Leiden University
RESEARCH MASTER MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
-
In affiliation with the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies,
American University of Beirut

CONTEMPORARY DANCE PRACTICE IN BEIRUT

Practical Organization, Social & Political Context, and Dance Performances

Research Master's Thesis

by

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-
August 2015

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been written without the generous accounts my interviewees agreed to share with me. I am infinitely thankful for your openheartedness, trust, interest and time. I wish you all my very best!

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Tsolin Nalbantian for her continuous support during the preparation for the fieldwork, the fieldwork period, and the writing process. Your constructive feedback challenged me to think and write critically. I am grateful to have benefited from your valuable advice.

I would like to thank Dr. Hans Theunissen for his interest and effort in reviewing my thesis as the second reader. Your insightful comments enabled me to considerably improve my work.

Many thanks to Dr. Julie McBrien for encouraging me to undertake this project. Our conversations inspired me to stay close to the anthropological discipline.

Thanks to the now closed The Netherlands Institute in Beirut for providing me with practical information about Beirut and the dance scene. Your presence in Lebanon and your expertise are greatly missed.

Thanks to Natasja van 't Westende, director of Dancing on the Edge, for her interest in my research. Your festival has been an inspiration for the research, and our interview has been of great help in designing the research project.

Thanks to the Lutfia Rabbani Foundation, the Fundatie van de Vrijvrouwe van Renswoude te 's Gravenhage, and Leiden University for their generous funding to carry out this research. Without your support, the realization of this project would have been impossible.

I am grateful to my parents, sister, brother, family and friends for supporting me during this journey. Ria, thank you for making it possible. Rufus, thank you for everything.

I am solely accountable for the content of this thesis. I take on full responsibility for any errors and misinterpretations. Readers of this thesis are kindly invited to share their views with me.

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Appendix *Fieldwork report (print version only)*

The online version of this thesis is slightly different from the original version presented to the supervisor and second reader. This is due to privacy considerations. Alterations have been made in consultation with the dancers. Changes mainly concern quotes regarding personal experiences and performances, as well as the interpretation of these quotes.

Introduction Motivation, relevance, and state of the art

Inspiration for the research

I have fostered a passion for dance ever since I attended my first ballet class at the age of eight. When I realized as an adolescent that a career in dance was not my path, I decided that dance would be the focus of my university studies. Many papers I wrote during my bachelor's in Cultural Anthropology were about dance. In 2009 I witnessed two dance performances at the festival Dancing on the Edge in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. This festival provides a platform for contemporary art from the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region, and encourages artistic exchange. Dancing on the Edge gives preference to art works that "address societally relevant issues in an artistically interesting way".[1] According to the program book, both performances I attended indeed engaged with social and political questions. The performance *Äataba* ("the threshold") by Taoufiq Izzediou with *Compagnie Anania* from Morocco explored the contradictions between society's expectations and individuals' behavior, revealing a legal but concealed sensual nightclub atmosphere.[2] The Palestinian-Dutch-Jordanian co-production *Waiting Forbidden* (Feri de Geus, Noortje Bijvoets with *Dancing on the Edge, Al Balad Theatre, El Funoun, Grand Theatre, Le Grand Cru*) addressed the Palestinian struggle with dislocation and oppression.[3] Being relatively uneducated in the social and political circumstances in the MENA-region, I only partly grasped the socio-political references transmitted through the performances' dance content, props, and emotions. It was only after further research into the subject that I could more accurately identify the messages the performances conveyed.

Societal and academic relevance

These performances aroused my interest in what I conceptualized as "societally engaged contemporary dance". I aimed to write my bachelor's thesis about this subject, but academic references were so few that these could not serve a thesis solely based on literature. In summer 2012 I was accepted for the research master Middle Eastern Studies with a research proposal aimed at anthropologically investigating socio-political engagement of contemporary dancers in Lebanon. During my master studies I continued writing about the political dimensions of dance and art in general, and explored the case of the online puppet theatre show *Top Goon* by the *Massasit Matti* artists collective from Syria.[4] When I initially designed the fieldwork project, I thus departed from my interest in exploring the employment of dance by its practitioners as social critique. I came across literature in which this criticizing function was discussed for a variety of artistic disciplines, ranging from music to theater to visual arts. We have learned from earlier case studies how artistic statements have played a significant role in voicing dissatisfaction with social and political situations. Adams, who has examined the employment of art by the prodemocracy movement in Pinochet's Chile, argues that this artistic feature of protest has often been overlooked.[5] A book by Reed addresses the usage of music, poetry, paintings and other mediums in the African American civil rights movements during the 1950s and 60s. Reed also directs attention to the role of new media in more contemporary revolutionary movements like the persisting lobbies for labor and women's rights.[6] Further, Peffer has written about art and the end of apartheid in his homonymous book.[7] Kong has dealt with music as a means of cultural opposition against state policies and socio-cultural norms in Singapore.[8] With regard to theater, Hamdan examines the new wave of protest theater plays that Syria witnessed in the last decade.[9]

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[1] "Second call for entries DOTE festival 2015," Dancing on the Edge, last modified November 2014, http://dancingontheedge.nl/news/second-call-for-entries-dote-festival-2015/.

[2] "*Äataba*," Dancing on the Edge, accessed August 3, 2015, http://dancingontheedge.nl/project/aataba.

[3] "Waiting Forbidden," Dancing on the Edge, accessed August 3, 2015, http://dancingontheedge.nl/project/waiting-forbidden.

However, little attention has been directed towards *dance* as a medium to address problems in society. Prickett produced two articles about the emergence of the critical modern dance genre during the 1920s in America; first in response to the stock market crash which caused suffering amongst the working classes, and later in reaction to World War II and fascism. Prickett's work highlights the strong connection of modern dance with social criticism.[10] In addition, an edited volume by Jackson and Saphiro-Phim deals with choreographies that challenge human rights' abuses, and protest movements in which dance plays a significant role. This volume, entitled *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion*,[11] explores the link between dance and humanitarian and social justice concerns. The articles collected cover a wide variety of interrelated subjects connected to this overarching theme, including dance as a means to support authoritarian ideologies, repression of dance practices and practitioners, but also the function of dance as a healing practice through dance therapy, and – most significant for my own work – dancers' critique on instances of injustice and discrimination, or instead their promotion of certain humanitarian ideals through their dance practice.[12]

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[4] "Top Goon Reloaded - Episode 5," YouTube video, 4:23, July 26, 2015, posted by "Masassit Matti," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoS1Kqlqw80.

[5] Jacqueline Adams, "Art in Social Movements: Shantytown Women's Protest in Pinochet's Chile." *Sociological Forum* 17, no.1 (2002): 21-56, doi: 10.1023/A:1014589422758.

[6] T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest. Culture and activism from the civil rights movement to the streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[7] John Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), accessed August 3, 2015, http://bit.ly/1IBGXQd.

[8] Lily Kong, "Music and Cultural Politics: Ideology and Resistance in Singapore," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 20, no.4 (1995): 447-459, doi: 10.2307/622975.

[9] Masud Hamdan. *Poetics, Politics and Protest in Arab Theatre. The Bitter Cup and the Holy Rain.* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2006).

[10] Stacey Prickett, "From Workers' Dance to New Dance," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 7, no. 1 (1989): 47-64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1290578; Stacey Prickett, "Dance and the Workers' Struggle," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 8, no. 1 (1990): 47-61, accessed August 3, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1290789.

[11] Naomi Jackson and Toni Shaphiro-Phim, *Dance, Human Rights and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion*. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press Inc, 2008).

In addition, Rowe's historical analysis of dance in Palestine comprises many instances of societal questions informing dance practices. Two influential dance collectives, the *El Funoun Popular Dance Troupe* and the *Sareyyet Ramallah Troupe for Music and Dabkeh*, receive considerable attention.[13] Of specific interest for my own study are Rowe's discussions of instances of politicized dance practices throughout Palestinian history. These vary from the political productions that *Sareyyet Ramallah* performed in the 1960s to the imprisonment of dancers by the Israeli military during the eighties, which gave dancers of both troupes the allure of heroic actors who opposed occupation. In this period, performances carried highly political connotations.[14] Rowe describes how in the 1990s *Sareyyet Ramallah* produced performances about the traumatic experience of living under the military occupation by Israel.[15] Performances dealing with challenging concerns continue to be created, for example *El Funoun's Haifa, Beirut wa Baed* (Haifa, Beirut and Beyond) about the effect of the *Nakba* on a Palestinian coastal village.[16]

Focus of the research and research question

Engaged dance is thus a rather unexplored frontier in academic research. This is a shame, for at least in The Netherlands, the theme of engaged dance and art in general gains much attention in cultural centers, festivals and funding bodies.[17] However, while rewriting the research proposal for the research on societally engaged dance in Lebanon, I became uncomfortable with the subject. I was worried it would limit the understanding of contemporary dance in Beirut to exclusively "engaged" practices. My additional aim was to reflect on Lebanese society through analyzing contemporary dance practices – that is, I envisioned that the themes of the performances could possibly tell me more about which societal issues were most important to address from the perspective of the dancers. Yet such an approach risks viewing Lebanese society only through problems. Even though I was aware of the many societal problems Lebanon faces, I was weary to limit my research to these problems beforehand. Further, I realized that identifying performances as "societally engaged" would be a difficult endeavor, for which would be the criteria for such categorization? However, a preliminary fieldwork visit to the dance festivals BIPOD (Beirut International Platform of Dance) and the *Leymoun* Arab Dance Platform in April 2013 seemed to affirm the relevance of my perspective. The Arab revolutions had been going on for more than two years by then. The debates during the platform, which were amongst others attended by dancers from Egypt and Syria, centered on artistic production in relation to political and social conflict. A significant part of the dance presentations that were shown were examples of such production, centering on themes like revolt and war.[18]

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[12] Jackson and Shaphiro-Phim, *Dance, Human Rights and Social Justice*, xv-xvi.

[13] Nicholas Rowe, *Raising Dust. A Cultural History of Dance in Palestine* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010), 135, 143-148.

[14] Rowe, *Raising Dust*, 150-151.

[15] Rowe, *Raising Dust*, 172-173.

[16] Rowe, *Raising Dust*, 190.

[17] The requirements of Dancing on the Edge are exemplary of this focus on engaged art. Further, in the past few years the Dutch funding organization The Prince Claus Fund, where I used to work, issued calls for artistic project proposals which strive to enact social change: "Closed Call Culture in Defiance," Prince Claus Fund, accessed August 3, 2015, http://www.princeclausfund.org/en/activities/current-call-culture-in-defiance.html. Finally, in April 2015, cultural debate center De Balie hosted a conference which I attended on engaged art in politicized contexts: "What's Art – The Impact of Art," De Balie, accessed August 3, 2015, http://www.debalie.nl/agenda/podium/what%27s-art...-+-the-impact-of-art/uitgelicht/e_9781744/p_11741689.

Underlying the focus on societally engaged dance is an assumption of the position of artists in society as critical thinkers and avant-gardists.[19] I imagined – and several dancers confirmed this during the research – that artists wear "critical glasses" through which they reflect on society, enabling them to point out particular issues. Part of the aim of my research would be to find out what these issues were. Further, artists employ artistic tools to reflect on societal issues in a particular way – according to many dancers, this is, also according to the dancers I interviewed, contrary to the straightforward way in which for example media approach society. Based on my personal interest, I chose to focus my research on contemporary dance. Similar research can be – and has been, as demonstrated above – conducted on other forms of artistic expression. However, given the historical employment of modern and contemporary dance as a tool to express emotion, which will be explained later in this introduction, I was wondering if the dance genre lends itself particularly well for expressing concerns. Even though some dancers agreed that they would not be able to express their emotions and worries through a different medium than dance and contemporary dance in particular, comparative research including other dance styles and art forms is needed in order to learn more about this quality of contemporary dance.

My research would contribute to academic understandings engaged art and dance in particular, by examining the engagement of contemporary dancers in Lebanon through their dance practices. However, once in the field, I quickly found that dancers were occupied with more matters than only the themes they addressed in their performances. My interviews were deliberately designed as unstructured, leaving openings for dancers to raise subjects they thought important. Many raised the practical problems they faced in practicing contemporary dance, with regard to obtaining professional education, making a living from dance as a profession, and lack of governmental support for dance in terms of education and funding to create performances. Dancers also addressed the lack of understanding and appreciation in Lebanese society for contemporary dance. They further raised a variety of problems they observed in their country, sometimes related to their performances, though not exclusively. Based on the dancers' input, I gradually changed the focus of my research.

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[18] For example, performances by dancers from Syria were entitled "Between Revolt and Death", "My brother and I in the war", and "Tell me what you dreamt of today? The Syrian Revolution." The ways in which the movement expressed these themes is difficult to put into words and beyond the scope of this introduction, though the performances conveyed a pressing atmosphere which stayed with me some time afterwards. Importantly, not all performances were informed by war or revolt. Sometimes these were difficult to interpret. Since my visit was preliminary, I was unable to fully analyze all works presented.

[19] Carol Becker, *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Responsibility.* (London: Routledge, 1994), 55-59, accessed August 3, 2015, http://bit.ly/1gUx2Pf.

This thesis answers the question: "How do dancers practice contemporary dance in Beirut?" Dance in the MENA has not been well researched in general.[20] This thesis aims to complement on research on dance in this area in general. In addition, academic literature on dance in the MENA has almost exclusively focused on practices alternately named *raqs al-baladi*, belly dance, folk dance, and local dance. Most attention in dance research is directed at Turkey and Egypt. Karin van Nieuwkerk has studied practices of female *raqs al-baladi* performers in Egypt.[21] *Raqs* is commonly understood as the Arabic equivalent for the English word 'dance'. The adjective *baladi* is used to refer to something which is from the country, the village, or part of Arab culture. The most accurate translation to English is often considered 'folk'.[22] *Raqs al-baladi* generally denotes performance practices of female professional singers and dancers in Egypt.[23] However, the practice was named *danse du ventre* or 'belly dance' by European colonizers.[24] The term 'belly dance' has become widely known in the West, and is often used to refer to a variety of related dance practices originating in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.[25]

In addition to Karin van Nieuwkerk, Noha Roushdy and Katherine Zirbel have focused on *raqs al-baladi* practices in Egypt.[26] Further, Öykü Potuoglu-Cook has examined urban gentrification practices in

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[20] Nicholas Rowe, Ralph Buck and Rose Martin, *Talking Dance. Contemporary Histories from the Southern Mediterranean* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2014), xii.

[21] Karin van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade like Any Other: Female singers and dancers in Egypt*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 41.

[22] Natalie Smolenski. "Modes of Self-Representation among Female Arab Singers and Dancers," *McGill Journal of Middle East Studies* (2007): 63, accessed August 3, 2015. http://francais.mcgill.ca/files/mes/MJMES9Smolenski.pdf.

[23] Noha Roushdy, "Baladi as Performance: Gender and Dance in Modern Egypt," *Surfacing, An Interdisciplinary Journal for Gender in the Global South* 3, no. 1 (2010): 72-73, http://bit.ly/1IQTLSa.

[24] Van Nieuwkerk*, A Trade Like Any Other*, 39.

[25] Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, "Belly Dance: Orientalism: Exoticism: Self-Exoticism," *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (2003): 14, http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1093&context=pomona_fac_pub.

[26] Roushdy, "*Baladi* as Performance," 71-99; Katherine Zirbel, "Playing it both ways: Local Egyptian performers between regional identity and international markets," in *Mass mediations. New approaches to popular culture in the Middle East and beyond.* Ed. Walter Armbrust (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000), 120-146.

Istanbul by analyzing regulatory policies for female belly dancers. Putuoglu-Cook indeed terms the practice ‘belly dance’.[27] In Turkey the practice is generally referred to as *Oryantal Dans*, though few academic literature uses this indigenous term.[28] Arzu Öztürkmen explored how under the secularization and westernization policies of Atatürk, in Turkey a range of local dances found across the country became appropriated as “folk dance” as part of the country’s modernization project.[29] Finally, Nicholas Rowe has produced an impressive body of work about dance in Palestine. In addition to the book *Raising Dust. A Cultural History of Dance in Palestine*, he analyzed how the folk dance *dabkeh* has been used as a hallmark of identity by Zionism, Pan-Arabism, and Palestinian nationalism.[30]

Most academic work so far is focused on dance styles which are indigenous to the MENA-region. Contemporary dance is a relatively new phenomenon in the area, which may explain the lack of attention for the genre in academic literature. By examining contemporary dance in Lebanon, this thesis diverts from the general academic tendency of focusing on belly dance or folk dance in the MENA. The subject of this thesis is dance practices that my interviewees considered either as contemporary dance, or as newly invented forms of local dance. In the operationalization below, I offer a critical discussion of the term “contemporary dance”. For this, I draw heavily on Nicholas Rowe’s work on dance education in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Rowe examines this subject from a postcolonial perspective, addressing issues of hegemony, counter-hegemony and anti-hegemony in relation to cross-cultural educational practices in these marginalized areas.[31] Finally, order to avoid the impression that dance in Lebanon is restricted to contemporary dance, this thesis also highlights other dance styles practiced in the country.

Recently, the researchers Nicholas Rowe, Ralph Buck and Rosemary Martin from the Dance Studies department of the University of Auckland, New Zealand, have published several works on dance practices in the South-Eastern Mediterranean, including contemporary dance.[32] Their joint book *Talking Dance Contemporary Histories from the Southern Mediterranean* presents stories told by dancers from the area.[33] In many respects, their experiences are similar to those of dancers in Beirut.

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[27] Öykü Potuoglu-Cook, “Beyond the Glitter: Belly dance and neoliberal gentrification in Istanbul,” *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (2006): 633-60, doi: 10.1525/can.2006.21.4.633.

[28] Yu-Chi Chang, “Localised Exoticism: Developments and Features of Belly Dance in Taiwan,” *Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research* 54, no. 1 (2012): 13–25, doi: 10.2478/v10141-012-0003-6.

[29] Arzu Öztürkmen, “Politics of National Dance in Turkey: A Historical Reappraisal,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 33 (2001): 139-143, doi: 10.2307/1519638.

[30] Nicholas Rowe, “Dance and Political Credibility: The Appropriation of *Dabkeh* by Zionism, Pan-Arabism, and Palestinian Nationalism,” *The Middle East Journal* 65, no. 3 (2011): 363-380, doi: 10.3751/65.3.11.

[31] Nicholas Rowe, “Dance education in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: hegemony, counter-hegemony and anti-hegemony” *Research in Dance Education* 9, no. 1 (2008): 3-20, doi: 10.1080/14647890801924188.

[32] The authors prefer to employ this term over ‘Middle East’, ‘Near Orient’, ‘Near East’, ‘Maghreb’, ‘Mashreq’, or ‘Arab World’, for their connection with European or Islamic domination and exclusive Arab identity. Nicholas Rowe, Ralph Buck and Rose Martin, *Talking Dance. Contemporary Histories from the Southern Mediterranean*. (London/New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd 2014), 11.

[33] Rowe, Buck, and Martin, *Talking Dance.*

In addition, Rosemary Martin has examined the experiences of dancers from various countries in international contemporary dance education.[34] She further reflected on her own practices as a contemporary dance teacher in Amman, Jordan, with regard to her students' reactions to the foreign genre, as well as the attitudes of their families and wider social environment towards their dancing.[35]

Nicholas Rowe, Rosemary Martin, and Krystel Khoury have produced a reflection on the Symposium on Dance Education in Arabic Speaking Countries that was held in July 2010 in Bodrum, Turkey, which was attended by 28 independent dance teachers from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Malta, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. The article reflects on the main topics which were raised during the debate, centering on the isolation dancers in the Southern Mediterranean experience from both their local social environment and the broader global dance community, practical challenges dancers face in practicing their dancing, the imbalance in participation in the international contemporary dance circuit between Western countries and the Southern Mediterranean, and a Western hegemonic appropriation of the contemporary dance genre (187, 197).[36] These matters are all relevant to contemporary dance practice in Beirut, and will thus be addressed in this thesis.

Literature on contemporary dance in the MENA-region thus seems to be dominated by the highly insightful works of the researchers of the University of Auckland. This thesis aims to contribute to research on dance in the area. As mentioned by one of my interviewees, dance in Lebanon has not been researched yet, and this thesis offers a first examination of the contemporary dance practice in Beirut.

Operationalization and thesis structure

The main question guiding this thesis is "How do dancers practice contemporary dance in Beirut?" The major concepts in this question require clarification. Below I will operationalize the concepts 'dancers', 'contemporary dance' and 'practice in Beirut'. I dedicate much space to the operationalization of the concept 'contemporary dance', for many dancers in Beirut questioned its meaning and employment. I first discuss contemporary dance with reference to academic literature, offering an overview of the development of the genre from a Western point of view. I then turn to the opinions of the dancers on the question what contemporary dance is, whether they indeed employ the genre, and what the implications are of different understandings and ways of using the genre. In the operationalization of the concept ‘practice in Beirut’, I explain the different contextual levels on which contemporary dance practice takes place. I also present the thesis structure in this discussion, since the thesis is organized along the lines of different instances of practicing contemporary dance in Beirut.

