and creative work emerged instances of rebellion against specific aspects of foreign dance practices or artistic relationships. These attitudes, which could be viewed as counter-hegemonic, seem to be a result of the history of home environments and the socio-cultural realities in which they are living and working within, with some of the women's approaches and choices regarding creative work appearing to be informed by political rather than cultural influences. Several examples of anti-hegemonic approaches towards choreography and performance were also demonstrated in the women's work. This was where a synthesis of practices was occurring and being considered. However, there were occasions where



insidious cultural hegemony seemed to emerge within some of the women's approaches towards elements of choreographic and creative work.

Through the dance practitioners experiences of returning home it became apparent that somatic practices were not a focus of all seven women's work. This could be due to their exposure to somatic experiences abroad; or it could be related to their alienating and transforming dance experiences abroad. For some, who chose to include such practices in their pedagogical, choreographic or creative work or as independent techniques, specific challenges and negotiations were faced, particularly in relation to cultural conceptions and perceptions of the body, approaches towards understanding dance and how these ideas could potentially be accommodated to the environment in which they were being taught or presented. Somatic practices also appeared to be intrinsically connected to some individuals' self-identities, and some felt that somatically they embodied a dance practice that informed who they were as dancers, teachers, choreographers and people, with such inscriptions impossible to remove.

There are many overlaps and occasionally contradictions in the approaches the dancers have taken. Many seem to be developing pedagogic, choreographic or somatic practices that could be perceived as cultural hybrids, lodged between the practices they have experienced abroad and the wider dance, cultural and societal practices they find themselves within at home. Some aspects of the women's strategies illustrate how the dancer as a native intellectual may approach dance teaching, performing or creating at home, reiterating that Frantz Fanon's notion of the native intellectual is an interesting frame in which to analyze international education in dance and positioning theories of post-colonial dance education. Alternatively, Antonio Gramsci's theory of the organic intellectual seemed to resonate with aspects of the dance practitioners' approaches towards dance at home, where some of the women were actively seeking to use their positions as dancers, teachers and choreographers to cultivate ideas and approaches to develop their communities and cultural environments.

## **9.6 Ramifications and repercussions**

During 2011 there were approximately 3.36 million students worldwide studying outside of their

home environments (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011) and this number may swell to roughly 8 million by 2025 (Altbach, 2004a) (see 2.1.1). With 20.8% of the total cohort of students at London Contemporary Dance School being international students (Simon O'Shea, personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011), and other institutes seeming to have similar numbers of international students (see 2.1.1) it appears that student populations in dance institutions are comprised of a notable number of individuals training outside of their home environments. The dance practitioners' experiences offer particular insight into the potential ramifications and repercussions of learning contemporary dance in Western cultural contexts and then returning home to non-Western contexts to continue to teach, perform or create dance. The ramifications and repercussions of the dance practices that can be taken have the ability to extend well beyond one particular group, not only affecting the dancers who are receiving international education in dance, but also dance educators and dance institutions, wider cultural environments and artistic scenes as well as the field of international education in dance.

First and foremost the ramifications and repercussions of international education in dance affect dancers who are international students, and in turn this experience can impact on their artistic directions and dance practices. The experience affects how they approach movement, choreography, pedagogy, understandings of institutional structures and curriculums; more broadly, it affects their lives as artists. Training in different cultural contexts can be alienating, yet it can also shift and transform understandings of dance, it can reinforce motivations for dancing and it can also challenge and change long held assumptions. International education in dance has the ability to inscribe on dancers' bodies a history that then permeates artistic practices, both consciously and unconsciously.

This research also demonstrates that dance practitioners' experiences are extremely unique. Although this investigation has not sought to provide an analysis of dance in the southern Mediterranean, it can be viewed that the experiences shared by the seven dancers challenge many of the historical representations of dance and women dancing in the region. The women's accounts frequently challenge the romanticized, exoticized and Orientalistic stereotypes that are often depicted in relation to dance in the region. It can also be noted that the experiences some

individuals shared of feeling guilt surrounding dancing and their resoluteness to ultimately continue dancing in their home environments reiterates that the experiences of those teaching, performing, learning and creating dance in the southern Mediterranean region are more complex and varied than much of the literature portrays.

This research contributes towards further documentation of how non-Western dance artists negotiate Western dance practices. The women's narratives illustrate how the experiences of alienation and transformation when abroad, and the approaches towards pedagogic, choreographic and creative practices at home invoke processes of cultural hegemony, counter-hegemony and anti-hegemony. This highlights how international education in dance has the potential for various repercussions on diverse cultural environments and artistic scenes. Through replicating foreign dance practices and accompanying behaviours, values and structures, it is possible that the cycle of cultural hegemony within dance is only perpetuated, reiterating the dominance of Western dance practices and in turn devaluing local cultural practices and knowledge. The quandary of replicating foreign dance forms with little reference to the socio-cultural environment in which they are being taught and performed can be deeply problematic, with repercussions that have the potential to reverberate through cultural practices. In relation to international education in dance it could be viewed that many dance institutions are dominated by Eurocentric paradigms (Dei & Simmons, 2010), where Western modes of dance pedagogy and performance are viewed to be 'enlightened' and 'refined' and are then assimilated in the colonized context. These values and the native intellectual's approach have the ability to permeate cultural landscapes reiterating culturally hegemonic dance practices and power-imbalances in dance education. It could be understood that these colonial traces through the replication of dance practices learnt abroad might linger long after a single dance class or performance.

Conversely, the approach of choosing to rebel against aspects of foreign dance practices that some dance practitioners have taken may be viewed as a way to preserve cultural identity. However, this approach could potentially stifle creative development just as much as the replication of the foreign dance forms that are being resisted in the first instance. The rebellion

that emerged, within some approaches towards pedagogic, choreographic and creative, or somatic practices is also something that could be questioned: is it possible to erase dance practices from the body and artistic work? This concept highlights the notion shared by Fanon (1961/1976b) who states that “it is always easier to proclaim rejection than actually reject” (p.176). Perhaps the imprint and inscription of dance practices on dancers’ bodies is something that is impossible to remove, becoming part of the body’s cartography, a form of insidious cultural hegemony, lingering even when ignored and psychologically rejected. Some of the women acknowledged the dance history they carried from learning contemporary dance in a Western cultural context in ways that were not based on replication of Western dance practices or alternatively rebellion against them. These individuals approached dance in their home environment with the intention of synthesizing dance practices learnt abroad with local cultural practices and dance forms. Potentially the approach of synthesis may allow for anti-hegemonic approaches towards dance to emerge. It could be said that the synthesis of Western dance practices with local artistic practices could lead to a third space (Bhabha, 1990b) for dance teaching, learning, performing and creating. This third space could be seen as a place for new perspectives and possibilities to evolve, and where a sense of body bilingualism within artistic practices might be developed (Desmond, 1993-1994).

Some of the findings from this research might also be of interest to dance educators and institutions working to resist cultural hegemony and condescending or deculturating ideals. International exchanges that situate dancers from the southern Mediterranean as learners and dancers from Europe and North America as teachers have the potential to exacerbate foreign cultural hegemony within dance environments. Dance practitioners from the southern Mediterranean are experiencing this when they are abroad and also when they are in their home environments, where foreign teachers and choreographers dominate the teaching and creating process, implementing cultural agendas with little regard and consideration of how these interactions and ‘collaborations’ might affect the local dance scene long term. Syrian choreographer, Noura Murad, poses questions that are perhaps relevant to this discussion, explaining that “support from Western institutions is often linked to a political agenda. But why are we so focused on Europe? Why aren't we trying to concentrate on our own identity and

cultural wealth?” (Wagner, interview with Noura Murad, 2009). Murad’s comments relate to Fanon’s (1961/1967b) notion of the fixation on creating a “third Europe” (p.252) that has been highlighted in this thesis. Perhaps dance educators and institutions within the southern Mediterranean have to continue to pursue their own unique dance identities, with more regional collaborations occurring, and institutions and educators from abroad (particularly from Western cultural contexts) need to resist interfering or at least consider the repercussions of their involvement as cultural interventionists, perhaps allowing local dancers, teachers, choreographers and institutional structures to develop their own practices independent from the ‘support’ from the West.

### **9.7 Recommendations**

From this investigation various recommendations can be made. There are considerations for dancers, teachers and choreographers who have already engaged with international education in dance and also those who might connect with such experiences in the future. In relation to the role and implementation of international education in dance there are several considerations that dance institutions and organizations could take into account.