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[34] Rosemary Martin, "Alienation and transformation: an international education in contemporary dance," *Research in Dance Education* 14, no. 3 (2013): 201-215, doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.732566; Rosemary Martin, "An international education in dance: Personal narratives of seven women from the southern Mediterranean region" (PhD diss., The University of Auckland, 2012).

[35] Rosemary Martin, "Pushing Boundaries: Reflections on Teaching and Learning Contemporary Dance in Amman," *Journal of Dance Education* 13, no. 2 (2013): 37-45, doi: 10.1080/15290824.2012.686677.

[36] Krystel Khoury, Rosemary Martin and Nicholas Rowe, "Bursting bubbles between sand and sea: teaching dance on the edge of the Mediterranean," *Research in Dance Education* 14, no. 3 (2013): 187-200, doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.722616.

Dancers

When preparing my fieldwork, I defined the group of people who I intended to be the focus of my research as “contemporary dancers”. However, once in the field, the meaning of this concept soon turned out not to be self-evident. For what “contemporary dance” is, who can be classified as a “dancer”, and according to whom turned out not to be self-evident in the context of Beirut. I entered the field with an understanding of the word “dancer” as “someone who is a professional dancer”, i.e. “who practices dance as his or her profession”, i.e. “who can making a living out of dancing”. However, during my research I came to realize that even the term “professional” is not indisputable, especially in the context of dance organization in Lebanon. Many dancers noted that ‘professional dancers’ as measured to international standards are very few. Most referred to two factors that decide on whether a dancer is internationally recognized as a professional: a diploma from an internationally recognized dance education institution, and having dancing as the sole and fulltime profession. These dancers actually make a living from their performances.

Dancers regularly used the concept of “professional dancer” or even simply “dancer” to classify themselves and others, as well as to make arguments about the state of the dance scene in Lebanon. Some dancers said that there are no professional dancers in Lebanon, and that hence there is no contemporary dance scene either. Several, but not all dancers who classified themselves as dancers and others as not, were educated abroad and lived from performing and teaching dance. Dancers who were not holding a diploma or dancing as a main profession usually also recognized these dancers as professionals. Dancers were often curious about who else I had interviewed, and in reaction to some names some would argue that “he/she is not a dancer”. One dancer simply could not believe that I interviewed so many ‘dancers’. At the same time, these dancers often recognized the problems that people with aspirations to dance face in Lebanon and did not look down upon others, and tried to train them on a high level in order to give them bigger chances to access the international professional circuit, despite the lack of a degree. Many noted that it is problematic that in Lebanon anyone can become a dance teacher without any formal recognition. Notably, not all dancers used the classification of “professional dancer” as a means of categorization.

In my view, people who are active in contemporary dancing in Beirut are part of the dance scene, and hence also have a place in my research. I interviewed those with a professional practice, but also many others whose dance activities are a very important part of their lives. I have continued to refer to the participants in my research as “dancers”. My own comprehension of the term has changed significantly in relation to the specificity of the research I carried out and the context where this research took place. I gradually came to understand my focus group, that is, the people I interviewed as “dancers”, meaning “people who practice contemporary dance in Beirut”. As will be explained below, both my interviewees and myself had a relatively broad notion of what “contemporary dance” encompasses.

Contemporary dance

Contemporary dance is generally understood to have developed out of modern dance, which in turn took shape in reaction to academic ballet. Academic ballet is characterized by the basic ballet technical principle of *‘en-dehors’*, the outward rotation of the legs and hips caused by a turnout of the hips. This unnatural position facilitates the lifting of the legs. These principles were first recorded in 1661 in the *‘Académie Royale de Danse’* (Royal Academy of Dance), established by Louis XIV. This academy is widely seen as the basis of academic ballet. Initially the main function of academic ballet was decorative, aiming at technical dance spectacle. According to Luuk Utrecht, the technical basis of ballet is not suitable for expression of emotions, and therefore choreographers often used pantomime in order to make their performances emotionally expressive. While the basic technique of academic ballet has remained the same until today, different choreographers’ approaches to the genre have resulted in a highly diverse repertoire of academic ballet performances.[37]

In the first half of the 20th century, radical transitions took place in scientific, societal and artistic domains in Europe and the United States of America. Avant-gardists challenged the dominant position of academic ballet by developing different dance practices which form the basis of most dance genres we know today. The totality of these genres has become known as ‘modern dance’. In modern dance, movements are often stimulated by mental experiences (an emotion or thought) or physical sensations – so-called movement impulses. While reforms in academic ballet were often based on intuition or artistic considerations, dance techniques and styles in modern dance are often grounded in an analytically developed vision on the relation between inner experience, movement, time and space More recently, the postmodern genre has become highly influential, which principles are based on the usage of everyday movements as dance movements, the undervaluing of narrative, and isolations – the isolated movement of particular body parts. Isolations are also part of several eastern dance forms.[38] Other new approaches to dance included minimal dance, free dance, and multimedia dance.[39]

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[37] Luuk Utrecht, *Van Hofballet tot Postmoderne-dans: De geschiedenis van het Akademische Ballet en de Moderne Dans*. (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1988), 84-88.

Finally, the label ‘contemporary dance’ is frequently used though little defined in dance talking and academic writing. It can be seen as encompassing a very broad range of dance practices found all around the world. The genre is often regarded as a fusion of different dance styles from various cultural localities and historical periods.[40] I suggest that the broad meaning of contemporary dance offers an undiscriminating definition of practices which can be inclusive of a range of dance genres regardless of movement techniques, artistic considerations and, importantly, cultural origin. I propose that for this reason, the term contemporary dance has become popular to classify dance across the world. This is relevance because the development from academic ballet to contemporary dance has largely happened in the limited cultural domain of Europe and the United States. The ways in which contemporary dance transferred across the globe has hardly been documented in academic literature, and this offers opportunities for further research.

Nicholas Rowe has deconstructed the notions of “modernity”, “postmodernity”, “contemporary” and “post-colonialism”, arguing that these do not accurately describe growing dance varieties across the globe. Drawing on Hall and Appadurai, Rowe questions the idea of a globalized cultural modernity, and claims that this notion has been homogenized by Western cultural hegemony, which disregards other types of modernity.[41] He therefore advocates for an alternative notion of the evolving of cultures which is value-neutral, in his words “that is, as simply the recognition of change continually occurring over time.” In such an understanding, the meaning of modernity and contemporary is culturally dependent, instead of measured by Western standards.[42] With regard to cultural activities and dance in particular, according to Rowe dominant notions of cultural evolution hamper local artistic development.[43]

The dancers I interviewed often found it hard to define contemporary dance. According to most, there is great discussion about the meaning of the term. Dancers often framed contemporary dance in terms of a dance *approach*. “It is a way of seeing and thinking about things”, as one dancer explained. Even though most dancers acknowledged that contemporary dance is to an extent codified and encompasses many techniques, such as release technique and flying-low, the overarching approach is one of a constant breaking of rules and inventing new ones, without limitations. Most dancers also thought of the genre as combining movements from various dance styles, ranging from ballet to hip-hop. Contemporary dance is thus not attached to a defined set of techniques or movements – that is, to a fixed dance vocabulary.

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[38] Utrecht, Van Hofballet tot Postmoderne-dans, 286-288.

[39] Utrecht, Van Hofballet tot Postmoderne-dans, 296-312.

[40] Nicholas Rowe, “Post-Salvagism: Choreography and Its Discontents in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 1 (2009): 45-68, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/drj/summary/v041/41.1.rowe.html.

[41] Rowe, “Post-Salvagism,” 46.

[42] Rowe, “Post-Salvagism,” 47-48.

[43] Nicholas Rowe, “Post-Salvagism: Choreography and Its Discontents in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 1 (2009): 58, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/drj/summary/v041/41.1.rowe.html.

In order to explain contemporary dance, several dancers also described the process of how modern dance was created in response to ballet and how contemporary dance in turn grew out of modern dance. Most of the time, dancers framed the development in reactive terms, indicating a rebellious movement which broke with the respective previous dance genre. Dancers often compared contemporary dance to the strict vocabulary of academic ballet to clarify the difference. Most did not like the rigid vocabulary of ballet much. Some dancers emphasized that contemporary dance has seen a development which is more dialectic than linear, characterized by cross-influence and intercultural dialogue. In fact, according to these dancers, thanks to cross-cultural influences contemporary dance has no noticeable origin in a specific geographical place. Some dancers defined contemporary dance as 'universal'.

For many dancers, their understanding of contemporary dance was based on how they were trained. They mentioned several components that according to them are part of contemporary dance. Some components are thus borrowed from other dance genres. Many dancers also mentioned improvisation, contact improvisation, floor work, taking risks, and even non-dance and not-moving as key parts of contemporary dance. Explaining the relation of the dancer with the floor in contemporary dance, a dancer said: "I think one of the ways that I try to explain contemporary is that you're not working against the floor; you're working *with* the floor. So it flips the kind of notion that you're only dancing on your legs." She continued explaining that the traditional vertical position of a dancer dancing solely with the feet on the ground is 'flipped' towards a horizontal position, where the dancer moves on the floor while touching the floor with more body parts.

The majority of the dancers felt that it was important to create a "Lebanese" or "Arab dance", either in terms of a localized approach to contemporary dance, or a particular style which would not necessarily be associated with this genre. Several dancers I interviewed – even those who were trained in contemporary dance – struggled with labeling their dance as contemporary. None of them knew what to call their dance instead. One dancer laughed at the question and answered: "I don't know if I do contemporary dance, I don't know. Really I don't know. […] Well a lot of my work is based on somatic techniques, and somatic techniques are very much used in contemporary dance." She concluded that her approach might be contemporary since she always tries to create new movement. Her technique is not contemporary though, as she never works with recognizable contemporary dance codes. This dancer seems to contradict herself here with regard to the usage of contemporary dance technique. Yet, I suggest that her account actually reveals a problem of artistic appropriation: somatic techniques are “owned” by contemporary dance. A dancer who employs these techniques inevitably becomes branded as doing contemporary dance, while the dancer herself may actually not identify her work as such.

Other dancers however did term their dance practice as contemporary, and understood the genre as locally malleable. One dancer stated: “The good thing about contemporary is the range of movement that happens there. […] It’s interesting, that it can shift and can adapt to many bodies.” She continued explaining that contemporary dance is a tool with which a dancer can do what he or she wants. A dancer can take a technique and form it along his or her own interests. Suddenly and almost aggressively, she added: “And nobody will tell me that ‘you’re not contemporary’. I *am* contemporary.” The fact that this dancer felt the need to emphasize the fact that she was doing contemporary dance to me suggests a concern with being denied acknowledgement of using the genre. I propose dancers’ difficulties and concerns with labeling their dance is related to their sense of being entrapped in a hegemonic understanding of contemporary dance. As a dancer questioned critically: “Can we really talk about a contemporary dance scene in Lebanon? What does that mean? What is imposed on us by understanding that there is contemporary dance in Lebanon?”

Several dancers observed inequality of artistic exchange between the Western dance circuit and dancers in the MENA-region. A dancer of the older generation asked rhetorically: “Does the Occident[44] need more ballet from us? Or even contemporary?” When I pointed out that there is definitely an interest from Europe in exchange with the Middle East, she exclaimed: “There is! But you know, every creation should stem from *your* land! What kind of exchange is that? I’m exchanging what you do, to you!” Another dancer made this observation as well, who noted that “Our [Arab] region – we always took from them [the West], and we never gave.” These dancers thus observed an exchange with foreign dance structures which is largely one-way.

During a debate at the Arab Dance Platform in 2013, a European curator stated that the power imbalance in artistic exchange between Europe and the MENA-region is due to an underestimation by Arab artists of their work. A local journalist acknowledged this, but suggested that such self-devaluation is related to a broader inequality between the West and the Arab world on political, ideological and financial levels. In personal conversations with curators, I learned that the hallmark of artistic quality was originality: they wanted to see something new. Curators regarded some works shown at the Arab Dance Platform as ‘outdated’. The dancers, on their part, argued for acknowledgement and acceptance by European curators that contemporary dance in Lebanon needs time to evolve. Dancers and curators thus adopted the same hegemonic discourse of “contemporary”, which holds that contemporary dance in the Arab region does not meet the standards of European dance. The debate is a clear example of the problem of cultural hegemony which Rowe identifies. Indeed, I think what was fundamentally underestimated by many participants in the debate is the legacy of historical Western domination over large parts of the Arab world. This domination is continuing at least on a cultural level, and is indicated by the dismissal of Arab dance works as 'outdated' by European curators.

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[44] The Orient/Occident dichotomy was used by some members the older generation of dancers I interviewed in order to separate the ‘Arab world’ and the ‘Western world’.

Several dancers observed that in order to be recognized by the European dance world, many dancers are copying European dance styles. In line with Nicholas Rowe, they were concerned that this does not help developing a local dance form. A choreographer said about copying: "I don't want to do work that is copying people in Europe, because I'm not living there. I'm not interested in issues there, I'm interested in this crazy environment I'm living in, and in what kind of experience I would take out of it, and would try to put it in dance. […] So I'm not interested in copying mentalities or structures from Europe. Of course there is an influence, but I want to propose something related to what I'm doing – also without being out of my timeframe." This choreographer touched upon several important issues. First of all he pointed out that he does not want to copy dance work in Europe because he is interested in the local context he is part of, which inspires his work. By this, the choreographer also indicates that he aims his dance works to be related to the local environment he lives in – according to him, in his case a "crazy" one. In other words, dance is related to a geographical and societal *place*. In his final statement the choreographer indicates that he wants to work within his "own timeframe". In light of the discussion of the hegemonic notions of cultural evolution and modernity, this comment is striking because it seems to adopt the idea that dancers in Lebanon work in a different time zone than European dancers – an earlier zone, to be precise. This highlights the supposed importance of *time* as a gauge for artistic progress.

The usage of the term "contemporary dance" for the practices of the dancers in Beirut may thus seem questionable. However, since there is no other term available, I have decided to stick to the label of contemporary dance, employed in a broad understanding of the adaptability of the genre to local contexts. This thesis however should be read with the above discussion in mind, and with the awareness that this thesis addresses contemporary dance practices *in Beirut*. By this, I am by no means suggesting that dance in Lebanon is essentially different from dance in Europe. However, I do advocate attention to and recognition of localized features of the genre.

Practice in Beirut – thesis structure

Dancers "practice" contemporary dance in Beirut on different levels and in relation to Beirut, Lebanon, and regional and international contexts. The thesis is structured along these levels. In chapter one, **'**The organization of contemporary dance practices in Beirut', I discuss the first level I identified in relation to contemporary dance practices: the organization of dance practices in terms of education, dancing as a career, the absence of governmental support with regard to institutionalized education and funding for artistic production, cooperation problems, and the related lack of dance companies and collectives. Dancers raised these issues multiple times during the interviews, and these strongly affect the conditions under which dancers practice contemporary dance. Further, the organizational difficulties discussed are related to broader problems dancers identified in Lebanese politics and society, such as the lack of a well-functioning government in general, and the difficulties with collaboration dancers observed in many domains of society. I discuss the organizational problems dancers face in Lebanon partly in connection with the findings of Krystel Khoury, Nicholas Rowe and Rosemary Martin with regard to practical challenges for dance practices in the Southern Mediterranean at large.

The second level of contemporary dance practice is the social context with regard to dance in which the practice takes place – more specifically, the attitudes of family and the wider society towards (contemporary) dance. Chapter two, ‘Contemporary dance practice in its social context’, discusses these attitudes, in relation to dancing as a career, self-determination, and religious considerations. In addition, dancers related the miscomprehension of contemporary dance of many Lebanese citizens to a superficiality of Lebanese society, which prefers easy entertainment over “difficult” contemporary art. I discuss the isolation from the rest of society some dancers experienced due to these superficial outlooks, and, in relation to this, examine the socio-economic backgrounds of dancers in order to find out if they are part of a distinctive cultural elite.

Chapter three, ‘Practicing contemporary dance in the context of Beirut’, examines the broader social, political and economic context in which dancers practice contemporary dance. I offer an overview of the situation at the time of the research, discussing the effects of the Syrian conflict on Beirut and Lebanon. Further, I discuss events dancers addressed which affect their daily lives: the civil war, the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, the 2008 armed conflict between supporters of the Lebanese government and Hezbollah, and the regular bombings in Beirut. Dancers identified the violent events as structural, and spoke of the “crazy” behavior of people in Beirut. Dancers often spoke of tiredness and the inability to make long-term planning due to continuing political and security instability. These have an effect on their daily lives, including their dance practices.

Finally, an important level of contemporary dance practice in Beirut is production practices, in terms of performances and other dance works, such as dance films. In chapter four, ‘Contemporary dance practice in Beirut: Performances’, which is the last chapter of this thesis, I describe the dance works I have seen and discussed with the dancers. I offer elaborate descriptions of the dance works, including dancers’ explanations of the themes which informed them. All themes were strongly related to social and or political events or issues, such as memories, particular movement of the Arab body, exhaustion, religious conservatism, and mourning. I analyze the themes in-depth and in connection with the broader context of Beirut, to which they are related. I then address dancers' viewpoints with regard to dealing with social or political issues in dance performances, related to their concerns with sincerity and superficiality, tiredness and foreign funding agendas.

This thesis is for the main part based on anthropological fieldwork in Beirut, Lebanon, in Fall 2013. Attached to this thesis is the fieldwork report, which offers a detailed account of the preparation for the fieldwork, the period and location of the research, methods of research and analysis, focus group, and ethical considerations.

Chapter One The organization of contemporary dance practice in Beirut

When I arrived in Beirut in September 2013, I contacted one of the dancers I had first met during my introductory visit six months earlier. She gave me the names of a few other dancers, and one of them became my principal gatekeeper to my focus group. I wrote separate emails to a number of dancers, explaining that I was interested to learn more about contemporary dance in Beirut. Most dancers immediately suggested that we would meet up to talk. One dancer wrote me: “As it stands, I wouldn’t go as far as to call myself a dancer because of the lack of rigorous training.” She was however willing to meet for a coffee and to talk about dance.

This dancer touched upon one major difficulty dancers experienced while practicing contemporary dance in Beirut: educational possibilities in dance are very limited. As I started asking dancers about their dance education, I came to understand that institutionalized education in dance is absent in Lebanon. There are no public dance academies or university programs which offer a curriculum in dance formation. In this chapter I examine the alternative educational paths dancers followed to gain training in dance. By doing so, I offer an overview of educational possibilities in dance in Beirut, and so far as dancers were educated elsewhere in Lebanon, in the country at large. I also pay attention to the introduction of the contemporary dance genre to Lebanon. This discussion serves to highlight the organizational context with regard to dance education in which dancers are practicing contemporary dance, and how they experienced the implications of the existing options for dance education.

One of these implications is again related to the remark of the dancer above, which was echoed by several other dancers: in Lebanon it is difficult to obtain a professional level in dancing as measured to international standards. Some dancers argued that the only professional dancers in Lebanon were the ones who gained their education in a dance institution abroad – which in most cases concerned an academy or university in France. These statements revealed the value some dancers attributed to an education in dance in Europe or the United States. According to Khoury et al, dancers participating in the Symposium on Dance Education in Arabic Speaking Countries in Bodrum, 2010, also raised the notion of Western education as superior to local education.[45] In addition, dancers’ education in western institutions demonstrates the connections of dancers in Beirut with an international dance circuit. Later in this chapter I will show how particularly the western dance circuit has a broader significance for dancers in Lebanon which extends education.

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[45] Krystel Khoury, Rosemary Martin and Nicholas Rowe, “Bursting bubbles between sand and sea: teaching dance on the edge of the Mediterranean.” *Research in Dance Education* 14, no. 3 (2013): 197, doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.722616.

A difficulty in obtaining a high level in dancing is not the only factor which hampers a professional activity as a dancer, however. The lack of education is part of a larger structure of impossibilities for professional dancing in Lebanon. These are mainly related to financial issues, and were summed up by a dancer who stated: “You must know by now that we get no governmental support. Any investment is private and it needs to come from someone who is fully interested in dance. So far there are no such people.” In this chapter I discuss how dancers experienced troubles in sustaining themselves financially as dancers. I highlight the different strategies dancers employed to work around financial issues, which ranged from succeeding in making a living from dancing alone, to teaching dance alongside dancing, to having an additional job in a different field than dance.

In addition, I examine how financial problems hinder dancers in producing performances. I address the limited access to rehearsal and performance venues, in financial terms as well as in terms of absence of such spaces. I discuss the lack of governmental support for dance, and explain how dance production in Lebanon is largely funded through regional and western funding bodies, cultural centers and embassies. These funding practices demonstrate how contemporary dance practice in Lebanon is part of an international funding and collaboration network. Further, I touch upon dancers’ observations of western funding agendas and their implications for dance production in Lebanon. This topic will be further explored in chapter four, which in addition to several performances discusses dancers’ opinions on addressing social and political issues through dance performance, partly in relation to funding activities.

A final obstacle for practicing professional contemporary dance in Beirut I discuss in this chapter concerns collaboration problems between dancers. These problems are caused by ambivalences many dancers feel with regard to working together in companies or collectives. I suggest that partly as a result of these ambivalences, companies and collectives in Lebanon remain few. These ambivalent attitudes are partly related to conflicts which have arisen between several dancers and one of Beirut’s leading dance companies, *Maqamat Dance Theater*. More generally, dancers suggested that the collaboration problems amongst dancer reflect a larger problem in Lebanese society with regard to cooperation.

In reflection on the variety of problems presented above as experienced by dancers, I discuss the state of tiredness many dancers described in relation to practicing contemporary dance in Beirut. Dancers mainly related their tiredness to financial worries and collaboration problems. They also made references to tiredness in relation to broader societal and political challenges, which I will discuss in chapter two. Chapter three addresses a performance which was stirred by reflections on states of exhaustion, as well as dancers’ views on politicized performances which related to tiredness.

I end this chapter with a positive note, highlighting how the restricting conditions under which dancers in Beirut practice contemporary dance paradoxically also provide opportunities for dancers to creatively work around the limitations they are confronted with. These sometimes result in innovative artistic ideas and practices.

Dance education in Beirut and Lebanon

Dancers were introduced into dance in many ways. About half of the dancers I interviewed started dancing at a very young age. One reason was that their parents – especially their mothers – wanted their children – especially their daughters – to be taught in ballet. As one of the dancers put it: “My mum was like all the mothers who want their daughter to be *gracieuse*”. In these families, dancing or other artistic activities were valued. One dancer noted: “For my parents, it was important to give us at least one artistic thing to do. So for me it was dancing, and my sister did the piano.” Sometimes my interviewees were introduced into dance because their older brother or sister was taking dance classes. A dancer whose sister was doing modern jazz told me: “My older sister used to use me as her pocket doll to go to class at night. I would walk her to the dance class, I would stay and watch, and we’d go back. I watched people dancing, and I liked it.”

Other dancers were not so strongly encouraged to start dancing, but were supported in their early wish by their parents. Parents themselves were sometimes active in the artistic field. The father of one of the dancers organized dance classes for a recreational club, and after school she would come with him to take part in ballet and Latin classes. While the dancers quoted above were all female, also male dancers would sometimes start dancing at a young age. One danced in a folk dance troupe in the village where he was raised, and another explained how he grew up with *baladi*. All these dancers have in common that ever since they first got introduced into it, dance has been an important part of their lives.

Roughly the other half of the dancers who participated in my research started dancing at a later age – that is, during their (late) teens. Quite a few were introduced into dance through the Lebanese dance company *Caracalla,* a popular dance troupe which performs spectacular dance shows which combine modern – especially Martha Graham – folk and jazz dance vocabularies.[46] Youths with an interest in dance would sign up for an audition to become part of the company. One of the dancers who used to be part of Caracalla explained how the company tried to “deal with the situation of the country” – that is, with the absence of education in dance – by making a first selection on the basis of physicality – fitness and flexibility. Then a period of dance training followed, after which a final selection was made. This final selection of dancers was further educated and performed in the company's shows. Dancers who were trained in *Caracalla* generally acknowledged how much they had learned there – yet all of them in the end decided to further develop their skills in contemporary dance elsewhere.

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[46] Several dancers criticized the shows presented by Caracalla for their sensational character. These criticisms will be further discussed in chapter two and four in relation to concerns with superficiality.

A path many dancers chose to gain further education in dance led through the theater program of *l'Institut Des Beaux Arts de Beyrouth* at the Lebanese University. The Lebanese University is the only public learning institution for higher education in Lebanon, with several campuses across the country. Several dancers noted that they decided to enroll in the theater program because it enabled them to follow education in the field of performance close to dance, and because it would provide them with a diploma. Others wanted to become actors and became interested in dance later on. According to those who graduated from this program, the courses in *espression corporelle* best approximated the dance training they were actually seeking to obtain. A few other dancers were educated in acting in different (private) institutions, in Lebanon, France or the United States. Most theater graduates followed their graduate education abroad, except for a dancer who continued with a master in theater at *Université Saint Joseph* in Beirut – although his research project focuses on dance.

Dancers who did not graduate from the theater program at the Lebanese University or elsewhere developed their dancing skills in a variety of ways. Quite a few were involved in the early years of *Maqamat Dance Theatre*, dancing in some of the company's performances, and later other dancers participated in the company's contemporary dance school *Takween*, located in Hamra. According to most of the dancers I interviewed, *Maqamat Dance Theatre* introduced contemporary dance to Lebanon. The company was founded in 2002 and aims to develop the contemporary dance scene in Lebanon and the Arab region. The director of the company as well as other dancers felt that nothing was offered in the discipline of contemporary dance before the first edition of BIPOD in 2004. The festival succeeded in creating a public – however still small –for contemporary dance.

Maqamat Dance Theatre has been creating several dance works since its foundation, which toured nationally and internationally. The company's members have changed over the years, but founder and director Omar Rajeh is *Maqamat*'s steady factor. The company runs a production house, *Maqamat DanceHouse*, which (co-)produces local, regional and international dance works. Since 2004, the company has been hosting the yearly festival *BIPOD* (*Beirut International Platform Of Dance*), which presents contemporary dance performances of international dance companies. It also bi-annually presents the *Leymoun Arab Dance Platform* simultaneously with BIPOD, in which dancers from the Arab region showcase their work to an audience of international curators and local Lebanese. Omar Rajeh further co-founded the regional contemporary dance network *Masahat Dance Network*, which links Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan.

In previous years, *Maqamat* offered three editions of *Takween*. This program offered a few months of dance training from local teachers associated with *Maqamat* and international teachers, who *Maqamat* invited to give workshops. Students learned to improve their dance skills primarily in the genres of ballet and contemporary dance, and were also introduced to the practice of choreography. This program attracted many Lebanese as well as dance students from elsewhere, mainly Egypt and Syria. Due to a very unfortunate and complex mix of circumstances, *Maqamat Dance Theatre* quit the *Takween* program, and a rather tense atmosphere has emerged among *Maqamat* and its previous Lebanese dancing colleagues and students. The effects of these troubles will be discussed later in this chapter.

Still other dancers who are now (also) active in contemporary dance were trained in the *Beirut Dance Studio*, located near Sin el Fil. This studio offers an intensive daily training program in classical ballet. Its associated company, *Beirut Dance Company*, performs performances that were alternately characterized by its director, its ex-dancers and dancers not associated with the company as contemporary and classical, or neo-classical. This variation shows the debate about dance genre terminologies, and for my discussion at this moment it is sufficient that the dancers who were trained in this studio stated that they at least received a solid basis in classical ballet, and some experience with modern and contemporary techniques when they went abroad with the company to do workshops in New York, Paris and London. These dancers also performed with the company for quite a long time before they decided to leave the company. One of them is very polyvalent and is now creating his own theater performances featuring dance alongside a range of other activities. Another decided to leave the company when she was no longer asked to perform, while a third left once she felt that she was not progressing in dancing and hence not at "the right place" anymore. In the end, two dancers shifted from *Beirut Dance Company* to *Maqamat Dance Theatre*. Both told me how switching from ballet to contemporary dance was challenging for them, because the two genres approach the body very differently.

Many dancers attended 'amateur' dance classes in Beirut or Lebanon at large. According to most, the first ballet schools in Lebanon were mostly run by 'Russian, Armenian, and Eastern European' or 'Lebanese' 'pioneers', as some dancers called them. Names associated with these pioneers are Sonia Poladian, Georgette Gebara and Raffic Gharzouzi, Marguerite Khoury, who in 2013 still owned a studio in Ashrafieh linked to the Royal Academy in London, and May Chelhot, who taught ballet in *Studio Cadanse* in Badaro and who was also trained in modern dance. A somewhat younger generation, partly taught by some of these pioneers, includes Nada Kano, director of the *Beirut Dance Studio* and *Beirut Dance company*, and Alice Massabki, leading the *Art & Movement Studio* in Jal el Dib, which offers a variety of dance training in ballet, contemporary dance, jazz, and hip hop. Further, Nadra Assaf ran the *Al Sarab Alternative Dance School* in Byblos, mainly offering modern dance. The curricula of these three dance schools are registered in the Ministry of Education, alongside 10 other schools across Lebanon, among which Georgette Gebara's *École de Danse Libanais* in Jounieh. These schools do not offer a university diploma, but their recognized curriculum gives them a distinct status. Other registered schools teach ballet, jazz, ballroom, *baladi*, hip-hop and street dance. Further, Jana al Hassan taught *expression corporelle* in the Lebanese University.

Undoubtedly, there were and are more studios in Beirut and Lebanon where dance is taught. I learned about teachers and studios mostly via my interviewees and the Internet. However, not all dancers are familiar with every dance possibility in Beirut and Lebanon, and additionally, not all dancers would probably regard every dance possibility relevant enough to tell me about. Furthermore, teachers from abroad who in the past opened a studio in Beirut disappeared after several years, such as a French male duo that was teaching ballet in Geitawi before 2006, but who are assumed to have left due to the July war.

At the moment of research, the dance studios in Beirut that were most prominently present in the dancers' accounts were *Cadanse* in Badaro*, Beirut Dance Studio, Art & Movement Studio, Houna Center* in Hamra (which offers *baladi*, contemporary dance, martial arts, yoga, amongst others), and the *Amadeus Dance and Music School* at Sodeco (ballet, contemporary dance, *dabkeh*, modern jazz, oriental dance, ballroom and Latin, Pilates). In addition, *Sima Dance Company*, which moved to Beirut due to the war in Syria, taught ballet and contemporary dance in *Babel Theatre* in Hamra. Furthermore, many dancers took workshops whenever these were organized in Beirut or elsewhere in Lebanon. Sometimes dancers residing in Lebanon – either Lebanese residents or internationals living in Lebanon – led these workshops. Other times dancers from Europe or the United States came to Lebanon to give workshops. Among these were Lebanese dancers who migrated to for instance Germany, Spain and France.

The various educational paths dancers followed demonstrate the diversity of alternatives for dance training which dance studios offer in response to the absence of institutionalized education. A number of studios strive to and seem to succeed in realizing a high level of professionalization, offering intensive dance training curricula. Some of their students manage to enroll in dance academies in Europe or the United States. However, several dancers and dance teachers noted that the lack of continuation in higher dance education is problematic. The dance studios currently offering dance training cannot provide the type of fulltime education required for a professional dance practice, for reasons that will be explained below. Therefore, one teacher was trying to get a dance curriculum included in a university program, but she had difficulties in gaining the university's full support. Dancers experienced impossibilities in obtaining the dance education they wished for in their home country, which made some enroll in theater programs that did not entirely meet their ambitions. Getting dance education on government and university agendas remains a continuing struggle.

Dance education abroad

Several dancers followed institutionalized education in dance in a foreign country. Most graduates from *l'Institut Des Beaux Arts de Beyrouth* went to Europe for their master's, especially to do the theoretical program in dance at *Université Paris 8*. However, one dancer told me that she did not finish the program and chose to return to Beirut because "I wasn't really interested to write about dance, I wanted to be more practicing. And you know, I felt it was a little bit pretentious at my age to start writing about dance. I just want to have the experience […] and maybe later on I could do a master's and then a *doctorale,* but for now I think I like to be more in that *pratique*." Most others obtained their MA degree. Another dancer who was educated in the Lebanese University went to England to do an MA in Dance Studies focusing on choreography and theory, and afterwards started a PhD at The Place, an institution associated with the London Contemporary Dance School. However, this dancer put his PhD on hold to invest in dancing in Beirut.

Dancers also obtained more practical dance training in contemporary dance in institutions in several cities (Paris, Angers, Montpeillier) in France. Some dancers switched several times from one (private) institution to the other. One dancer who followed the *Takween* program was keen on doing a master's in choreography in Europe and considered *De Theaterschool* in Amsterdam. "So now I have a contact," she replied when I told her I followed an orientation year there. Absence of contacts and other practical matters like language (German schools for instance are not accessible to non-German speaking students) and having a family can hamper plans for studying abroad. Dancers also followed various (amateur) dance classes abroad. Some grew up in several places in the United States and Europe during the civil war, and followed classes in ballet or all kinds of styles. Some dancers who followed university studies other than dance abroad often took dance classes on the side. Further, a *baladi* dancer was educated by Leila Haddad in Paris, and continued to refine his techniques through workshops in Egypt, where the *baladi* megastars from the Mohammed Ali Street in Cairo and the Mahmoud Reda Troupe offer classes.

Finally, the older generation I interviewed was also educated abroad, following practical and/or theoretical dance training in ballet and modern techniques, and occasionally jazz in France, England and the United States. Some of them also held theater diplomas and educational degrees in dance. Some experienced troubles during their study period abroad. One dancer told me how she encountered instances of racism, and how it bothered her that nobody was pronouncing her last name correctly. Another dancer who was educated in France suffered from the struggle to go abroad, and from travelling back and forth between France and Lebanon for several years. Still another dancer left

France, where she had been educated and dancing professionally, due to personal problems, and she returned to Beirut.[47]

These international educational paths dancers followed illustrate how some dancers decide to go abroad to obtain an education in dance which is not provided in Lebanon. It further demonstrates the strong international connections which thus exist between Lebanese dancers and institutions in the United States and Europe – especially France – on the level of dance training. In addition, some dancers' comments showed how dance education abroad offers recognition of the professional level of the dancer. One dancer was surprised how she was suddenly held in higher esteem by other dancers when she came back from a dance workshop in Germany. I suggest that the valuing of education in Western institutes is not a stand-alone attitude, and that it is related to a broader discourse in the international dance circuit which takes Western dance notions, education and production as quality standard. This issue will be discussed later in this chapter in relation to funding for dance production, and will be addressed more in-depth in chapter four.

Majoring in a field different from dance

While some dancers had followed an education which exclusively focused on theater and dance, the far majority of my interviewees was educated in a different field as well, in universities or private institutions in Lebanon or abroad. Apart from the Lebanese University, universities in Lebanon are private. Several dancers followed a study program in a different field from theater in the Lebanese University. Dancers were also educated in the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University, or *Université Saint-Joseph*, in fields ranging from anthropology to graphic design to communication. Other study fields dancers specialized in include philosophy, literature, law, photography and medicine.

Dancers also went abroad to study subjects other than dance, mainly to Paris, the United Kingdom and the United States, especially New York. Students enrolled in either universities or private institutions. Again, study directions varied greatly, from law to architecture to philosophy and from film academy to advertising to nursing. Notably, the educational path of most dancers was characterized by a lot of switching between study fields, including theater and dance, as well as by changing from university and geographical location. It was quite common for dancers to follow their BA in Lebanon and their MA in Europe or the United States. Some students also combined their other-than-dance or -theater studies with an intensive dance curriculum in Lebanon or abroad – which most experienced as rather challenging.

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[47] For an insightful account of the experiences of seven women from the southern Mediterranean, including Lebanon, during their dance education in international (Western) environments, see Rosemary Martin, "Alienation and transformation: an international education in contemporary dance," *Research in Dance Education* 14, no. 3 (2013) 201-215, doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.732566; Rosemary Martin, "An international education in dance: Personal narratives of seven women from the southern Mediterranean region" (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2012).

While some dancers enrolled in study programs different from dance did so out of a genuine interest in the different field, for others this choice was based on the necessity to obtain a university degree while staying in Lebanon. The high degree of switching between different studies indicated uncertainties of many dancers regarding the kind of professional they aspired to become. These uncertainties were likely to be related to the related to the kind of life a particular profession would entail: as I will explain in the upcoming section, working as a professional dancer in Lebanon involves a fair amount of struggling.

Working as a professional dancer in Lebanon

As indicated by the dancer quoted in the introduction of this chapter, professional dance practices in Lebanon are not governmentally backed – financially nor educationally – and private investors are few. Dancers thus have to rely on their own resources in order to sustain themselves. A dancer summarized the troubles dancers experienced, wondering: "I don't know how my fellow dancers are managing financially. I don't think they are. I think they do other jobs, or they are teaching."

In this comment, the dancer summarized the financial situation of most dancers. Very few dancers managed to sustain themselves solely on the basis of performing dance. Some did, but many noted how fragile their livelihood is. This mainly goes for dancers who work solo, that is, not as part of a company, and who choreograph their own work. One dancer mentioned that she did not want to think about the possibility of no longer being able to manage economically. She managed from day to day, and she felt as if she was surviving. Some dancers used to work as freelance dancers for several (sometimes European) choreographers in the past. They were eager to continue this and would be even keener to be part of a company led by a choreographer, since this offers more financial security than working freelance. Indeed, the core members of the company *Maqamat Dance Theatre* seemed to be better able to sustain themselves, and the multiple (partly funded) activities of the company, including performing regularly and yearly hosting the festival BIPOD, may be of help in this regard. However, as we will see below, to establish other dance companies or collectives in Lebanon proves highly challenging, and this, amongst other factors, hampers a professional scene to thrive.

Many dancers were teaching dance alongside performing from time to time. They do so in their own private dance schools, in primary or secondary schools where dance is compulsory, in university where body expression is part of the curriculum, or in cultural centers, which offer a range of dancing and other cultural activities. Other dancers used to teach but quit, because the investment of teaching was too big and prevented them from creating their own work. Some, including the older generation, are only teaching, and the younger dancers face the same situation of their colleagues who stopped teaching: they do not have enough time to invest in producing performances. Still others have the aspiration to teach, but cannot find the time alongside their main job.

Indeed, several dancers had a job in a field different from dance – generally the field in which they majored. While some dancers were passionate about their job, others involuntarily deprioritized dancing because the job took up so much time and energy. This happened mostly out of financial reasons: having less than a fulltime job is often simply not enough to make a living. Dancers are thus also photographers, editors, philosophy teachers, dermatologists, Pilates teachers, theater actresses or filmmakers. Some of these activities are indeed strongly connected to the artistic field, while others are not. Dancers are sometimes also involved in more than another professional activity, and make a living through doing a range of artistic things, combining dancing with theater, puppetry, filmmaking, and photographing. Some of them noted that they do not want to commit to a regular job because it would limit their freedom to work intensively on an artistic project for a certain period of time. A few dancers are also following a PhD-trajectory at a European university, or used to do so but put it on hold, or aspire to do so in the near future. Most work or would like to work on a topic related to dance or arts more generally.

It is important to note that the ways in which dancers arranged their professional lives changed quite rapidly, and often their activities themselves were irregular with regard to time invested. Very similar to their changing paths as students, as professionals dancers would teach dance, then quit, would work next to dancing, then quit, would swap dance for teaching, would dance at first but quit to get a more sustainable job, and would dream of starting to dance again in some way or another – which some, two years after I interviewed them, may have actually achieved.

The fluctuating courses of most dancers' professional lives highlight the unstable organization of the dance scene in Lebanon in terms of financial sustainability. They further show how choices dancers make in whether to become a dance professional or not are related to financial considerations. It was sometimes difficult for me to get a grip on the financial resources of the dancers. First of all, finances can be a sensitive issue. Secondly, and more reflective of the insecure financial circumstances in which dancers work, their incomes often came from multiple sources and were irregular. These financial circumstances have an effect on dance performance production in Lebanon alongside other factors, to which I will turn now.

Dance performance production problems

As result of the challenging working circumstances for dancers in Lebanon, dance production in terms of performances is limited and irregular. Dance production needs time investment and continuation, which is hard to achieve in an unstable context where financial insecurity is continuous, spaces to dance are few, funding is little, and companies or collectives are largely absent. During the time of the fieldwork, four dance productions were in creation: one by *Maqamat Dance Theatre*, another by solo dancer Danya Hammoud, and two by two groups of three performers each who temporarily united to create a performance: choreographer Ali Chahrour and amateur dancers Rania Rafei and Umama Hamido, and choreographer and dancer Danya Hammoud, dancer Khouloud Yassine, and actor Mounzer Baalbaki. These dancers were all actively rehearsing and all performed their creations at the end of my research period or sometime afterwards. Three other dancers had a solo creation in mind, and were at various stages of the research process, developing conceptual ideas and sometimes already physically working on movement.