From this research the inference could be drawn that receiving international education in dance experience was valuable for many of the dance practitioners, resulting in transformative learning experiences, the development of international collaborations and networks, opportunities to reflect on artistic choices in relation to cultural contexts, and often generated feelings of social responsibility that led to them becoming proponents of change within their dance communities. However, international education in dance also posed numerous challenges such as alienation and isolation, confusion over learning expectations and modes of pedagogy, and how to adapt Western dance knowledge in non-Western contexts. It is perhaps important for dancers looking to train within an international setting to initially consider their expectations of learning abroad and the factors motivating them to seek dance training abroad, while also considering issues such as the length of time they spend abroad, the types of programmes they enrol in and the importance of frequent returns home. For dancers who are currently (or who have been) engaged with international education in dance it is perhaps of significance to critically reflect upon how

foreign dance knowledge might be incorporated within their home environments, how their artistic choices are influenced by this experience and how such choices might impact on the wider cultural environment they are working within.

Dance educators teaching international students have a responsibility to value and incorporate students' dance experiences and prior knowledge in learning situations, acknowledging international students as individuals with complex dance histories who are able to contribute to dance learning environments. It could also be beneficial for dance educators to retain awareness that for some international students the diverse modes of learning they experience in new learning environments could initially seem bewildering. Therefore, it could be most helpful for institutions and educators to explain why certain approaches towards dance learning are taken and why particular elements of dance education are being taught, rather than assuming that students will know why certain concepts, methods and movements are being taught; taking the approach of teaching not only *how* to dance in a particular way but also *why* to dance in a particular way.

It can also be seen that there is the need to implement dance curriculums that provide international students with the best possible learning experience that will prepare them to return home to continue to teach, perform or create dance and to take on various roles within dance communities. This could be, for example, an approach within the choreographic component of a curriculum that enhances the creative dexterity of dance students (Rowe & Zeitner-Smith, 2011), where dance students are not only assisted to generate movement from raw material, but they are also provided with a methodological approach that promotes confidence within aesthetic choices and clarity about the multiplicity of ways in which both dancer and choreographer can bring diverse contributions to a choreographic process. There is also the need to create further intersections between teaching, creating and performing within curriculums. Many of the women in this research spoke of feeling unprepared to teach dance in their home environments, yet discovered that it was often a necessity to sustain themselves as artists. A teaching artist model within tertiary dance curriculums (Huddy & Stevens, 2011) could potentially develop confidence and competency in teaching for international students who then return home to work in relative

artistic isolation. Along with preparing students with pedagogical competencies the need for culturally relevant dance education is also apparent. This could be viewed as a vital aspect of all dance education, both within educators' approaches to teaching international students but also as a theory that is explicitly taught to dance students, regardless of the locations they come from and where they might ultimately have their dancing careers. These suggestions might in turn better prepare dancers, teachers and choreographers for their return home and for dance experiences in assorted locations.

Somatic approaches appear to be valuable within international education in dance and provide the possibility for transformative learning experiences. However, from a pedagogical perspective, consideration of the cultural context in which these practices have emerged from is required, framing somatic approaches towards dance within the socio-cultural constructions in which they have transpired. Certain aspects of somatic practices – the description of the body, touch and partnering work – require sensitive and considered navigation. Alternatively, multiple approaches towards exploring these concepts need to be taken, allowing students from a variety of backgrounds to feel at ease with somatic work and somatically motivated dance concepts.

Regarding the structure of dance programmes offered by institutions, there are possibilities for institutions to reflect on the duration and shape their dance programmes take. From some individuals' experiences it can be understood that short, yet frequent dance experiences abroad could be more manageable and most beneficial. Such experiences can enable dance practitioners to incorporate new material and ideas into their creative work and teaching, while also maintaining connections to both the personal and social support they might have in their home environment and ties within local dance communities. This could be an issue that funding organizations financially assisting dancers in the region to study abroad might also want to consider when liaising with dance institutions or developing scholarship programmes. It could also be a relevant issue for dance institutions hosting dancers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and histories, to consider dance education as something that does not necessarily have to happen over continuous one, two or three year periods, but rather a learning experience that could be more flexible in its delivery and structure.