Financial risks often restrict dancers to produce performances. An established choreographer observed: "It's a difficult situation actually. It's very difficult for people starting to do work. It's not easy. I mean with this performance [the performance he was creating at that moment], to a certain extent there's a certain number of people that will come [to see it], so we can cover part of it [the production costs], but still it's a big risk. For a young artist starting to do work, this is not possible." Dancers indeed mentioned that renting a theater to perform a dance production is an expensive investment which they are not sure will be covered by ticket sales. In addition, some theaters have to be rented a year in advance. As circumstances in Lebanon can change rapidly due to instability in the country and the region, dancers often do not dare to take the risk to make long-term arrangements. One dancer explained that she would be worried that if for example violent clashes would break out, people would stay in their homes and would not come to the performance.

Finally, dancers experience problems in finding affordable and proper training and rehearsal spaces. Spaces are few and expensive to rent. Illustrative for this problem was a group of dancers I watched rehearsing in a space which at the time was still under construction. The dancers worked in the corner of a large room laced with a temporary linoleum layer, under the constant noise of drilling and hammering. Dancers often related the unsteady working conditions to the instability of Lebanon at large. One of the dancers rehearsal in the construction space remarked: "this space is unstable, like everything here". These instabilities will be further examined in the next chapter, in order to highlight the broader context which affects dancers' experiences in practicing contemporary dance in Lebanon.

The role of the government

Dancers felt that the government is first responsible for providing the infrastructure for well-functioning art scene in general. Many dancers expressed their frustration with the absence of government funding for arts and specifically for dance. Lebanon has a Ministry of Culture, but as one annoyed dancer remarked: "There is a Ministry of Culture, right, it just doesn't do anything except support Baalbek."[48] Another dancer urged me to include the Ministry of Culture in my research in order to find out why they seem unenthusiastic to invest in culture. Infuriated, she exclaimed: "There is no structure at all! It's terrible! And it's really unacceptable. […] I would really like to know what they think of all this, how come that they are looking at all that is happening and not helping at all? […] Why are things like this, and is there any plan, any way, for dancing – do they know what *is* contemporary dance? I'm not even sure they know what contemporary dance is." I asked several dancers if they knew the reasons behind the government's absence in supporting dance. Most felt that the government has other priorities – given the current regional instabilities, the main priority is security. One dancer noted that since the civil war ended, a strategy for building up a structure for the cultural scene was never effectively created. Government attention to culture is only directed at attracting tourists. Several dancers voiced their disagreement with the prioritizing policies of the government, arguing that artistic production is highly important for society.

While political authorities in Lebanon do not do much to support dance, the practice is not actively opposed. Censorship exists in many domains in Lebanon.[49] Censorship by the government however did not seem to be a major concern of most dancers. A dancer noted: "Well I don't know how it works for dance performances, because each time we see someone naked on stage we are very surprised, because it's supposed to be forbidden by the government. […] I don't know if it's expressed as a law, but we know that they can stop the performance for this, even for speaking about sex or speaking about religion in a theater play, because theater plays have to submit their text to the censorship." Asked how censorship is executed with regard to dance, this dancer thought that dancers are simply not submitting their work: they just perform and take the censors by surprise. Worried that he would be stopped performing his show which addressed religious repression, a dancer advised me to come to the premiere. In the end however, he performed all shows that were scheduled.

Andrew Hammond has suggested that there is relatively little state supervision on arts in Lebanon compared to other countries in the region, in order to prevent conflicts between the country's diverse sectarian communities.[50] With regard to dance, the Lebanese government – which is structured along sectarian lines – may indeed allow the performance of most dance productions in order to appear neutral and avoid suspicion of censoring based on sectarian motivations. More research is needed to discern the government's attitude towards censoring and funding dance practices in order to better understand the grounds of government policies dancers experience while practicing contemporary dance. Though not suggested by any of the dancers, the lack of governmental support for dance may also be interpreted as a less obvious repressive strategy than censorship to hinder the spread of especially contemporary dance performances, given their often critical messages.

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[48] Baalbek is an ancient town and touristic site in the Bekaa Valley, east of Lebanon. The town yearly hosts Lebanon's biggest internationally known cultural festival, Baalbek International Festival.

[49] Recently, the film 'In This Land Lay Graves of Mine' directed by Reine Mitri was banned by the Lebanese governments Censorship Committee because it would be "stimulating sectarian and partisan zealotries and disturbing civil peace". Alex Rowell, "Forget but Don't Forgive," *NOW*, June 29, 2015, accessed August 9, 2015, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/10questions/565510-forget-but-dont-forgive. Some dancers expressed their support for the director on Facebook. For an overview of materials that were censored by the General Directorate of General Security since the 1940s, see "The Virtual Museum of Censorship," accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.censorshiplebanon.org/Home.

[50] Andrew Hammond, *Popular Culture in the Arab World. Arts, Politics and the Media.* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 33-34.

Khoury et al. have noted that during the Symposium for Dance Education in Arab Speaking Countries, the directors of state-funded institutions were not invited, because the other attendees would then have felt the need to first discuss issues of abusive practices of authorities.[51] Other dancers could potentially regard state funding for dance practices, in terms of education as well as performance production, as an association with particular state policies. State-funding thus becomes further complicated in the context of the Arab revolutions. Similar considerations would probably play a role in the context of state-funding from a Lebanese government which is organized along sectarian lines, and which policies are seen as problematic by many dancers.

Funding

Since government funding for dance is lacking in Lebanon, financing of dance production and festivals comes through alternative channels. Dancers often invest from their own pockets, and theater technicians and venue owners sometimes offer reduced prices. In addition, crowdfunding through platforms like Beirut-based Zoomaal are becoming more and more popular to finance cultural events and performances.[52] Funders for dance include a few Lebanese private investors, corporate businesses like banks, regional Arab funds such as the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and the Young Arab Theater Fund (YATF), international businesses like Nestlé or Redbull, institutions like European embassies and cultural centers, and a range of funding bodies such as the French Cultural Institute, the Goethe Institut, the British Council, the Anna Lindh Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. A substantial amount of funding for dance appears to come from French institutions, and while some dancers were not sure about the reason or this, several reckon that this is due to the historical political connection between the two countries – from 1920 until 1946, Lebanon was a French mandate.

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[51] Krystel Khoury, Rosemary Martin and Nicholas Rowe, "Bursting bubbles between sand and sea: teaching dance on the edge of the Mediterranean." *Research in Dance Education* 14, no. 3 (2013): 193, doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.722616.

[52] Recently, the neighborhood street festival Nehna wel Aamar wel Jiran (Us, the Moon and the Neihgbors), organized by Collectif Kahraba, started its crowdfunding campaign to cover part of the costs of the festival. "Nehna wel Amar wel Jiran Festival," *Zoomaal,* accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.zoomaal.com/projects/naj2015/5035?ref=29140630.

Funding thus happens largely internationally and partly on a European level. This has significant consequences for dance production in Lebanon. For example, when a performance is funded by a French structure, the production too happens in France – often through residencies – and the performance is staged in France as well. Dancers experienced far better working and performing conditions when their work is supported by Western European institutions. However, once the performance is finished, dancers cannot present it in their country of residence. They would not be able to pay the theater rent and the equipment for the performance from their own pocket. They would certainly not have any salary.

Even though dancers who worked in Western Europe were very happy to have this opportunity and were generally appreciative of the collaboration, they and other dancers saw a problem here as well: dance production in a system like this does not sufficiently help to develop the dance scene in Lebanon. According to several dancers, the same goes for festivals in Lebanon that invite European dance companies to perform with support of the embassies and cultural centers associated with the respective countries. Even though most dancers acknowledged that it is important to have such foreign input, they insisted that investment in local dance production is essential to build up a Lebanese scene. Other implications of foreign funding practices for dance production in Lebanon will be discussed in chapter four.

Collaboration problems

Contemporary dance companies are few in Lebanon; most dancers work solo. Some dancers related difficulties in dance performance production to the relative lack of dance companies. Dance companies like *Maqamat Dance Theatre* and *Beirut Dance Company* indeed produce dance works more regularly, as do private dance schools. Most solo dancers mentioned that they found it difficult to always work on their own and create individual performances. Therefore, solo dancers sometimes unite to create a performance together. The problem with this is however that there is no joint continuous construction to build on: every time a new group unites, the dancers have to get to know each other's artistic interests and potentials. Further, usually when a performance is created, a choreographer guides the process – even though dancers may participate in creating the choreography to a very high degree. When the structure of a company is lacking, the dancers themselves have to create a temporary structure to work together.

Many dancers told me that the absence of collaboration with other dancers is hampering dance development. One dancer said: "There are many things in the country that are not helping the dance field. Of course the lack of funds is something really tough, but the lack of meeting points to cross-reference with the work of others, and of collaboration, is as well killing us, because all of us end up working by ourselves. And I'm not aware what others are working on, I am working on my theater play and I'm not aware that this guy is doing a very interesting physical theater thing, and I'm not aware that this guy is doing *baladi*…"

According to quite a few other dancers, collaboration with other dancers is indeed highly challenging, and often does not come about. As highlighted by the dancer quoted above, the reasons for this are practical as well as emotional, with regard to collaboration as such. Indeed, several dancers even felt that dancers are working more and more *against* each other instead of *with* each other. Some related this to competition between the dancers. Dancers would not be willing to work openly, which hinders dialogue amongst dancers. Trying to find reasons for this, dancers suggested that people may be afraid that others will 'steal' their artistic work and that they themselves will not get the credit that they deserve. Further, competition in gaining funding was highlighted by dancers as a reason for the unwillingness to share ideas. Dancers were however puzzled by the competitive attitudes which surrounded them: "I wonder where that attitude comes from, because you know, everybody wants to get funding, everybody wants to be on stage, but don't you realize that we can do that all together?" Two other dancers used the metaphor of dividing the cake, stating that in order to have a share in the cake, the cake needs to be bigger, and by working together, you can enlarge the cake.

Yet apparently, dancers had difficulties sharing the cake. Many of them related collaboration problems to 'ego's' in the dance scene. As one dancer explained: "It's ego issues. It's very difficult to put aside your own ego to work with other people. Even I had to deal with this." The notion of 'ego' came up so many times during interviews that it seemed to be an obsession for dancers. They accused other dancers in general of being obsessed about themselves, and sometimes acknowledged that they themselves had problems with working with other people, too. Some dancers noted that young dancers think too quickly that they can already be choreographers, while they actually do not have enough experience. While I was puzzled about why there apparently were so many ego's 'around' in the dance scene, most dancers seemed to take these attitudes for granted. A teacher of the older generation said: "Dancers have ego's. What can I do?"

A group of dancers once tried to unite in a collective, though the attempt never worked out. Dancers did not give me too much information on this attempt when I asked about it, probably because it had no lasting positive effects. Dancers mentioned difficulties with organizing discussions and moderating people with very different opinions as factors preventing an actual collective start-up. Referring to other attempts of people to work together, a dancer noted that when dancers get "slaps in the faces from a few people", this stops a lot of people from wanting to trust others anymore. This creates a lot of tension amongst the dancers. She concluded: "It's tiring, it's really tiring."

Still, several dancers were eager to work with others, but they were ambivalent with regard to the ways and means. Some gave up and found it difficult to regain energy for a joint endeavor. Dancers were themselves confused about their feelings regarding collaboration and reasons for not trying to undertake this again, despite the wish to do so. A dancer deliberated: "I think someone needs to say 'Ok, that's it, let's work.' But I don't know how open people are to that. And who is [would be] saying this? Why am I not saying this? […] I'm trying to break my own barriers and say, 'well I'm going to try something new and I want to work with somebody new.'"

Some unfortunate incidents seem to have had enormous consequences for fruitful collaboration in the Beirut dance scene. These have caused tensions that have arisen between several dancers and *Maqamat Dance Theatre*. I discussed these tensions quite thoroughly with many dancers involved. I heard opposing accounts, including contradictory accusations, curious questions about 'what others had told me about this', stories about misunderstandings, clashes of personalities, and competition. In such situations, generally neither of the sides is 'right', and it is not and has never been my aim to choose a side. I will also not discuss the issue in detail in order not to irresponsibly flare up arguments. I would like to make a point about this situation, however. To me, it became very clear that all sides have suffered greatly under these conflicts, and apart from personal pain, it has had damaging effects on the dance scene in Lebanon. As nearly all dancers I spoke with acknowledged, *Maqamat Dance Theatre* has been instrumental in developing contemporary dance in Lebanon. The company continues to play an important role in the scene, as does a number of solo dancers. A good relation amongst dancers, especially in the challenging context of Lebanon, is greatly needed for this scene to thrive. I hope that the relationship between the company and the dancers, as well as between dancers individually, will eventually improve for the sake of this.

Some dancers related the collaboration issue to broader problems in Lebanon concerning working together. One dancer explained: "Collaboration is a big issue in this country [laughs]. People don't know how to collaborate." Asked if he was talking generally or with regard to dance, he answered: "No, in general! In dance but in general too." In a different conversation, another dancer made a similar and more elaborate observation:

> "I think it's about our history. The people are always different, it's about differences, in this culture it's a bit hard to get ourselves to work together. […] I think it's the tension in the country. […] It's communication, everybody is doing their own thing, we're not open to each other. […] It's in our culture, and in the history of wars and everything, and in religion too, because our religions are opposing each other and are not open to each other. So even if we're not religious, the mentality of the people is like this. […] There's right and wrong, and if you're not like me you're wrong. […] Our reactions are based on history and our parents you know. It's a bit hard to get rid of them. […] I think the conflicts are really faster than the people that are trying to calm down."

These dancers thus identified collaboration problems in Lebanon at large, and related these to the country's historical and contemporary conflicts and sectarian strives. As will be further described in chapter three, conflicts reoccur time and again in Lebanon and its surrounding areas. The dancer quoted above observes this as well when she states that "the conflicts are really faster than the people that are trying to calm down". In other words, violent events succeed each other at a speed which makes it difficult for the people living in Lebanon to keep calm. What this means for how dancers experience the behavior of their fellow citizens will be addressed in chapter four, as well.

A combination of negative experiences with working together and broader collaborative issues in Lebanon at large thus prevented many dancers from retrying to collaborate. However, echoing the dancer quoted in the beginning of this section, several dancers also mentioned practical problems as a main reason for collaboration staying out. One dancer highlighted the fact that most dancers have a job or are still studying next to their dancing as preventing dancers to take the step to start collaborating: "I don't know why there is resistance. And everyone is at the same time doing something else with his or her life, studying, working… for me this is the main problem. Personally I didn't resolve it, and it's making me suffer. Sometimes I say it's my fault, I should take a proper decision and just do it. Which is to have a space, and work. You know, have a part of the day that is almost institutionally dedicated to work on dance. As if this is not possible… I don't know."[53]

While in her statement this dancer identified the problem of lack of time to invest in dancing, she also wondered if she was herself to blame for not dedicating time to dance. I propose that the circumstances in which dancers in Lebanon are practicing contemporary dance are so challenging that a dancer would need a massive amount of willpower in order to beat these. Practical stumbling blocks and personal struggles with regard to dancing and dancing together are thus highly interrelated. This dancer continued explaining that the concrete lack of spaces to collaborate was further hindering collaboration between dancing: "I'm more a solo, but actually due to the situation. I don't think about it every day, but from time to time I try to imagine a situation where there will be a space at our disposal, and that things would start to get produced, and not only occasionally, but punctually… and maybe this is the problem: there's nothing like that, for the moment, for a collective. It means a space where people can come, produce stuff, and work with each other if they want, give classes, do readings, do workshops, experimentations…"

Despite these practical and emotional difficulties, a young dancer and choreographer managed to bring dancers together to work on a production. Dancers spoke about this endeavor with much admiration, and the initiator's determination could be an inspiration for others: "All these people were so motivated and because I have as much motivation, I feel it in other people. I understand why someone wants to sweat and why someone wants to dance, I understand this love, this passion. And I thought, why not, let's put it together. Let's put all these people together and do something." This project culminated in a performance, and initiatives like these continue to happen occasionally.

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[53] Particularly the last few words of this dancer's account highlight her difficulty in taking the decision to dedicate more time to dancing. Her last words contradict her earlier feelings by questioning if it is really impossible to dance more. However, she cannot come to a conclusion.

Dancers had different opinions on what the dance scene in Lebanon requires to meet the needs of its practitioners. Some thought that a collective is needed, but they disagreed on whether this can come 'natural' and with time, or that someone needs to stand up and force the process. For many, this would imply a hierarchy in the collective, and the common understanding of a collective amongst the dancers was that it has no hierarchy. Some dancers were not in favor of hierarchy, while others were, who were therefore keen to see more companies established. Another dancer thought that the development of a collective needed to come about smoother. Referring to the successful collaboration, she stated: "I still think that being a collective is... I don't know. It's tricky, it's not that easy. I mean it's good to have it, it's a great intention to do it, but I think for example a smarter idea was to bring people together, instead of creating an organized collective. You know, for me that would be an actual effective step towards a collective." Like other dancers, this dancer was cautious of pushing collaboration.

I suggest that the ambivalent attitudes of most dancers regarding collaboration are preventing the formation of collectives or companies, which is in turn hindering dance development in Lebanon, as explained above. Many dancers who work solo may do so out of choice, but for a large part also out of necessity. It was clear from most dancers' accounts that they wish for a space which is accessible to all, in which collaboration could get a chance. None of the dancers wanted to be the initiator of establishing such a space, as they did not feel to become branded as 'leader'. Therefore, some dancers suggested that I, as a 'neutral' mediator, could fulfill that position. I personally did not think I could, first of all because such a position would challenge my relative neutrality as a researcher. In addition, lack of time and in-depth understanding of the dance scene in all its complexities would have prevented me from effectively mediating this process. Dancers usually realized this at the very moment they did their suggestion. However, I think that my examination has been helpful in identifying the problems and possible solutions for contemporary dance practice in Lebanon, which could be taken into account in future endeavors to help it develop. A recent positive initiative aimed at contemporary dance development in the region at large is the establishment of *Min Tala*, a pan-Arab dance company which offers dancers the opportunity to cooperate in a collective, launched in June 2015 in Egypt.[54]

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[54] "Min Tala," accessed August 9, 2015, http://mintala.org/en/home.

Challenges and opportunities

Dancers practicing contemporary dance in Beirut thus experience organizational difficulties on various levels. The lack of institutionalized education in Lebanon has implications for dancers' capabilities. The alternative of gaining dance training abroad is not in reach for everyone, and creates selective recognition of dancers holding a professional dance level based on having been educated in dance in Europe or the United States. In addition, dancers experience financial restrictions hampering them to sustain themselves of dance alone, and causing them to take on extra jobs. As a result of an absent supportive government and the restricting agendas of funding bodies, dance performance production is limited. Collaboration problems between dancers further hinder dance production and the development of the Lebanese contemporary dance scene.

Many dancers indeed stated that contemporary dance in Lebanon is not well established yet. In many interviews, dancers characterized the state of contemporary dance in Lebanon in strikingly similar expressions. They often used the words 'new', 'young', '*jeune*' and 'small' to indicate that the practice is a relatively new phenomenon, and that the scene's infrastructure is little developed. Dancers spoke in very developmental terms, pointing out how contemporary dance in Lebanon needs to grow and develop into a more 'mature' scene. One dancer did not even see the point in participating in my research, and wrote me "There is no contemporary dance scene here." Such statements struck me as frustration, and I encountered these several times during the research.

Specifically, dancers strikingly often referred to a state of tiredness they and their colleagues experienced in working under such challenging circumstances. One dancer noted how she knew that one of the pioneering dance teachers was very tired of continuously trying to maintain her private school. A dancer who used to combine her dancing activities with a job in a very different field, recounted how tiring it became to keep up this way of living, and how she felt much better now that she is only performing and teaching dance. Another dancer told me that dancers who performed at a festival in Beirut a couple of months earlier did so without being paid in order to help the festival and to be able to perform. Even though this is admirable, she stated: "These dancers cannot always work for free. It's a bit tiring, you know." Finally, collaboration problems also exhaust dancers, as was indicated by the dancer quoted in the above, who explained that the lack of trust caused by negative collaboration experiences is really tiring. Dancers raised the matter of tiredness when speaking about the broader state of social and political affairs in Lebanon and the region as well, which will be addressed in the next chapter. Chapter three examines how experiences of exhaustion in turn informed a dance performance.

While many dancers stated that the way in which the dance field functions in Lebanon is highly unstable, quite a few suggested that these circumstances also offer opportunities for dancers to be flexible and creative in working around their situation. As a dancer explained: "This country is really difficult in the conditions of work. These conditions are changing, never the same, you cannot rely on something stable. So you have to develop a kind of flexibility." One of the early pioneers told me that she had to be "free in her head" to overcome the limitations she was confronted with, and to make something out of what is at hand. Sometimes this frustrated her, but it also took her into interesting directions of dance practice – both with regard to the organization of dance classes, as to the content of performances. A much younger dancer noted that she hated certain things about 'this place' – Beirut – but on the other hand she liked the freedom to hop around and gain new experiences. The ideas of several dancers to start performing dance in the city's streets to overcome the problem of a limited audience and expensive theater venues are also illustrative of the inventiveness dancers employ to be able to practice their dancing.

Dancers thus flexibly adapted to the constantly changing conditions of work, evident from their educational paths, dance careers, and artistic innovation. I encountered positivity about the future of contemporary dance in Lebanon. Many dancers stated that with time, the practice will become more established. Addressing the challenging circumstances for beginning dancers, a more established choreographer added: "But also sometimes I feel it's good. This is how *we* started, I mean when we started there was nothing. So why not? They can push a little bit and do things on their own, and they will find ways, I'm sure they'll find ways." The roads may be rocky, but the passion dancers expressed leads me to think the same. More support is badly needed, though as one dancer positively put it: "There's a big artistic dynamism, and for me this is the most important thing."

Chapter Two Contemporary dance practice in its social context

This thesis examines how dancers in Beirut practice contemporary dance. The previous chapter offered an analysis of the way in which contemporary dance practice in Lebanon is organized, with a focus on its challenging aspects dancers experience. These organizational aspects are partly related to the broader context of Lebanon, including government policies with regard to education and funding, and social challenges like cooperation problems. The present chapter examines social context in which dancers are practicing contemporary dance, focused on societal attitudes towards (contemporary) dance.

I first discuss how dancers experienced the reactions in their direct environment towards their activity in contemporary dance. Dancers' parents often opposed their children's choice to dance as a career. Whether the dancer was a male or a female often made a difference in the reaction of their parents: several, though not all, parents of male dancers rejected their son's ambition to dance based on the fact that they were male. Dance teachers correspondingly observed more rejecting attitudes of parents of male dance students. Female dancers experienced disapproval of their parents as well, however, which was mostly related the fact that daughters took control of their own lives by making a choice which did not meet their parent's expectations. Further, for many parents financial concerns about how their children would be able to sustain themselves were a main reason to discourage them from taking up dancing as a profession. Many dancers also mentioned that their parents, who were often unfamiliar with contemporary dance, did not understand their child's passion. However, several parents accepted their child's wish in the end, and some even started to appreciate dance. I discuss these parental attitudes in a framework of academic literature which addresses cultural and religious approaches towards dance, dancing as a professional, and dancing as a male or female.

Dancers' accounts of their parents' incomprehension of contemporary dance often echoed attitudes towards contemporary dance which dancers experienced in society at large. Several dancers addressed how they felt they and their practice were regarded with indifference and even rejection. While I assumed that religious attitudes would play a strong role in these attitudes, dancers identified a superficiality of Lebanon and its citizens as the main cause. I examine these observations in relation to broader instances of superficiality I encountered in Lebanon. Dancers raised concerns with superficiality with regard to dance performances as well, and these will be addressed in the last chapter of this thesis. I started wondering whether dancers belonged to a particular social class which made them feel isolated from the rest of society. Since class is a sensitive subject to address, I interpreted dancers' educational paths to find out more about their socio-economic background. These indicated a relatively diverse social make-up of those active in the dance circuit: intellectual, in terms of university education, though ranging from middle to upper class. Further, I took into account dancers' remarks about the public for contemporary dance, which, most identified as part of a cultural elite.

Parental and societal attitudes towards dancing

As we have seen in the previous chapter, some dancers were actively encouraged or at least supported by their parents to take dance classes when they were younger. In other families, dancing was not seen as an desirable part of a child's upbringing. Dance teachers told me how they regularly encountered estranged parents who find it problematic that their son or daughter is dancing. Rosemary Martin has noted that in Jordan, the generally negative societal attitude towards dancing makes it difficult for dancers to defend their activities. This is especially true when family and friends are unsupportive of dancing. Conversely, supportive family members or friends make it considerably more comfortable for students to continue their contemporary dance training.[55] Similarly, if the parents of Lebanese dancers were supportive of their activities, their accounts of their formation in dance in relation to their family were generally positive. Dancers who experienced opposition from their parents spoke instead of large struggles to continue dancing.

Regardless of their parents' attitudes when they were younger, most dancers were confronted with disapproval of their parents with regard to taking up dancing as a profession. Some dancers experienced serious fights over this, which caused them to break (temporarily) with their parents. Parents' attitudes differed based on whether their son or their daughter wanted to dance. A dancer explained that even though she and her brother were encouraged by their mother to do ballet when they were young, her choice to become a professional dancer was met with great opposition. She assumes that if her brother would have wanted to continue dancing it would have been even more difficult, as "you know, I'm a girl, so it's fine… that kind of thing." Other parents refused to speak to his son for a year because he wanted to dance. Another dancer's father kicked his son out of the house at 18 because he wanted to have a career in theater. If he had told his father that he wanted to dance, according to the dancer his father would probably have killed himself. Dancing is as a profession is thus even less acceptable for males than for females. Several dance teachers made this observation as well. According to one of them, Lebanon is not a society where especially boys are given a chance to dance. Another asked rhetorically: "They all become great engineers, but how about just becoming a male dancer?"

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[55] Rosemary Martin, "Pushing Boundaries: Reflections on Teaching and Learning Contemporary Dance in Amman," *Journal of Dance Education* 13, no. 2 (2013): 44, doi: 10.1080/15290824.2012.686677.

Female dancers encountered negative responses of their parents towards their decision to dance professionally, as well. One dancer told me that when she just started dancing, the reaction of her family was terrible. They totally opposed her choice. Many female dancers related their ambition to dance and the disapproval with which it was met to their struggle to become self-determining. Often times, going abroad was a means for dancers to make their own decisions. One dancer explained that she wanted to be the "author of her own decision", when she persuaded her father to pay her university studies abroad. Once there, she started taking dance classes next to her studies, and in the middle of the year she decided to quit her studies and to continue taking dance classes. About this decision, she said: "At the end of the year I informed my parents. And it was a big shock." Unsurprisingly, going abroad to dance was in turn a main source of parents' opposition. Sometimes fathers were more strongly opposed to their daughter's ambition than mothers. A dancer of the older generation told me how she fought her parents, especially her father, to be able to dance. Her parents found it especially difficult to accept that their daughter travelled to France for her education. A younger dancer encountered a similar situation: her parents did not like it that she travelled to various countries to perform.

Some female dancers related their fight to become independent through dance to broader societal expectations which confront women in Lebanon. As one dancer explained: "I needed it, I wanted to be a dancer, nothing but a dancer. […] I want it because it's my voice, it's how I found my voice, how I changed my life: I went out of my parents' house, I decided that I want to live the life that I want, not that any other people want. Plus we live in a different context, we live in a society where you should belong to the family and you're a girl that should be married at a certain age, like all these social things. So dance was there to take me out of all this shit. And so it was somehow a way, a healthy way for me to find another way of life. And not the way that it was supposed to be in my parents' view for example."

Since female dancers explicitly related their ambition to dance to a struggle to become independent, I suggest that parents' reservations with regard to their daughter's dancing fit in a broader societal attitude which leaves little freedom for young women to decide their own lives. This was reflected in the account of a dancer who connected her activity in acting and dancing to her decision to go live by herself without being married. She noted how it is especially difficult to walk your own path as a female in Lebanon. Though she added that more generally young people have difficulties with becoming independent and leaving the family home. This is mainly due to financial reasons, and many married couples continue to live at their parents' house.

Indeed, dancers do not only experience financial difficulties. Those who had an additional job noted how wages in general are not sufficient to cover the high living costs in Lebanon. One dancer told me how she had seen her wages drop over the years, while life became more expensive. Another dancer mentioned housing, transportation and health care as unacceptably costly. In December 2014, the same dancer posted a cheerful message on Facebook, linking to an article of the Daily Star which announced state health care for artists. Since then, the state has been offering free medical treatment for members of artist unions at public and private hospitals.[56] While this is a major improvement for dancers' quality of life, the absence of sufficient support for dance in Lebanon leads to a fragile livelihood that continues to be the reality for most dancers.

Therefore, the resistance of parents towards their children's choice to dance was very often also related to strong concerns about how their children would be able to financially support themselves through a career in dance. Most dancers now expressed an understanding for their parents' anxiety with regard to the financial future of their children when they choose dancing as a profession. As one dancer whose parents not strongly opposed, nor encouraged her profession in dancing, noted: "The resistance from my mother mainly came out of economic reasons, telling me that you will stay poor. And she is completely right [laughs]." Another dancer explained: "Of course, especially in this kind of country, here in Lebanon, your parents would hope for a better future for you." Several dancers remarked that this is not particular to Lebanon, though: the complications for artists to sustain themselves are to an extent relevant worldwide, and so are parents' related hesitant reactions.

Dancers often also related parents' unsupportive reactions to their incomprehension of contemporary dance. One dancer told me that she was sure that her parents, especially her father, would have preferred her to do something else in life: "My father doesn't understand anything about dance, and he never understood that I was doing dance, and he was always telling me: 'when are you going to get a real job?' […] So no, they don't really get it. No." Her father's statement that dancing is not a 'real job' echoes parents' attitudes regarding dancing as a profession discussed above. In addition, this dancer felt that her parents did not understand dance. Several other dancers made this observation with regard to their own parents, and they did so through strikingly similar expressions. A dancer explained that her parents, like many other people in Lebanon, did not know what contemporary dance actually was, and they were also not particularly interested. If she would take her parents to a performance, they would say: "It's nice, but we don't understand anything." Her parents are just not "into it". This dancer noted that recently more people are becoming familiar with contemporary dance thanks to the television program *So You Think You Can Dance Arabia*.

Another dancer explained: "My mother for example never saw contemporary dance in her life. She doesn't get it, she thinks: 'these people are stupid'." Asked if her mother ever came to watch her daughter perform, she replied: “Sometimes she does, but she also finds it very weird, she doesn’t get it.” Dancers thus often said that parents did not understand dance, were not ‘into’ dance, or did not ‘get’ dance. One dancer elaborated that when her mother would come to see a performance, she would make comments such as ‘you could have moved much more’ and ‘you could have done more splits’. The dancer explained: “She also wants some acrobatic skills, you know what I mean? It’s a different understanding.” According to several other dancers, this different understanding is common amongst many of their fellow citizens, as will be discussed below. The dancer quoted above explicitly mentioned that comments about her performances from people who are not familiar with contemporary dance are very important for her own thinking about her work.

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[56] "Lebanon announces state health care for artists," *The Daily Star Lebanon,* December 17, 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Dec-17/281405-lebanon-announces-state-health-care-for-artists.ashx.

Dancers thus experienced a variety of reactions of their parents on their wish to dance professionally. Negative reactions were mostly grounded in concerns about the perceived inappropriateness of dancing as a profession, of dancing sons as such, the rebelliousness of dancing daughters, and an incomprehension and dislike of the contemporary dance genre. Importantly, some dancers did not experience any opposition from their families in their choice to dance, and a few were even actively encouraged. Besides, most of the dancers’ parents who initially did not meet their child’s ambition with great enthusiasm or even downright rejected it, have now accepted the fact that their son or daughter is active in dance. For most, this took several years, and some parents still have ambiguous feelings. Others really believe in their child’s dancing activities – either because they know how important it is to their child, or because they have really started to appreciate dance. One of the dancers noted how the negative attitude of her family changed enormously: “Now they’re very fine, they’re like, ‘Oh, you’re not working on a creation, why?’”

Societal attitudes towards dancing

Based on my knowledge about negative attitudes towards dancing in the MENA-region, I expected that parents’ attitudes mainly would be grounded on cultural or religious considerations. However, as we have seen in the above, parents’ hesitations were not directly related to such considerations. Still, one dancer told me that she had heard stories about people who desperately wanted to become dancers, but who did not succeed in overcoming the view of their social environment of dance as *haram.* Dancers often experienced indifferent or even negative societal attitudes towards dance. Very few dancers related these attitudes to religious considerations. Some dancers of the older generation identified conservative Christian and Islamic outlooks as opposing dance activities in general. Further, dancers noted that ballet is generally more accepted than folkloric dance such as *dabkeh* and especially *baladi*. Some explain the ambiguous attitudes towards *baladi* as rooted in a range of local assumptions, such as the dance style’s presumed Gypsy origin and historical ideas about the (female) body dancing in public.

Rosemary Martin has addressed the circumstances under which her students in Jordan learned contemporary dance, in particular the role herein of social and religious values and the attitudes of family and friends with regard to dance. The genre of contemporary dance is generally not highly esteemed in Jordan. Martin's students identified two opposing sides in Jordanian society however: a liberal side which is more open to new ideas and practices, and a more conservative side that regards especially contemporary dance as unnecessary and even *haram* – taboo, immoral. This latter attitude is not solely related to religious (both Islamic and Christian) principles; rather, it is an outlook prevalent in Jordanian society more generally and is also related to the perceived inappropriateness of dancing women. The negative attitude is also mainly directed at contemporary dance as an abstract and Western style, while folk dance and also ballet (despite its Western origins) are more accepted. The propriety of dance thus depends per genre, as well as the setting in which it is performed – weddings and celebrations are an accepted context for dance, while other instances of public performances are not.[57]

Karin van Nieuwkerk, Katherine Zirbel and Öykü Potuoglu-Cook have found very similar attitudes towards *raqs al-baladi* and *Oryantal Dans* in Egypt and Turkey respectively. In particular, female entertainers and dancers who practice dance as a profession are regarded with suspicion, as the practice is often associated with prostitution. In addition, cultural and religious beliefs – in particular Islamic notions of shame with regard to the public female body – play a role in the stigmatization of dancers.[58] The genres of *raqs al-baladi* and *Oryantal Dans* may have connotations different from contemporary dance, as the latter genre is new to the MENA-region and not associated with nightclub settings. Nevertheless, the attitudes described above may inform attitudes towards contemporary dance as well, given the novelty of the genre to many Middle Eastern publics.

Further, dancers observed that the attitudes towards dancing in Beirut are different from those in the villages on the countryside. One dancer remarked that "you cannot perform anywhere, everything. Beirut is a bit more open." She once performed in Tripoli and people from the surrounding villages attended, too. Afterwards they told her that they liked the performance by saying: 'it's nice, it's not dance!' If these people had considered the performance a dance performance, they would probably not have liked it. The dancer was however not bothered by this attitude, as she related it the novelty of dance practices to some parts of Lebanese society. She added that the low appreciation for contemporary art in general in Lebanon might be related to the fact that many of these art forms, including contemporary dance, are not local but brought in from ‘outside’. The genres are thus new to the region and since there is no art education in most schools, the discipline of contemporary art remains unfamiliar to the general public.

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[57] Rosemary Martin, "Pushing Boundaries: Reflections on Teaching and Learning Contemporary Dance in Amman," *Journal of Dance Education* 13, no. 2 (2013): 42-43, doi: 10.1080/15290824.2012.686677.

[58] Karin van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade like Any Other: Female singers and dancers in Egypt*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 3; Öykü Potuoglu-Cook, "Beyond the Glitter: Belly dance and neoliberal gentrification in Istanbul," *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (2006): 634, doi: 10.1525/can.2006.21.4.633; Katherine Zirbel, "Playing it both ways: Local Egyptian performers between regional identity and international markets," in *Mass mediations. New approaches to popular culture in the Middle East and beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 121.

Corresponding to Rosemary Martins findings in Jordan, dancers also attributed indifferent or negative societal attitudes to incomprehension of many of their fellow citizens of the genre of contemporary dance. Most dancers thought that the abstract nature of contemporary dance makes it difficult for people to comprehend, which has an effect on the popularity of the genre. A dancer pointed out that whenever she tells that she is active in contemporary dance, people ask “Oh, the stuff that we don’t understand?” In her mind, she replies: “Yeah, probably the stuff that you don’t understand.”

Dancers’ assumptions on a societal lack of understanding of contemporary dance were related to a superficial atmosphere they observed in Lebanese society with regard to appreciation for dance. A dancer of the older generation somewhat bitterly stated: “there is ignorance and a lack of culture in this country.” She explained is a “world apart” in Lebanon, and she felt as if she was fighting an ongoing battle to change this. This dancer specifically related her parents’ strong opposition to her profession as a dancer to this broader ignorant societal attitude. Dancers’ characterizations of the popular dance troupe *Caracalla* further illustrated their interpretation of societal appreciation of dance as superficial. Several dancers used the word “spectacular” to describe the style of the company, and their tune revealed that they were not so much in favor of it. One dancer who was trained in *Caracalla* characterized the mix of oriental and jazzy styles she was taught in as “stupid”. Another dancer referred to the company’s shows as “exotic” and “what Lebanese people like”. Still another called it the “façade of Lebanon”. Dancers thus felt that the general public in Lebanon preferred the spectacular shows of *Caracalla* to more abstract contemporary dance performances, and considered this a sign of societal superficiality.

More generally, many dancers expressed viewpoints which reflected their shared feeling centering on a perceived superficiality of Lebanese society at large, which focuses very much on appearance. One dancer asked me if I had not seen how many Lebanese women clearly had a nose job done. People who asked her if she was active in dance in order to lose weight also annoyed this dancer. Another dancer also pointed at the motivation of many Lebanese women who become active in dancing to become thin. Clearly, these dancers did not think that bodily fitness was the purpose of their dancing. Still another dancer mentioned irritably that sexual morals in Lebanon are so tight that many ‘intelligent people’ have left the country because they cannot live in such an environment, and as a result the ‘dumb people’ – the *nouveau riche* and the uneducated poor – are left.

These accounts indicate a frustration of some dancers with the superficiality of Lebanon and its citizens on the levels of aesthetic awareness, physical looks, sexual freedom, and intelligence. Dancers are not the only citizens of Lebanon who observe superficial instances, though. On a car ride to a mountain hike, it struck me how many billboards on the roadside advertised wedding dresses. A Lebanese friend pointed out in reply that many Lebanese are so eager to have a grand wedding that they get into large debts which take years to pay off. To another friend I expressed my surprise of the many big expensive cars parked near Downtown we passed by on our way to a theater performance. He replied that Lebanese find it very important to have big cars to show off with, but that such cars were actually not that expensive. He could easily buy such a car tomorrow.

Another instance of superficiality in Beirut is the controversial building project of Solidere. After the civil war, Beirut's Downtown district was severely damaged. How to reconstruct Beirut was highly debated by different sectarian groups, especially because urban reconstruction was partly envisioned to represent a collective identity.[59] In the end, the city center Downtown was built up as it can be experienced today: a chic neighborhood with large flats and beautiful houses, and a shopping area reminding of Paris. Downtown area is however largely deserted, and in Beirut there is lots of discussion about the destruction of heritage to make place for new construction. As pointed out by a dancer: "There is no strategy for this country, except making it beautiful for the tourists." Indeed, as a visitor to Beirut it is a relief to walk in the partly car-free streets of Downtown. However, the liveliness that according to many Lebanese characterized pre-war Downtown is gone, and the new houses are too expensive for most to buy or rent. The city's other districts get far less attention in gentrification policies, and the lack of public spaces, the neglect of traditional houses, and the hectic traffic bother many Lebanese, including dancers: "I always say that Beirut is really nice for a vacation, but not to live in."

Experiences of the superficial atmosphere and the lack of appreciation for contemporary dance in Lebanon made some dancers feel isolated from and misunderstood by the rest of society. The group of dancers which was rehearsing in the space which was still under construction told me about an encounter they had had just the day before. The conversation clearly showed the misapprehension dancers often face when they come across people who are not familiar with dance as a professional practice. "Yesterday we were eating here and some people entered, in an energy that was very invading. They wanted to see the space, they wanted to talk to the owner, and we were sitting here and they looked at us, and they're like 'Are you working here?' – like cleaners and stuff, they thought we were, you know, workers. – 'We're dancers.' – Yes, I said 'No, we're dancers.' So they don't get us, they continue their things and then they start talking to us, asking about the venue, and they're like, 'What kind of dance do you do?', and then they say 'Oh, we have a conference, why don't you come and dance for us?' [one of the dancers makes exaggerated showy dance moves with his arms]. So I guess that explains everything."

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[59] Tarek Saad Ragab, "The crisis of cultural identity in rehabilitating historic Beirut-downtown," *Elsevier Cities* 28, no. 1 (2011): 107, doi: 10.1016/j.cities.2010.04.001.