There are possibilities that dance communities and networks could better provide and accommodate dance practitioners who engage with international learning and exchange and the subsequent creative work that these artists develop. Drawing conclusions from the experiences shared by the dance practitioners it can be seen that dance communities and networks willing to support dance practitioners engaging in international education in dance, rather than dance communities that might reject or alternatively glorify them, is necessary to allow dance practitioners to be better prepared for training abroad and also returning home. Such support may contribute to reducing the feelings of alienation and isolation that many of the women spoke of both when abroad and at home, and foster the development of their subsequent artistic practices, encouraging a synthesis of artistic ideas over the replication or rejection of particular dance forms.

### **9.8 Dancing towards the future: Research and questions**

From this research areas for future investigation and emerging questions have also been illuminated. Further research exploring experiences of alienation and isolation specifically in relation to dance education in different cultural contexts would be of benefit to international dance students and institutions alike, with this research providing a starting point for such a discussion. Notions of transformative learning in dance education – and specifically international students' experiences – could be explored further. Studies focusing on somatic dance practices in various cultural contexts could also be an area for future research to pursue, and more specifically research looking at these practices in relation to the cultural contexts of the southern Mediterranean. The experience of returning home after receiving dance training in Western cultural contexts, and the challenges and issues dance practitioners might then encounter could be a further area of investigation, potentially revealing ways in which those returning from abroad could be better equipped within their home environment to develop their dance practices without culturally hegemonic or alternatively counter-hegemonic approaches towards dance dominating. Issues relating specifically to women performing contemporary dance in the southern Mediterranean region requires further attention within dance scholarship, as do issues concerning the relationship between the dancing body and the socio-cultural and political



contexts of the southern Mediterranean. The impact that the Arab Spring uprisings may have had on dancers' lives and practices in the region could also be pursued, particularly as the uprisings unfold further and the repercussions of these events become clearer. There is also potential for scholarship to critically evaluate the role of funding bodies and cultural centres in cross-cultural dance education; investigating such concerns could be of value and significance to further evaluate cultural hegemony within contemporary international education in dance.

From this research there are several questions that have emerged that are potentially worthy of further investigation within future studies. These include:

- How are tertiary dance institutions currently preparing international dance students to return to their home environments?
- Are dance educators and institutions considering how the material and ideas they teach might then be applied in different cultural contexts? It could also be asked, do dance educators and institutions even feel a responsibility towards this aspect of students' education?
- How can contemporary dance curriculums be reshaped to approach dance in more culturally relevant ways, addressing the needs of students from diverse cultural contexts and recognizing the dance knowledge that students bring with them to learning environments?
- How can various dance practices (somatic, choreographic, and pedagogical) be taught in ways that better entwine them with the socio-cultural constructions in which they have emerged from?
- How can international dance programmes be restructured to enable more flexible delivery of curriculums; where dance practitioners can engage in short learning experiences rather than extended programmes, and/or to have the option to learn both at home and also abroad?
- How does the experience of learning, performing, creating and teaching contemporary dance between cultures affect or influence the body habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) or embodiment of various dance practices?

While this research has focused on the experiences of a small group of research participants from a particular region of the world, it is hoped that the issues raised and narratives shared may also intersect with other dance practitioners' experiences and be of relevance to broader areas of study. With education only becoming more internationalized it is pertinent for those within dance education to address the needs of international dance students. Through encouraging the development of a dance bilingualism that speaks across boundaries and borders, it is hoped that dance practitioners engaging with international education in dance will have the ability to become key proponents for the enhancement and innovation of the contemporary arts within their home environments and the global dance community.

“The time for dancing in the streets has come” (Fanon, 1961/1967b, p.57). Re-reading Frantz Fanon's words I was struck at their potency in relation to the narratives I had gathered from the seven women, many of whom are now a part of the tumultuous Arab Spring uprisings and have encountered immense change in their home environments. Some of the seven women continue to work as dance practitioners in their home environment; others have travelled abroad again to pursue dance opportunities or further training. With the shifts in politics across the southern Mediterranean region some of the women find themselves in new roles influencing the directions of dance in their home locations, roles they never thought would be possible at home. Since returning to my 'other life' in New Zealand, there is not a day that goes by where I do not think about someone I met on my travels who shared their story with me, who took the time to invite me into their life for a brief moment. I have memories that I will never forget from these very special and privileged opportunities, and perhaps in the process of this research I too received an international education.

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interviewees

- Baker, Noora. Dancer, teacher, choreographer and administrator of the El-Funoun Popular Dance Troupe. Interviews conducted in English in Al-Bireh and Ramallah on 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2010.
- Camilleri, Rebecca. Dancer, teacher and choreographer. Interviews conducted in English in Bodrum, Valletta and Attard on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010, and 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2010.
- Chaabouni, Nesrine. Dancer, teacher and choreographer. Interviews conducted in English in Bodrum and Paris on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> July, and 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.
- El Abd, Dalia. Dancer, teacher and choreographer. Interviews conducted in English in Cairo and Beirut on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2011.
- Fielding-Smith, Abigail. Freelance journalist. Interview conducted in English in Beirut on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.
- Jazouli, Meryem. Dancer, teacher and choreographer. Interview conducted in French with translation by Maria Sadani in Casablanca on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2010.
- Kano, Nada. Director, choreographer, teacher Beirut Dance Company and Beirut Dance Studio. Interviews conducted in French with translation by Lea Chikhani in Beirut on 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.
- Nasser, Lana. Performance artist, playwright and translator. Interview conducted in English in Utrecht on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011.
- O'Shea, Simon. Head of Student Support Services, London Contemporary Dance School. Interview conducted in English in London on the 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2011.
- Sefan, Mey. Dancer, teacher and choreographer. Interviews conducted in English in Damascus and Bodrum on 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 24<sup>th</sup> May, and 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2010.
- Stahlhofen, Carolin. Student Administrator, Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, Frankfurt. Interview conducted in English over Skype on the 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2011.
- Tyler, Mark. Deputy Registrar, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Interview conducted in English over Skype on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2011.
- Yassine, Khoulood. Dancer, teacher and choreographer. Interview conducted in English (with supportive translation by Mohammad Yamani) in Beirut on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.

## Appendix 2: Performances cited

- El-Abd, Dalia. (2011). *I don't know what this dance is about, but it must be about something*. Beirut International Platform of Dance: Arab Dance Platform, Maqamat Dance Studio, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2011, 2pm.
- El-Funon, Le Grand Cru, Al-Balad Theatre. (2009). *Waiting forbidden*. Dancing on the Edge Festival, Frascati, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2009, 7pm.
- Izzediou, T. (2011). *Aleef*. Beirut International Platform of Dance: Arab Dance Platform, Theatre Monnot, 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2011, 7pm.
- Jezouli, Meryem. (2011). *Kelma... un cri a la mere*. Beirut International Platform of Dance: Arab Dance Platform, Babel Theatre, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2011, 10pm.
- Shafik, M. (2011). *The smell of the city*. Beirut International Platform of Dance: Arab Dance Platform, Babel Theatre, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2011, 10pm.

**Appendix 3: Ethics participant information sheet, consent form and translator confidentiality agreement**



## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(Dancers, teachers and choreographers)

**Project title:** *'Learning dance for performance: Experiences of women in the southern Mediterranean'*.

**Name of Researcher:** Rosemary Martin

### Researcher introduction

Rosemary Martin is a doctoral candidate conducting research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Dance Studies, at the National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries, The University of Auckland, New Zealand.

### Project description and invitation

In seeking deeper understandings of contemporary dance training and performing process in the southern Mediterranean region and how these might ultimately impact upon female dancers' views of themselves, their chosen art form and the dance world, this research investigates the experiences of female contemporary dancers, teachers and choreographers in the southern Mediterranean. The research will focus primarily on collecting the narratives of female contemporary dancers, who are learning, teaching, creating and performing contemporary dance in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Malta, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Occupied Palestine and Lebanon.

I wish to invite you to be involved in my doctoral research. I have selected to invite you to participate as I am looking to work with female contemporary dancers in the contemporary dance field. Please read the following information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you choose to participate, I thank you, if you decide not to participate there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and I thank you for considering my request.