The "everything" that was explained through this dancers' anecdote basically came down to one issue: a different understanding of what "dancers" are and do, by the dancers on the one hand, and the visitors of the space on the other. This is reflected in the remark of the dancer that the visitors "didn't get" them when the dancers explained that they were dancers. The visitors' request to the dancers to dance for them at the conference further exposed a common societal attitude dancers experienced which regards dancers as entertainers, who are only appreciated when they offer the public a sensational dance show. These and similar encounters make dancers sometimes feel estranged from other citizens. Equally, the dancers who participated in the Symposium for Dance Education in Arab Speaking Countries also addressed the isolation they experienced from their local setting.[60]

Some dancers associated the desire for entertainment with the high degree of consumerism in Lebanese society. They felt that this limited the ability of citizens to think critically about society. She identified consumerism as a cause passivity of Lebanese citizens in developing critical reflections, and related this to a continuing ideological hegemony rooted in colonial history:

> "It's a big problem here that you don't have the laboratory[61] spirit of the people. They are always 'products', all the people in the Arab world are consumers. They don't know how to be producers, how to produce. […] Since the colonization they're like this, they're trained to be consumers, because they need to consume whatever comes to them. And this doesn't only apply to products that they buy in the supermarket, it applies also to ideology and to thinking. So whenever you tell people that this is a laboratory where you can change your ideas, they're not really convinced. We need to have a leader that everybody follows. And then you fight people with different opinions."

Instances of consumerism and related superficiality can however also be attributed to the fact that there is "no project for Lebanon", as one of my interviewees put it: there is no stable government, and no shared vision for the future. According to Samir Khalaf, lack of moral and political guiding has resulted in a consumerist attitude of many Lebanese.[62] I further suggest that the effects of the civil war and the violent events since then have created a desire of Lebanese to be entertained. This suggestion is based on dancers' observation of the low appreciation of Lebanese publics for abstract contemporary dance performances, and of the mixed reactions towards performances which address sensitive societal or political issues. I will further develop this idea in chapter four.

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[60] Krystel Khoury, Rosemary Martin and Nicholas Rowe, "Bursting bubbles between sand and sea: teaching dance on the edge of the Mediterranean," *Research in Dance Education* 14, no. 3 (2013): 187, doi: 10.1080/14647893.2012.722616.

[61] The dancer meant a proactive attitude which takes the initiative to create in innovative ways.

[62] Juan Romero, "Lebanon Adrift: From Battleground to Playground Lebanon: The Politics of a Penetrated Society The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War, and the International Drug Traffic," review of *Lebanon*

The dance community: a particular social class?

The alienating experiences dancers shared and their perception of Lebanese society as superficial made me wonder whether they belonged to a particular social, cultural and economic class which set them apart from the rest of society. I occasionally came across this assumption when I spoke with different people about my research on various occasions. On one occasion in a café in Beirut I told my conversation partner that I was doing research on dance. He asked me if I was studying *dabkeh* at social celebrations. When I explained that I was focusing on professional contemporary dancers, he concluded that I thus did not speak to "normal people". A dancer told me that except for her mother, everyone else in her family thinks she is a "hippie". A Dutch professor suggested that the dancers were probably part of a socio-cultural elite.

One dancer noted that people often do not know how to react when she tells them she dances and that she thinks that this is because they think dancing is shameful, but that people who are from her background and class are less rejecting. According to another dancer, how contemporary dance is viewed depends per social circle. Amongst 'intellectuals' it is well viewed, but for 'more conventional people' it can be horrible. They would argue that this is not dancing, because it does not meet their aesthetic ideal of beauty. Several dancers noted that ballet is more accepted socially, but only really appreciated among the elite – denoted by some as an elite which is francophone.

Since the subject of social class can be quite sensitive, I was hesitant to ask dancers directly about this.[63] However, the various educational paths dancers followed and their parents' diverse reactions to their dancing ambition to me suggest a great variety in social, cultural and economic background. Quite a few dancers were educated in the public Lebanese University. Education in this university is free, and according to some dancers, the students are not part of the *bourgeoisie* and study there mainly because it is affordable. Other dancers attended Lebanon's several private universities. Several dancers were educated in universities in France, the United Kingdom or the United States. Dancers were thus all educated on a university level, which in my view indicates belonging to an intellectual segment of society. Further, while I associate education in the Lebanese University with

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Adrift: From Battleground to Playground, by Samir Khalaf, *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 6 (2012): 1015-1021, doi: 10.1080/00263206.2012.723877.

[63] For similar reasons of delicacy, I did not inquire about dancers' ethno-religious backgrounds. Dancers never raised this subject themselves, which can be interpreted in two ways: either they did not think it was relevant, or they thought the issue so sensitive that they did not wish to talk about it.

a middle class background, private universities in Lebanon and education abroad may be in reach only for higher middle and upper classes. However, several dancers combined education at the Lebanese University with dance training in a university abroad. Some dancers may have received scholarships to study abroad, or reached their goal by working hard to afford it.

In addition, with regard to dance education, dancers indicated that ballet and contemporary dance attract a different range of members of social classes. Few dancers noted that classical ballet is generally reserved for the *bourgeoisie*. Ballet classes are expensive, and the practice is associated with a French educated elite. Dancers whose parents encouraged them to take ballet classes would thus be classified as such by dancers – including those who came from such families. Conversely, several dancers noted that contemporary dance seems to be open to people from different social milieus. The fact that the *Takween* program was free for students to enroll in may explain the apparent diversity of its participants.[64] Yet while some dancers regularly take contemporary dance classes and travel abroad, others told me that they struggle to afford workshops, and that going abroad for residencies or auditions is out of the question. One dancer told me how she did not manage to take all classes taught by a teacher who visited from Berlin: “I couldn’t attend all the workshops because I had to work – that’s a bad thing about having another job, that sometimes you have to compromise to make a living, instead of going to the class. […] Or [to choose] to spend 50 dollars for a workshop or buying a new shirt.”

I suggest that dancers came from relatively diverse backgrounds, and did not form a distinctive social, cultural and economic elite. Most dancers were most likely part of middle and higher middle classes, and many struggled to make a living as a dancer. Dancers only occasionally came from families in which artistic expression was valued, often as a hobby and rarely as a profession. Nearly all were however educated in university, often in humanities or social sciences, suggesting an intellectual outlook on society which is also perceptible in their performances, as we will see in the next chapter. Most importantly, dancers were artists, holding particular aesthetic views as well. This quality, more than any of the above, defined the way they regarded society – and probably how many of their fellow citizens regarded them – as somewhat eccentric.

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[64] I encountered some ambiguity with regard to the financial aspect of the *Takween* program. My interviewees’ explanations indicated that the program was free, though some students had arguments over financial matters with the program’s director, usually related to co-producing performances.

Chapter Three Practicing contemporary dance in the context of Beirut

While the previous chapter focused on the social context in which dancers in Beirut practice contemporary dance with regard to societal attitudes, the present chapter examines contemporary dance practice in the broader social, political and economic context of Beirut and its citizens, and how this city is connected to the context of Lebanon at large and the surrounding region. The contextual dimensions of Beirut and beyond described in this thesis are mostly directly derived from dancers' accounts, and hence show the aspects of the context most relevant to their lives. It is therefore essential to note that this chapter uses dancers' personal experiences as illustrations of the context in which they practice contemporary dance. These illustrations are based on individual experiences, and can therefore not be generalized. However, dancers often addressed the same aspects of their environment. This chapter aims to highlight these, as well as the various ways in which dancers experienced these aspects. In addition to a discussion of dancers' personal experiences, the chapter offers more general descriptions of features of the context of Lebanon and the region which are likely to influence any inhabitant of this area, including dancers.

I discuss the social and political situation in Beirut at the time this research took place, in April and fall 2013. I examine this situation in the broader context of Lebanon and the surrounding region, of which the war in Syria is to a high degree determining. In addition, I address historical events which have shaped the context in which dancers practice contemporary dance today. A comprehensive account of Lebanon's recent history of war is beyond the scope of this thesis, and therefore I will pay attention to major events that have left lasting imprints on the region. Dancers themselves addressed the civil war, the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, and the 2008 armed conflict between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah. Several dancers described "the situation" in Lebanon, as they often referred to it, as structured by violent events. They also highlighted the effects of these events on Lebanese society, identifying a tense and "crazy" atmosphere related to a collective trauma. In addition, I address the sectarian organization and ill-functioning Lebanese political system.

Dancers explained how the structure of violence and political instability causes them to organize their lives on a very short-term basis, enabling little possibility for long-term planning. Similar to their weariness with an undeveloped infrastructure for dance, dancers experienced a high level of tiredness due to living in an unstable environment more generally. Dancers also expressed their concerns for the future, fearing for continuing violence in Lebanon and their country's increasing involvement in the Syrian conflict. Finally, dancers addressed several societal and practical problems, of which I will pay some more attention to women's rights, homophobia, and racism. I end this discussion with a positive note on the passion with which dancers spoke about Beirut, despite its many challenging circumstances, and how under these conditions, dance development continues.

“The Situation”

At the time of my introductory visit to the Beirut International Platform of Dance and the Arab Dance Platform in April 2013, the Arab Revolution in Syria which started in spring 2011 had turned into a violent conflict which was commonly referred to as the Syrian Civil War. Due to this conflict, some international invitees to the festival had canceled their attendance. While I personally experienced little of the tense atmosphere in Lebanon during the short time I was there, the dancers I met told me how they felt that many Lebanese citizens were “tired of the situation”. During debates of the Arab Dance Platform, which centered on artistic production in revolutionary environments and in which several Syrian dancers took part, the situation in neighboring Syria was frequently addressed. One dancer shared how he felt he was suffocating from the continuous pressure this conflict caused. In one of the performances of works in progress, a dancer grabbed his throat with his hands, which I interpreted as a similar expression. As I will explain below, during the actual research period in fall 2013, I encountered more dancers who experienced “the situation” as “tiring”, “suffocating” and “crazy”.

Shortly before my departure to Beirut on 15 September 2013, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a travel advisory which advised against all unnecessary travels to Lebanon. Such advices are usually difficult to interpret – the specific motivations behind them tend to remain unclear – and are thus hard to apply to individual travel plans. However, since Leiden University follows the Ministry’s advices, my departure for Lebanon became uncertain. I interpreted the travel advice with the latest events that had taken place in neighboring Syria in mind: on 21 August, the Ghouta suburbs around Damascus were attacked with chemical weapons. Despite uncertainties with regard to those responsible for the attack[65], based on suspicions of the involvement of the Syrian government the United States threatened with a retaliation attack on Syria.[66] One of my interviewees referred to this threat as “the Obama thing”. However, an arrangement between Syria and the US agreed on the destruction of all chemical weapons in Syria, and the US renounced from taking action.[67] I decided I wanted to travel to Lebanon, and after a responsibility agreement with the University, I arrived in Beirut on 15 September 2013.

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[65] “Syria chemical attack: What we know,” *The BBC,* September 24, 2013, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23927399. In an article in the London Review of Books which appeared on 17 April 2014, Seymour M. Hersh explores the possibility of the access of oppositional forces of the Syrian regime to sarin, and their involvement and the role of the Turkish government in the sarin attacks. Seymour M. Hersh, “The Red Line and the Rat Line. Seymour M. Hersh on Obama, Erdoğan and the Syrian rebels,” *London Review of Books* 36, no. 8 (2014): 21-24, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n08/seymour-m-hersh/the-red-line-and-the-rat-line.

[66] Frederik Pleitgen and Tom Cohen, “’War-weary’ Obama says Syria chemical attack requires response,” *CNN*, August 31, 2013, accessed August 15, 2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/30/world/europe/syria-civil-war.

Once in Beirut, the first dancers I met spoke about the recent happenings in Syria and the associated bombing on 15 August in *dahiya*, Beirut's southern suburbs, where Hezbollah has its headquarters. Hezbollah is an organization with a political and military wing which is deeply involved in the Syrian conflict, siding with Bashar al-Assad's government. The suburbs were attacked several times through the course of summer – with civilian casualties as result, since *dahiya* is a residential area mainly populated by Shia Muslims.[68] Dancers told me how the atmosphere in the city was very tense during the summer. They had a hard time continuing their daily activities under the threat of bombings. Throughout fall, bombings continuously disturbed the Bekaa Valley in the east part of the country, as well as the border areas with Syria.[69] In addition, the northern city of Tripoli frequently forms the scene of violent clashes. During my holiday week in October in the Qadisha Valley, the hotel owner warned my companion and me not to get too close to the town. Beirut however was largely spared of larger violent events, with the exception of the Iranian Embassy that was targeted by a twin suicide bomb attack on 19 October, killing 25 people and damaging the building.[70] The dancers I interviewed in the week of the bombing all referred to the incident to indicate the unstable security situation in Lebanon.

Another result of the crisis in Syria is the vast influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. At the end of the fieldwork period, the UNHCR counted almost 800.000 registered refugees on a population of around four million Lebanese and about 450.000 residing Palestinians.[71] The presence of this large amount of refugees put Lebanese society under further pressure, overcrowding existing Palestinian refugee camps, and raising tensions between Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees. The presence of refugees was visible in the streets of Beirut, where old men, young women with babies and little boys and girls begging, offering shoe polishing services, or selling roses have become a common sight.

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[67] Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive: Syria begins destruction of facilities – sources," *Reuters,* January 19, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/19/us-syria-crisis-chemicalweapons-idUSKBN0KS1GY20150119.

[68] Al Akhbar reported that on July 9 a Syrian rebel group called the Special Forces 313 Brigade claimed responsibility for a car bomb in Bir Abed. The Aisha Brigades for External Mission claimed responsibility for the car bomb in Roueiss on August 15. "Several killed and scores wounded in Beirut suburb explosion, " *Al Akhbar*, August 15, 2013, accessed August 9, 2015, http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/16730.

[69] Ibrahim al-Amin, "Two Options for Lebanon: Deterrence or Collapse," *Al Akhbar*, August 17, 2013, accessed August 9, 2015, http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/16746.

[70] Rima Aboulmona, "Suicide bombers kill 25 near Iran embassy in Beirut," *The Daily Star Lebanon*, November 19, 2013, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Nov-19/238284-blast-heard-near-iranian-embassy-in-beirut-witness.ashx.

[71] "Syria Regional Refugee Response," UNHCR, accessed on August 9, 2015, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122.

According to some Lebanese as well as internationals who had been residing in the city for several years, before the war in Syria began there were less beggars in Beirut, indicating that most of the beggars were Syrian. I could not verify the accuracy of these statements,

Various people I met in Beirut told me about how they felt the atmosphere in the city had changed significantly in recent years. They often linked this to the degree of safety they experienced while walking or driving the streets of Beirut. In particular, during my stay horrific stories of women who had been sexually harassed while travelling with *service*[72] or walking in the streets swirled round. Several women told me they were "paranoid" of taking public transport. Once a woman told me on the street that I should be on the lookout for Syrian men, who roam the streets in groups. When I asked how to identify these groups, the woman said "you will recognize them". I discussed the presumed recognizable identity of Syrians with some Lebanese acquaintances, and despite their different opinions they explained that they could generally distinguish Syrians by their accent, skin color, and dress.

Such statements often struck me as racist, and reflected the rejecting attitude of many citizens of Lebanon to Syrians. After violent clashes in Arsal in August 2014, according to Human Rights Watch attacks on Syrian refugees have increased dramatically.[73] The accuracy of harassment stories and related recommendations was hard to detect; few women had had first-hand experiences of harassment, and – like me – based their accounts on hearsay. I do not question any experiences of harassment that women – and possibly also men – encountered, whether by Syrians or others. In any case, sexual criminalization of Syrian male refugees was increasing around that time, and has been linked by media source *Muftah* to the blaming of Syrian refugees for Lebanon's social, political, economic and safety problems.[74]

Structure of violence and political instability

Importantly, the bombings which happened during the fieldwork period are linked to a recent history in which from time to time violent eruptions occurred throughout Lebanon. In 1948, the Arab-Israeli war violently affected Lebanon. Lebanese and Syrian troops went to defend southern Lebanese

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[72] A *service* is a shared taxi that picks up and drops off several passengers at different destinations.

[73] "Lebanon: Rising Violence Targets Syrian Refugees," *Human Rights Watch*, September 30, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/30/lebanon-rising-violence-targets-syrian-refugees. Refugees encounter similar responses in Turkey, where despite international praise for the country's actions to take in refugees, many Syrians face abuse by Turkish soldiers and rejection by Turkish citizens. Constanze Letsch, "Amnesty report reveals desperate plight of Syrian refugees in Turkey," *The Guardian,* November 20, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/20/amnesty-report-desperate-plight-syrian-refugees-turkey.

[74] Adriana A. Qubaia and Mathew Gagné, "Sexualizing & Villainizing Male Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," *Muftah*, December 15, 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://muftah.org/sexualizing-and-villainizing-syrian-refugees.

territory against Israeli occupation. Lebanon also witnessed a flow of about 100.000 Palestinian refugees from Israel into its territory.[75] Despite the Lebanon's attempts to withdraw, in 1967 the Six-Day war once again plunged the country into the Arab-Israeli conflict – which had, given the number of Palestinian refugees, never left Lebanon.[76] A similar situation re-occurred in the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, with Israeli and Syrian troops crossing Lebanese borders.[77] The year 1975 is generally seen as the start of the Lebanese 'Civil War', which would last until approximately 1990.[78] To identify the causes of this conflict remains complicated, though according to Fawwaz Traboulsi, the demand of political, economic and social change by all segments of the Lebanese population certainly played a significant part (ibid: 165). The Civil War in particular has left its traces on the country and people of Lebanon. In addition, more recent events like the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 in Beirut, the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War (also known in Lebanon as the July War), and the conflict between supporters of the Lebanese government and Hezbollah in 2008[79] contribute to citizens' feelings of instability, tension and lack of safety. While some dancers seemed to speak with relative nonchalance about these events, others clearly expressed their anxieties over "the situation", as most referred to a complex combination of circumstances which affected their lives.

Some dancers experienced the civil war as young children, and told me how it affected their lives until today. Others were abroad during the war, and even though they did not experience it in a direct way, it still affected them. One of the dancers explained: "I remember saying to my American friends: 'Don't you see channel 30? We're burning, my city is burning.' That was very important for me, and they would answer: 'It's the first world, we're having everything we need.' Every time they presented me these issues from Israel, and I was saying 'No, I'm from Lebanon, and we are in a fight.' And then I learned to shut up." This dancer thus experienced a lack of understanding of her situation by her peers abroad, and experienced the war through images on television.

Dancers who were abroad during or born after the war noted that even though they did not directly experience the war, they were affected by it through their parents and earlier generations of fellow citizens. As one dancer explained to me:

> "You're a child of war. And you're living with people that are all coming from the war. And I have a family that in their behaviors – it's also imprinted in their behaviors and their mentalities, in their stress, and that's

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[75] Fawwaz Traboulsi, "A History of Modern Lebanon," (London: Pluto Press, 2012 [2007]), 114.
[76] Traboulsi, "A History of Modern Lebanon," 153.
[77] Traboulsi, "A History of Modern Lebanon," 187.
[78] I put this word in quotation marks because apart from Lebanese involvement, many international parties were active in this conflict: Syria, the Soviet Union and France. Hence this war was not merely civil, but also international.
[79] Tom Perry, "Lebanon political conflict turns violent," *Reuters*, May 7, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/05/07/us-lebanon-strike-idUSL0761005520080507.

> the same for all of us. […] Being in crisis, being, having, carrying anger.. yeah I see this every day, when I step out of the house I see many examples, all the time. People in their cars, people in the streets, all the time. […] For example some people get angry for no reason in the streets, some people are crazy, some people lost people in the war, they're totally nuts. You see them in the streets, they walk in the street. This over-anger, this over-stress, because of the situation, the political situation, and the things that haven't been solved."

With this last comment, the dancer referred to the post-war situation in Lebanon which is often characterized as collective amnesia; after the war, those responsible of crimes were never put on trial.[80] This has led to feelings of injustice and anger amongst many residents of Lebanon. Another dancer noted that the current clashes are related to a still ill-functioning judicial system: people know they can get away with a crime, and they take the right in their own hands since they feel that the enactment of laws would not sufficiently do justice.

Several other dancers observed that people in Beirut were acting "crazy". They noted that they felt a lot of tension between people in Beirut, and most related this to 'the situation', mainly the aftermath of the civil war and the persisting political instability in the country. Several observed that many people have become "crazy" due to the civil war and the violent events that occurred since then. One dancer noted: "Our society is a little bit crazy. I don't know if you noticed? People are a little bit crazy." While some dancers found it hard to put the causes of this craziness into words, usually after talking about the subject for a while, they pointed to the continuation of conflicts in Lebanon as the main source: "There are clashes happening everywhere, so we are very tense, all the time actually, and I think this is of course linked to… – I mean this explains why people are crazy." The "craziness" is related to what dancers often described as a collective Lebanese psychological state of trauma. Dancers used expressions like "we are all traumatized", "*nous sommes déstabilisés*" and "we all have a posttraumatic stress syndrome" to explain this. A dancer also told me that she only realized as an adult that not only she, but also her friends did not sleep well, due to air raided childhood nights.