### Project Procedures

The research involves individual interviews with participants, and observation and photographic documentation of participants in their dance classes, rehearsals and performances. Should you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to:

- Take part in 4 x one hour interviews with the Researcher (Rosemary Martin), which will be conducted over a two month period at a convenient and comfortable location.
- You will be available to check a full transcript of your interviews.
- Give permission to be observed and photographed during your dance classes, rehearsals or performances over a two month period.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Assurance will be sought from the involved dance organizations that the participation or non-participation will bear no negative effect on the participants positions, involvement, status or standing within the dance organization.

#### **Data storage/retention/destruction/future use**

The interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed by the Researcher (Rosemary Martin). All data, tapes, photographs, transcripts and written documentation, will be securely stored in a locked cabinet of the Researcher's (Rosemary Martin) office for a period of six years before being destroyed. You will be offered the opportunity to check your transcripts and view photographs, have a copy of your interview tapes and photographs, and have a final copy of the written thesis. A third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will translate during the interviews.

#### **Right to Withdraw from Participation**

Participants are free to withdraw their participation from the research at any time, and to withdraw any data from the research up to three months after the data has been collected.

#### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

This research is not anonymous, as it intends to collect young women's stories and experiences in full, your name will be used and identifiable information will be included in the research. Therefore, no anonymity or confidentiality can be given to participants. However, the participants' privacy will be respected by allowing only the Researcher (Rosemary Martin) and the Supervisor (Dr Nicholas Rowe) to have access to the data, and only the Researcher (Rosemary Martin) and translator will be present during the individual interviews with participants.

The collected data from interviews and observations will be used primarily to inform the basis of a doctoral Thesis. The data may also be used to inform future peer reviewed publications and articles, conference presentations and seminars.

#### **Contact Details**

##### **Researcher:** Rosemary Martin

PhD Candidate, Dance Studies, NICA, The University of Auckland

Email: [rosemary.k.martin@gmail.com](mailto:rosemary.k.martin@gmail.com)

Ph: +64 9 373 7599 ext: 84248 (New Zealand)

Ph: +96 2656 87557 (Jordan)

##### **Supervisor:** Dr Nicholas Rowe

Senior Lecturer, Dance Studies, NICA, The University of Auckland

Ph: +64 9 373 7599 ext: 86357

Email: [n.rowe@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:n.rowe@auckland.ac.nz)

##### **Head of Department**

Associate Professor Ralph Buck

Head of Dance Studies, NICA, The University of Auckland

[r.buck@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:r.buck@auckland.ac.nz)

Ph: +64 9 373 7599 ext: 82529

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 20 August 2009 for (3) years, Reference Number 2009 / 302.



## CONSENT FORM

(Dancers, teachers and choreographers)

### THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

**Project:** *'Learning dance for performance: Experiences of women in the southern Mediterranean'*.

**Name of Researcher:** Rosemary Martin

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that the research will take place between January 2010 and January 2011.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to three months after the data has been collected.
- I understand that the research is not anonymous and that I will be identifiable.
- I agree for my name to be used in the research and for identifiable details to be used in the final written thesis of this study, conference and seminar presentations or subsequent publications of this research.
- I agree to take part in 4 x one hour interviews with the Researcher (Rosemary Martin).
- I agree to be observed by the Researcher (Rosemary Martin) in dance class, rehearsal or performance.
- I agree to be audio-taped during the interviews.
- I agree to be photographed during dance class, rehearsal or performance.
- I understand that the Researcher (Rosemary Martin) will transcribe the interviews.
- I agree to be available between January 2010 and January 2011 to view the data for accuracy, to have the opportunity to add/change or delete any part of this data.
- I wish / do not wish to have my tapes or photographs returned to me.
- I wish / do not wish to receive the summary of findings.
- I understand that a third party who has signed a confidentiality agreement will translate during the interviews.
- I understand that assurance has been sought from the participating dance organizations and that the participation or non-participation will bear no negative effect on the participants positions, involvement, status or standing within the dance organization.



- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I understand that no remuneration will be offered for participation in this research.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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COMMITTEE ON 20 August 2009 FOR (3) YEARS REFERENCE NUMBER 2009 / 302.

## TRANSLATOR CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**Project:** *'Learning dance for performance: Experiences of women in the southern Mediterranean'*.

**Researcher:** Rosemary Martin

**Supervisor:** Dr Nicholas Rowe

**Translator:**

I agree to translate during the interviews for the above research project. I understand that the information contained within them is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_