Other dancers brought up the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 during our conversations. A small number of dancers raised the issue of their complicated feelings towards Israel and Israelis. Dancers spoke about their concerns in relation to dance practice, mostly in terms of collaboration. Dancers found it difficult to (imagine to) dance together or collaborate artistically with Israelis. One dancer accounted in detail of her experience in participating in an international dance project, in which an also an Israeli dancer took part:

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[80] Sune Haugbolle, "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 25, no. 1 (2005): 191-203, https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/comparative_studies_of_south_asia_africa_and_the_middle_east/v025/25.1haugbolle.html.

> "… initially it was the idea of an Israeli guy, a dancer, […] so you know I was interested in that, because as Lebanese people we're not in contact with Israel – of course we're in contact, but…[81] So that was one of the tough experiences I had with dance. […] When I went abroad, and I actually had to meet an Israeli guy, that was very shocking. And actually this was right after the war that they did on us, in 2006, we were still traumatized, and me meeting a guy from Israel who supposedly…[82] – he's a dancer, he is harmless, he's a dancer. But for me it had a lot more, it carried a lot more... tension than that."

However, geographically and culturally, she and the Israeli dancer were closer to one another than any of the other participants. They were just as close in their reaction to the sound of an explosion that went off inside a museum for arms, just when they were heading for their dance class:

> "At some point we would hear like 'BOOOM' you know, and it was right after 2006, so we had the reflex to just go down, both of us. Everyone just continued with [their activities] – and just the two of us went down, we had the same reflex. And it was... it was the moment of connection, and nobody could understand you know, they were looking at us like 'ok, what is wrong with these people?' But we were totally devastated, I never thought of – even living here I never thought of war as such a trauma, but there I felt it was so traumatic, it was really traumatic. And… you know I was just crying, just crying, and I never felt this, even here."

In a later e-mail conversation, the dancer explained that during this momentary experience she realized how much memory and experience she embodied, and that the only person who could actually understand her was her "enemy". She felt that just talking about war, as media often does, does not sufficiently explain its effects. She emphasized that her experience was very personal, and that it could not be generalized beyond its context.

Another event which affected citizens of Beirut, including dancers, was the violent conflict between supporters of the Lebanese government and Hezbollah in 2008. A dancer experienced this conflict very closely, and told me:

> "Honestly 2008 was one of the most traumatic experiences I've ever had. Because they were, they were… it was like a street outburst, and it was right under my building, so I was stuck at home for three days, which is fine, but what wasn't fine was the constant sounds of gunfire, and explosions and all that, and you don't really know where it's coming from or where it's going to hit. And I remember that my body was shivering

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[81] The dancer cut off her sentence here, highlighting a complicated relationship between her and a dancer from Israel.

[82] The dancer again did not finish her sentence. We can only guess what the Israeli dancer in her eyes could supposedly have done, though I assume she referred to any violent actions against Lebanese civilians.

> for three days because I was so scared, and… and I just, I just hope never to feel this again and I hope that no one will ever have to feel this again."

Dancers thus spoke of traumas related to the civil war, the July 2006 war and the 2008 clashes. Their accounts clearly reflect the lasting anxiety caused by these events. Several dancers identified the violence in Lebanon as structural. One dancer stated: "After 2006 there were a lot of people who suddenly died, and the events continued, and in fact every while we have people dying in this country for more or less stupid reasons. […] It [violent events] affected us many times, it's a kind of chronic happening." By identifying conflicts with fatal results as chronically occurring, this dancer suggested a structure of conflicts in Lebanon. He linked these fatalities to "more or less stupid reasons". The dancer referred to a variety of events addressed in the above, which origins are multiple, though to a high extent interconnected. A full examination of these causes is beyond the scope of this thesis, though another dancer shared her view on the matter. She first echoed the observation by the dancer quoted above, by describing "the situation" as going from eruption, to normal, to eruption. She explained this process as follows: "It's really a political accident that is embedded in the structure. The structure will always produce this accident, which regulates the structure." This dancer thus described the situation as a structure which reproduces itself. She identified a "political accident" which is stirring this reproductive cycle. The continuing conflicts explain the observation of the dancer quoted in chapter one, who related the collaboration problems dancers face to a situation in which "conflicts are faster than the people can calm down".

This analysis can be applied to several conflicts which have affected Lebanon, including the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which Lebanon repeatedly became involved in. However, the Lebanese political system may also be regarded as functioning in a reproductive structure. The system has since a long time been based on institutionalized religious sects.[83] The sectarian representation in parliament of Christians and Muslims long had a 6:5 ratio. This system changed with the *Ta'if* agreement of 22 October 1989 towards the end of the Civil War – partly fought along sectarian lines – transforming this representation to equivalence.[84] Political organization in Lebanon thus still based on sectarian divisions.

An in-depth examination of the implications of this system is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Lebanese politics have been characterized structural complications of government formulation. During the fieldwork period, a legal administration was characterized by absence. President Michel Suleiman's government had resigned on 22 March 2013, and the scheduled elections in May were cancelled. The term of the Parliament was extended in order to manage the country's security situation.[85] For ten months, a caretaker government led by caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and speaker Nabih Berri ran Lebanon, until in February 2014 a new government was formed under leadership of Prime Minister Tammam Salam.[86] Political problems have continued to afflict Lebanon, which in the beginning of 2015 found itself in a political vacuum and a presidential election crisis.[87] Confused by the rapidly changing political state of affairs of the country and its many parties and shifting alliances, I asked some of my interviewees and acquaintances for clarification. Often times they told me that Lebanese politics are so complicated and tiring that they decided not to bother understanding anymore. Such remarks revealed a sense of weariness of politics which I encountered multiple times.

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[83] Fawwaz Traboulsi, "A History of Modern Lebanon," (London: Pluto Press, 2012 [2007]), vii.
[84] Traboulsi, "A History of Modern Lebanon," 247-25.

Structures of governmental malfunctioning and violent clashes have generated a way of living that is day-by-day, some dancers noted. As one of them put it:

> "Well, because I live in a context where I don't know what will happen to me in a week or in a month. So the context is something that is a continuous process, every day. Maybe if I was living in Switzerland it would be different. Not maybe, of course it would be different. Because I would organize myself like, 'in one year I will be doing this'. I'm 32 years old, and I could never say 'in one year I will be…'. I don't know what I would be in one year. I never had the opportunity to plan my life. And I'm not complaining, maybe I prefer it this way, I don't know. But I mean, I never lived this other option to know about it. And we are also in a place where we need to position ourselves, and I'm not able to position myself at the moment. Because nothing is convincing. Because there is no idea of a project in this country. It is a very fragmented country. I mean, how can I how can I be a stable person? Living here? It's impossible."

As we have seen in the previous chapter, many dancers raised the problem of the impossibility to accomplish long-term planning in relation to dance activities, too. Further, this dancer refers to an inability to "position" herself in a political system where political parties cannot present a convincing project for Lebanon, and are unable to unite.

Dancers also often referred to a state of tiredness caused by continuous accumulation of previous and current anxieties and tensions, and a weariness of political instability. Dancers spoke about this tiredness on both a general and a personal level, explaining that they sensed a feeling of exhaustion in society as well as in their personal lives. About this latter sensation, one dancer said: “I personally always feel exhausted. I feel I’m in a continuous exhausted phase. […] I think it’s also because of accumulating many things that our parents’ generation gave us, about all that they lived, and it’s also because of us trying all the time to create a better way of living and always having obstacles. Yes, I think the exhaustion comes from this.” These obstacles have been examined thoroughly in the previous chapter by addressing how dancers practice contemporary dance under challenging organizational circumstances. However, this dancer also spoke more generally about a situation which continuously presents hindrances to the younger generation to which dancers belong. According to her, these hindrances have their roots in her parents’ generation. Several other dancers observed these problems, and mostly related them to the effects of the Civil War.

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[85] "Banks, malls, leading businesses heed strike call," *The Daily Star,* September 5, 2013, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Lebanon/2013/Sep-05/230065-banks-malls-leading-businesses-heed-strike-call.ashx#axzz2e72uF5Cu.

[86] "Lebanon forms new government after months of political deadlock," *The Guardian,* February 15, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/15/lebanon-forms-new-government-salam.

[87] Antoine Ghattas Saab, "Will presidential election crisis be internationalized?," *The Daily Star,* March 2, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Mar-02/289246-will-presidential-election-crisis-be-internationalized.ashx.

Some dancers expressed their worries about the near future: “I have a lot of dignity for what I am, I belong to this nation, and unfortunately we’re moving on a very wrong rail. Stupid. Regressive. But I’m still part of it. And I’m fully responsible.” Other dancers spoke more explicitly about what this wrong rail entailed. Referring to our earlier discussion of the “craziness” she experienced in the streets of Beirut, a dancer noted: “The sad thing is that some people are getting used to this. So they are violent without noticing it.” She thought that the reason why she and people coming from abroad could notice the violence was because they have experienced a different, more peaceful kind of life. According to several dancers, the question is not *if* another war will come, but *when*. A dancer explained this as follows:

> “It feels like the young generation today is really… [sighs]… Probably doesn’t have this maturity against the war. It feels like they would go at war. I mean it’s also not their fault, it’s because of the politics, of the political leaders in this country, they are really pushing people into this. But you see people, young people of 16, 17 years old, yes they would fight. And it’s absurd, because they would fight for nothing. I mean the Civil War in Lebanon had nothing to do with Lebanon. […] I mean what’s happening today in Syria, it’s a fight between the international world, it’s a fight between Iran and the States and Russia and Saudi-Arabia, and the Syrians are not able to decide anything in this war. So from this perspective I feel it’s absurd.”

This dancer addressed several problems in this account. He first of all indicated that Lebanese youth might not have “maturity against the war”. The dancer was pointing to a certain wisdom acquired by generations that experienced the war and its effects more closely, enabling them to stay away from reigniting tensions. This dancer blamed the Lebanese political leaders for setting people up against each other, to which youngsters in particular are sensitive. Referring to a widely recognized and feared risk that the current war in Syria will further spill over into Lebanon,[88] he concluded that like in the Civil War, Lebanese citizens would fight in a conflict characterized by foreign intervention and interests. Indeed, international political super powers including Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States, Turkey, and Russia all play a role in the Syrian ‘civil war’.[89]

Dancers also expressed a concern with several other societal problems. In addition to general financial issues and the destruction of heritage discussed earlier in this thesis, dancers addressed women’s rights, homophobia, and racism, and practical problems like water shortage and pollution, and continuous electricity cuts. These matters came up time and again during the research period, in newspapers as well as in conversations with other people I came to know in Lebanon. This thesis offers too little space to deal with all of these issues in-depth. However, the issue of women’s rights caught my attention several times, as numerous reports about domestic violence against women with fatal results were published in newspapers throughout fall 2013.[90] Some dancers were part of activist groups for women’s rights, and participated in demonstrations against domestic violence.

Further, despite the legalization of homosexuality in March 2014,[91] on June 9 Lebanese police put two men under arrest for possessing half a gram of marijuana. After suspicions by the police on a supposed homosexual orientation of the two, the men were kept imprisoned and tortured during three weeks. Dancers and acquaintances in Lebanon posted blog articles about this event on Facebook. It surprised me that as far as I could find, in addition to blogs and a few other online sources, the event was only covered by one Lebanese newspaper, L’Orient Le Jour.[92] Condemnation of homosexuality thus continues to be a problem in Lebanon, and is a concern of several dancers.

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[88] Lina Khatib, “Regional Spillover: Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict,” *Carnegie Middle East Center,* June 9, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=55829.

[89] “Syria crisis: Where key countries stand,” *The BBC,* February 18, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23849587.

[90] Stephan Kalin, “Lebanese march against domestic violence in rare non-partisan protest,” *Reuters*, March 8, 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/08/us-lebanon-protest-women-idUSBREA270LS20140308.

[91] For an elaborate reflection on the significance of the transgender element of the verdict which legalized homosexuality in Lebanon, see Erin Kilbride, “Lebanon Just Did a Whole Lot More Than Legalize Being Gay,” *Muftah,* March 8, 2014, accessed on August 9, 2015, http://muftah.org/lebanon-just-whole-lot-legalize-gay/#.VakZmPmqqko.

[92] Béchara Maroun, “Liban : Détenu et battu pendant trois semaines pour homosexualité et un test de drogue... négatif,” *L’Orient Le Jour*, July 2, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.lorientlejour.com/article/932477/detenu-et-battu-pendant-trois-semaines-pour-homosexualite-et-un-test-de-drogue-negatif.html; Najib, “Two Men, Suspected Of Being Gay, Arrested And Tortured For 3 Weeks By The Lebanese Police,” *Blog Baladi*, July 3, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://blogbaladi.com/two-men-suspected-of-being-gay-arrested-and-tortured-for-3-weeks-by-the-lebanese-police; “Being Gay Is Worse Than Being ISIS: 2 Lebanese Men Tortured For 3 Weeks in Prison Over Their Sexuality,” *A Separate State Of Mind*, July 5, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://stateofmind13.com/2015/07/05/being-gay-is-worse-than-being-isis-2-lebanese-men-tortured-for-3-weeks-in-prison-over-their-sexuality; Joe Ehram-Dupre, “Two Men Imprisoned, Tortured, For Being Gay In Lebanon—Even Though It’s Not A Crime,” *Logo NewNowNext,* July 6, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.newnownext.com/two-men-imprisoned-tortured-for-being-gay-in-lebanon-even-though-its-not-a-crime/07/2015.

Finally, dancers addressed instances of racism as habitually occurring in Lebanon. Recently, dancers shared an article of Now News on Facebook, reporting of the severe beating-up of a woman from Ivory Coast by a shop manager who wrongly accused her of thievery.[93] Several acquaintances in Lebanon told me about the widespread racism of Lebanese towards people from Asia and Africa – particularly Filipino's and Ethiopians. Women from these countries often work as domestic workers or nannies for well-to-do Lebanese families. Last year, the newspaper Al Akhbar published an article on the experiences of racism by Lebanese citizens originating from Asian or African areas.[94] Further, as explained above, racism increasingly affects Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Racism is not limited to Lebanon, however: in 2012, Al Jazeera published an article by Susan Abulhawa, in which she addressed the issue of racism in the Arab region at large.[95]

Many dancers thus raised various problems which are still relevant to Lebanese society and politics. At the moment of writing – summer 2015 – Lebanon's political, economic, social and security situation continues to be problematic. Especially the area's bordering Syria are plagued by abductions of citizens and soldiers, and clashes between the Lebanese military and militants of the al-Nusra front and Islamic State (IS).[96] Hezbollah continues to be deeply involved in the Syrian conflict, primarily fighting IS.[97] Lebanon country closed the border for Syrian refugees in August 2014, only accepting 'emergency cases', and in January Lebanon hosted around 1.1 million Syrian refugees.[98] Dancers continue working under these circumstances, designing new initiatives at a speed which sharply contrasts the continuing political deadlocks in the country. In September 2014 I received an email from one of the dancers, informing me of her new activities. She wrote me: "The news from here is not only war and terrorism and presidential vacancy! But also good news for dance! I try as much as possible to focus on that and not watch and get affected by the news." Together with one of her students, the dancer had initiated a series of movement days on the countryside of Lebanon. The dancers' words indicate both the pressing political situation at the time, and the continuing development of new dance practices.

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[93] Myra Abdallah, "We're not racist, but she's 'black'," *NOW,* July 10, 2015, accessed August 9, 2015, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/blogs/565571-were-not-racist-but-shes-black.

[94] Rana Harbi, "Racism reigns in Lebanon: "But you don't look Lebanese"," *Al Akhbar,* March 26, 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/19169.

[95] Susan Abulhawa, "Confronting anti-black racism in the Arab world," *Aljazeera,* July 7, 2013, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/06/201362472519107286.html.

[96] "UN backs Lebanon's military action in Arsal," *Aljazeera,* August 5, 2014, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/un-backs-lebanon-military-action-arsal-20148565541833505.html; Nidal Solh, "Kidnappers demand $200,000 for Arsal youth," *The Daily Star Lebanon,* March 23, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Mar-23/291826-kidnappers-demand-200000-for-arsal-youth.ashx?utm_source=Magnet&utm_medium=Recommended%20Articles%20widget&utm_campaign=Magnet%20tools.

[97] "Nasrallah: Hezbollah to increase presence in Syria," *Aljazeera*, May 25, 2015, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/nasrallah-hezbollah-increase-presence-syria-150524233716453.html.

[98] "UNHCR: Registration of Syrian refugees drops in Lebanon due to restrictions on border-crossings," *ecre,* accessed on August 9, 2015, http://www.ecre.org/component/content/article/70-weekly-bulletin-articles/880-unhcr-registration-of-syrian-refugees-drops-in-lebanon-due-to-restrictions-on-border-crossings-.html.

This chapter examined the context in which dancers practice contemporary dance, as experienced by the dancers, as well as more generally. The next chapter addresses how this context informs dance practices in terms of performances. I end this chapter with a quote by a dancer which summarizes what the context of Beirut can mean for a dancer, including many of the instances addressed in the above:

> "Actually I wouldn't want to live anywhere else than in Lebanon. For now. I mean, I say for now, because sometimes I imagine that something related to the political context takes away someone I love. Then maybe I would react, maybe I would leave, but till now it didn't happen. It's very blunt and stupid, but it's like this, because sometimes I think about it, I think, what if my brother or [name of her husband] or my friends were in a bomb thing, would I be able to accept it? I don't think so. […] And are we waiting for it to happen, or is it a denial? No, I think I really love this country, I want to stay here. I grew up here, I like the air here, I like the atmosphere here, I like the colors of the trees, because I feel at home. And I like this feeling, I don't want to lose this feeling of being at home. Even though sometimes I feel like a stranger here [laughs] because of a lot of things, but at the end, for me, the essential things in Lebanon keep me here. The essential things for me in Lebanon are the colors of the trees, the air you are breathing, the sea that you can go see whenever you want, the old people in the mountains that open their doors for you and welcome you…"

Chapter Four Contemporary dance practice in Beirut: performances

Performances form a significant part of contemporary dance practice in Beirut. Even though performance production is restricted due to financial and organizational difficulties addressed in chapter one, from time to time dancers present new dance performances. While before most performances were produced by *Maqamat Dance Theatre* and the *Beirut Dance Company*, in recent years other choreographers have started to produce or have intensified their production of dance works. In the present chapter, I examine the dance works I witnessed, as well as the discussions I had about the performances with the dancers. At BIPOD I attended the performance *Danas. Mawt Sagheer – First Movement* by Ali Chahrour and Emilie Thomas, and a production by *Maqamat Dance Theatre*: *That Part of Heaven*. Illustrative of the limited performance production in Lebanon, during the three-month fieldwork period the only dance performance staged was *Elgha2* by Alexandre Paulikevitch – though two new performances by and Ali Chahrour *Maqamat Dance Theatre* were shown right after I had left the country.

In order to become familiar with more performances, I attended the festival *DansFabrik* in Brest (France), where I witnessed Danya Hammoud's *Mahalli*.[99] In addition, I saw Wafa'a Halawi's dance film *Can You And I Really Dance Together?* and Rima Maroun's stop-motion dance film *Les Pleureuses* (The Mourners) at the dance film festival *Cinedans* in Amsterdam. I interviewed all choreographers and some of the dancers who danced in these performances, in Beirut as well as in Brest. The showcasing of dance works by Lebanese artists in Brest and Amsterdam demonstrate the strong connections of the dance scene in Lebanon with the dance circuit in Europe. Finally, I interviewed several choreographers and dancers about performances they had created or danced in which I had not seen, or ideas they had on a new dance production.

In the present chapter I discuss the dance works listed above. I offer descriptions of the performances, and present the thoughts dancers shared with me about their work. These examinations are based on notes I made during the performances and the interviews I conducted with the dancers. Following, I dedicate a section to a more in-depth analysis of the themes which stirred the performances. Very often these themes and inspirations were related to features of the context of Beirut, Lebanon and the region as discussed in the previous chapter. Related to this discussion, I address dancers' opinions with regard to dealing with social or political problems in dance performances. Several dancers stated that they observed a tendency of societally engaged dance production and Lebanese art production more generally. Dancers often stressed the thoughtfulness with which dance work dealing with political or social problems should be created.

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[99] Due to highly unfortunate circumstances, I missed three performances at *DansFabrik*: *Mes Mains Sont Plus Agées Que Moi* by Danya Hammoud, *Tajwal* by Alexandre Paulikevitch, *Le Silence de l'Abandon, Miniature,* by Khouloud Yassine, and *These Shoes Are Made For Walking* by Nancy Naous.

I relate dancers' statements on engaged performances to, first, a concern with the superficiality dancers detected in Lebanese society, second, to a collective tiredness dancers observed in Lebanon with regard to engaging with civil war or sectarian issues, and, third, to concerns with artistic values. Further, several dancers viewed dance performances addressing themes such as war, the Arab Spring or women's causes as a way to gain funding or access to European festivals. Some even suggested that western funding and festival selection agendas enforce engaged dance production, and limits local creativity. In line with these observations, I advocate further research on Western strategies directed at cultural production in the MENA region.

Dance works

Danas. Mawt Sagheer – First Movement

During BIPOD 2013 I witnessed *Danas. Mawt Sagheer – First Movement*[100] by Ali Chahrour and Emilie Thomas, which premiered in March 2012. During BIPOD, the piece was performed by Ali Chahrour and Mia Habis, who substituted for Emilie, in Al Madina Theatre in Hamra. The two dancers, wearing dark underwear, were moving in a square pillar construction lined with transparent plastic, which blurred the spectator's view on the stage. The dancers' movements were a combination of playful, violent and sexual fighting: climbing on each other, hitting each other and intimately touching each other's bodies. According to the performance summary, the performance "exposes destitute bodies".[101] Choreographer and dancer Emilie Thomas explained: "We wanted to work on memories and death, and you know, the ground of Beirut is full of bodies from the war. […] And people continue to live on it, as if it's nothing, and a lot of people disappeared in Lebanon and we don't know…[102] It was important for Ali to work on this idea of mass grave." She added that the bodies in the mass graves were deprived of their identity, making it impossible for their families to properly bury and remember them.

Emilie described how she and Ali interpreted the themes of memories and anonymous dead related to mass graves through movement: "We wanted to go back to this really raw movement, the naked body, and to erase everything that we [knew about] older [dance] forms." Asked how the dancers grasped such raw movement, Emilie explained: "Through breaking the codes. We wanted to go far away from what we have learned – classical ballet and even contemporary techniques. Me, I really wanted to go back to the simple things with my body. A simple state of body. Trying not to do a sequence of movements that is beautiful or that is fluid, using all these codes again. So we wanted to create something different, and really go back to a body moving. What's happening when we fight? […] It's very violent, when I used to do it with Ali, we were really fighting." Emilie explained that the movement needed to be real. During the rehearsals, Ali invited Emilie to really hit him. She found it very difficult, and then Ali hit her, forcing her to fight back. Emilie: "It became real during the rehearsals." Further, she and Ali tried to work with they imagined would be the weight of a dead body. Emilie explained that in order to show a performance to the public which turns from a representation into a real manifestation, a dancer has to feel the actual sensation: "If you fake it, I think the public will directly see it." As we will see throughout this chapter, several other dancers used the categorizations "fake" and "truth" to classify movement or performance themes. This tendency will be addressed later in this chapter.

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[100] Ali Chahrour, "Danas. Mawt Sagheer - First Movement Trailer@Maqamat DanceHouse," Vimeo video, 3:29, 2012, https://vimeo.com/44827754.

[101] Ali Chahrour, "Danas. Mawt Sagheer - First Movement Trailer@Maqamat DanceHouse," *Vimeo*, accessed August 9, 2015, https://vimeo.com/44827754.

[102] The dancer broke off her sentence, but she was probably referring to the fates of many who disappeared during the civil war are still unknown, as addressed in the previous chapter.

Emilie finally noted that she was curious on how the performance would be interpreted by a European public. When they performed their previous work *On the Lips, Snow*[103] at an edition of Dancing on the Edge in The Netherlands, many members of the audience felt that the performance was about male domination of women, and related it to the position of women in the Middle East. Members of the Lebanese audience however connected the performance more to the romantic story the work represented of the memories of two people who had spent 100 years in the same room together. Emilie concluded on *Danas*: "Some people will read it as a gendered piece, of course. But it's not. We don't want it to [be]. […] It is a relationship between two people, but we didn't want it to be like "man and woman". I'm Emilie, and she is Mia, and [he is] Ali."

That Part Of Heaven

I also viewed *Maqamat Dance Theatre*'s performance *That Part Of Heaven*[104] at BIPOD. Choreographed by Omar Rajeh, the work featured five dancers: Mia Habis, Ali Chahrour, Hala Abi Rached, Zei Khauli and Bassam Bou Diab. It was performed in Al Madina Theatre in Hamra. During the fieldwork period I also attended a rehearsal of the piece, since the company was travelling to perform in Cologne, Germany. In the opening scene of the performance, five dancers representing women, wearing excessive make-up and eye-catching classy costumes, were speaking incomprehensibly on stage. Their talking became louder and culminated in a distressing cacophony of anxious utterances. The bodies of some dancers started to shake, their body parts moving into different directions. It seemed like the dancers were out of control of their bodies. Later in the piece, dancers performed synchronic movement sequences, featuring many jumping to and rolling over the ground. At some point, dancers dragged other dancers' limp bodies, as though they were dead.

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[103] "On the lips, snow - A dance performance by Ali Chahrour," YouTube video, 2:28, posted by "Mia Habis," October 6, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZBAo5B3hvM.

[104] "That Part of Heaven – Trailor," Vimeo video, 2:42, posted by "Maqamat Dance Theatre," 2013, https://vimeo.com/62552295.

One of the dancers said about the way she danced in the performance: "It was a little bit staccato movement in the first solo, it's like a person who has like something in her body that is tearing her in very different directions and she cannot control it anymore, like compulsions, and she's not able to control this thing that is tearing her all the way." She explained how these movements are connected to a physical state of mind related to the civil war: "For me it relates to how much affected we are of what we lived during the war. *Nous sommes déstabilisé* psychologically and emotionally, and we are trying all trying to be normal, but in fact a lot of friends around me are, we're sometimes out of control. Either we are depressed or we're doing crazy things, sometimes we don't want to work. Sometimes we have difficulties with our children."

Part of the performance summary reads: "Five women survivors of civil war are struggling with their past beliefs, repeated disappointments, and losses. Their wounded bodies and souls tell the stories of their own insecurities, insomnias, anger, and fear from the other."[105] The dancers on stage indeed seemed to embody a state of anxiety, which one of the dancers who performed in the piece related to her the daily experience of the atmosphere in Beirut she wanted to share: "Because it's a subject that is really affecting us. Every day. Every day I see this. I mean for me, *That Part Of Heaven* is in the street all the time." When I asked her to explain this, she continued: "People carrying memories, not dealing with their issues, not talking about things, lying to themselves, to others… lots of things."

The choreographer explained that That Part of Heaven started as an exploration in dimensions of physicality. It takes the 'event' as point of departure, which marks the body. It then used the theme of the civil war in order to express "movement as a resonance of the body in its virtual possibilities and 'becomings'." The importance of the work lies in the artistic approach to movement and the body, rather than the theme. This approach fits in *Maqamat's* way of working: in its artistic research, the company draws on the cultural and social environment in which it practices dance.

Elgha2

I was lucky to be able to see Alexandre Paulikevitch' performance *Elgha2*[106] on the evening before I left Lebanon, in the Sunflower Theatre in Tayouneh. The performance opened with a dancer lying on the ground, who was pushed down by a giant beard which was coming from the ceiling. The dancer then broke free from the beard, and danced *baladi* sequence. Since I have far less background in *baladi* than in contemporary dance, it is more difficult for me to describe this performance. When I found it difficult to put the movements I saw into words, I wrote: "movements we did in class". In his *baladi* classes, which I attended during the fieldwork, Alexandre taught specific sequences of steps, hip drops, pelvic undulations and big upward ribcage pops. I also observed some movements in *Elgha2* which I associated with academic ballet. Alexandre explained that these movements were integrated into *baladi* by the upper middle classes in order to make the style more decent. This style became known as *arabesque,* and contrary to *baladi*, which was generally performed in streets, *arabesque* moved inside theaters and casinos.

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[105] Maqamat Dance Theatre, "That Part of Heaven – Trailor," *Vimeo,* accessed August 19, 2014, https://vimeo.com/62552295.

[106] This performance is not available online. For a different dance work by Alexandre Paulikevitch, see Alexandre Paulikevitch, "TAJWAL - a dance performance by Alexandre Paulikevitch," YouTube video, 3:13, March 6, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1TKH1Mis2I.

In the second scene, the dancer took off his salmon pink dress, now undressed to his underpants. The soundscape was full of declamations in Arabic, and light projections of yellow hands ran all over the dancer's body. The dancer started trembling feverishly, and the air became filled with anxious women's voices. The dancer stood like this for about twenty minutes. When the scene ended, the dancer calmly wiped off the sweat of his face, and put his make-up back on. He put on a turquoise dress, and dances a final *baladi* sequence. Despite the beauty of the movement, it could not lift the pressing sensation the previous scene had caused on my part.

Since we were not able to meet after the performance in Beirut, I interviewed Alexandre during *DansFabrik* in Brest. He explained that the beard represented the repression of Muslim and Christian religious conservatism and machismo. The spoken Arabic texts during the performances were *fatwas* of sheikhs from various Arab countries, and citations from the Quran. About the way he selected the citations, Alexandre said: "I was looking for anything that deals with the body. From the make-up to the hair to the dress to the walking, anything that has to do with the body, the dancing, anything that has to do with the body. […] Like: 'the Muslim woman should not go with make-up on, it's *haram'*; 'The Muslim woman should not show her hair'; 'If she dances she has to dance between women without having sexual connotations'."

The voices belonged to women who were sexually assaulted during the revolutionary protests in Syria, Yemen and Egypt. Their accounts can be found on the Internet, and Alexandre constructed these into a soundscape. He was appalled by the violence against women during the revolutions: "For 2, 3 years I had been seeing a lot of horror images, [hearing] a lot of horror stories, from the Syrians present in Lebanon, from the people I met, from the people I interviewed – because I also interviewed some people – all the stories that came from Syria, all the stories that came from Yemen, all the stories that came from Tahrir Square, and these collective rapes… […] It's connected to the failure of the revolution. It's connected to a revolution that wanted freedom but finished by raping it's women."

When I asked if his performance was also connected to Lebanon, Alexandre replied: “Argh! Don’t talk about Lebanon, it’s a catastrophe! [laughs] It’s a catastrophe, Lebanon. ‘What about Lebanon?’…!” But then he explained: “Lebanon is connected essentially by my activism for women rights. The stories of Roula Yakoub, and those women who died recently, beaten.[107] And their husbands who got out [of prison] weeks after, or who did not even get into prison. It’s connected to Lebanon in this way. I danced those women who died, and nobody was put in prison for it.”

Mahalli

During *DansFabrik* in Brest, I witnessed *Mahalli* by Danya Hammoud. [108] In the performance, a female dancer in a tiny black costume performed highly restrained, detailed movement on a dark stage. The movement was smooth and calm, and the performance generated a sense of stillness. The movement was sensual and the dancer’s attitude provoking. Her facial expressions, in particular her provocative smile, were as conspicuous as her body movement. The performance summary reads: “The counterpart to this figure is order. For survival, this figure is forced to make use of power. In its movement there is heavy restraint, suppressed pensive anger. This figure has the power of a female animal and the pride of a woman.”[109] I discussed the performance in-depth with Danya in Beirut before I saw it in Brest. Our interview lasted 2,5 hours, which is why my discussion of her work is relatively lengthy.

Mahalli means “from here” or “my place”. Danya explained: “It is a question of territory: through improvisation I reached a point where the territory is the body. Each one’s territory is his or her own body. That is the territory to preserve, to protect.” Danya strongly associated her improvisation research with a notion of territory and a question of women, which she explored in the performance. However, her choreography process did not start with any thoughts related these concepts:

> “*Mahalli* started with a very simple basic question: if I want to move, what would be the most important place for me in the body that will allow me to move? […] And from here, by improvising on this question, came the pelvis. Obviously. Now for me it’s obvious [laughs]. It is the center of the body. And it is the center in many meanings, the center somatically and anatomically, and the center in the way that it holds the

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[107] Stephan Kalin, “Lebanese march against domestic violence in rare non-partisan protest,” *Reuters*, March 8, 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/08/us-lebanon-protest-women-idUSBREA270LS20140308.

[108] “Danya Hammoud,” Vimeo video, 3:05, posted by “Recontres chorégraphiques,” 2013, https://vimeo.com/64719695.

[109] “MAHALLI-Dance Performance by Danya Hammoud,” accessed August 9, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/events/339695216146558.

> organs that make you move. But then if you would release everything and just move through the pelvis, you would really be able to move."

The improvisation process thus brought Danya to the pelvis, and she connected it to the place of maternity: "By improvising more and more, the question of women was here. So I couldn't just refuse it. […] But it is simply because I was a woman. If the same research was done by a man it would be different. I think it's as simple as that, it's because I'm working on my body and because my body is a female body, the question was here. So then I took this question and I developed it." Danya developed the question of women through images of women she was struck by, among others the painting *Olympia* by Manet and pin-ups. Danya explained: "Why Olympia, because Olympia was the first nude model in a painting to look straight into the eye of the spectator. So I took this posture, and I was working on what would be the smallest transformation to do to this posture, that would transform this image completely. And it was all in the face actually." Danya explained that by adding a small change in the face to the image, it becomes disturbing.

Through the research on the images, Danya realized that the woman has become objectified in a fake image: "She *became* an image. But I'm not proposing a different image, I'm taking those images and transforming them. But not transforming them in the way that I would like them to be, I'm actually transforming them to reveal what they really are." By doing so, Danya paid attention to details such as a smile, which can transform an image: "Maybe by taking the time to watch the details is taking a step back from this consumption that we live in. And consuming in all ways, consuming everything we see, everything we do. The images we are consuming, ourselves, we are consuming our relations… It is to reveal that we are consuming everything so much that we are actually not thinking anymore." Danya stressed that even though through objectification women have become objects of seduction and victims of oppression, her performance goes beyond this discourse. Rather, she revealed the exhaustion of the woman. Danya only realized this when we were talking about exhaustion in relation to another performance. She understood exhaustion as an active position, however: "To me exhaustion is not a dead end. Because even in exhaustion you can act. But it's a different state, it's actually a state where you went through many things, and it's as if you reached a point that something should change. For me this is exhaustion."

The second question Danya explored in *Mahalli* concerned territory: "For me the question of what would be the essential movement for me to move, is already a political question. […] What would be our necessity to move? And how can we keep on moving? How do we continue when the territory is disappearing? How do we survive? And from here appeared the question that if the territory is disappearing, but I'm still moving, then I *am* my territory, and wherever I move I'm moving it with me. And here also the question of women comes in. That for me the woman is also… a survivor." I asked

Danya which other specific concerns she had about territory. She replied: “Well, I cannot ignore the Palestinian cause… But because this is a very complex history, I never mention it. But for me this cause today is a metaphor for many things happening. Like what it is today to defend your land, to defend your country, to defend your family, to defend... your home, to defend the place that you would call home. […] So I think when I talk about territory, of course I think of this, but I can never say that while working on *Mahalli* I’m treating this. I’m not. That would be like the biggest pretention ever, I’m not.” Rather, Danya explained that the environment in which she lives influences her all the time.

Mes Mains Sont Plus Agées Que Moi

At the time of the fieldwork, Danya Hammoud was working on a performance together with dancer Khouloud Yassine and actor Mounzer Baalbaki. I missed the performance, which was performed in *DansFabrik*, but I interviewed Danya while in Beirut. The title of the performance was *Mes Mains Sont Plus Agées Que Moi* (My hands are older than me).[110] Danya explained that in some ways the performance is a continuation of *Mahalli*. She was seeking to reveal the complexity of the tension between the victim and the aggressor:

> “Many questions of *Mahalli* are re-questioned again, but now also in relation to others [other dancers]. *Mahalli* was a solo, and now we are three. So for me it’s already a huge difference. By re-asking the same questions not on one body, but on three. And then first it started from a very personal obsession, of the idea of someone becoming a criminal out of nowhere. It’s really a very personal and a very old obsession that I have. I’m very obsessed with investigations and detectives, even though none of these will ever appear in the work. […] And there’s a document that I saw many years ago, but that stayed a lot in my mind, that is the movie I think I told you about it, *Massacre*, by Lokman Slim and Monica Borgmann. It’s a documentary about the persons who were involved in the killings in Sabra and Chatila.[111] So it’s actually not so much about the film itself. It’s more about the way they were saying that they are still willing to do it again. If it must happen. And this stayed in my mind a lot, especially that these people still live with us, but we don’t know them. They are still between us, and to know that these people are still willing to do this

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[110] “Mes mains sont plus âgées que moi,” YouTube video, 1:01, September 19, 2014, posted by “Le Quartz SN de Brest,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o2TvcXMP5Q.

[111] The dancer was referring to the massacre of Palestinians and Lebanese inhabitants of the Palestinian refugee camps Sabra and Chatila during the civil war. Robert Fisk has accounted how shortly after the mass murder, which took place between 16 and 18 September 1982, it was difficult to find out who were responsible for the crime. The refugee camps were under Israeli military command, though the massacres are believed to be carried out by the Christian Maronite Phalange militia under leadership of commander Elie Hobeika, and members of the pro-Israeli ‘South Lebanon Army’ militia lead by Saad Haddad. Fisk’s account reveals that Israeli commanders were aware of what was happening in the camps during the mass murder, though did not try to prevent it. They are even believed to have lightened the camps with flares. Estimations of the number of victims range between 700 (according to Israeli intelligence) and 2000 (according to Phalangist officers). Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1990), 368-390.

> again. So mainly these are the two things. But then working on *Mahalli*, and now interested in this issue, is actually just to question the distance from us and from us being a criminal. So again it's not about trying to say anything or to give a message or to propose another reality, no. It's just revealing it through another angle. That is the angle of the movement in time."

About the title of the performance, Danya said: "Well, I think there is something about having lived more than you have really lived. I think it's one of the explanations that we can have. Because there's another explanation: if my hands did so much, killed so much, they are older than me, actually. And there is also another explanation that is: I've lived more than I could." All explanations are related to a state of exhaustion. Danya explained: "It's maybe not [the exhaustion] of the victim or of the aggressor, but the state of exhaustion." I asked her if she meant a societal exhaustion, and she replied: "Of course, of course. Yeah." Throughout the choreographing process, Danya worked on this sensation of tiredness. "What I'm interested in is not the act [of killing] itself, it's before and after. And this situation and this state of being tired and trying to look for the comfort is for me the step after the act. But I never mention this act, I don't need to mention it, this is only my worry, it doesn't have to be a psychological situation for the improvisation. It's just for me. And I look through other propositions in order to reach it. I'm not starting from it. I would never start by saying: 'ok you just killed someone, and now what will you do?'" […] If now I tell you 'just sit in a really comfortable way', you would feel your tiredness anyway. You would feel it because later on I would ask 'ok, from this position, try just to really know, really notice, where is the tiredness in the body.'"

Fatmeh

Another dance performance which was in creation at the time of the fieldwork was *Fatmeh* by Ali Chahrour.[112] The work was performed shortly after I left Lebanon, though I was able to attend a rehearsal at a late stage of the choreographing process. The rehearsal took place in Houna Center in Hamra. The performance featured two female dancers, Umama Hamido and Rania Rafei, wearing long, black skirts and black veils. In the first rehearsal scene, the dancers were jumping at one spot, while clapping their hands. They expressed screams of grief through mime. The dancers ran back and forth through the space, and then started spinning on the rhythm of drums, bells and handclapping, their skirts wide. In the second rehearsing scene, one of the dancers started singing. The other dancer joined in and they sang together. While singing, the dancers moved their hips, which reminded me of *baladi*.[113] In another rehearsal scene, the dancers stood next to each other, and one of them hit her chest hard with her lower arm and hand. For a moment the rehearsal halted, as the dancer and the choreographer could suddenly not control their laughter. The dancers then sang and clapped, then started slapping their bodies again, simultaneously or by taking turns. Their slapping generated different rhythms. The dancers were clearly exhausted. At the end of the scene they made eye contact, and one of the dancers embraced the other from behind.

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[112] "FATMEH: A dance performance by Ali Chahrour," YouTube video, 0:55, May 31, 2014, posted by "Be Kult," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLXQnojPrYw.

[113] Indeed, Alexandre Paulikevitch partly trained the dancers for this performance.

The actual performance may have looked different from the description of the rehearsal above, in terms of the structure of the scenes, the final selection of movement sequences, and possibly other aspects. However, as can be seen from the trailer, at least the slapping, turning, and the music have remained. I discussed the creation with Ali Chahrour. He explained about the research he pursued through his creation: “It’s research about the local quality of movement, and how the contemporary dance is linked to this space, to this country.” He did not think it was interesting to take contemporary dance as a tool from another culture, and to put their own culture in it. “So how can we find a specific, local quality of movement or dance? If you do a research about how the bodies in Beirut or in Lebanon move, and what kind of tools of movement they have in a situation, you can create a special technique. And this is what I’m doing.” Ali felt that there is something particular about the local way of moving, because of particular political and religious situations: “For me the relation between the body and religion is very strong in the local body. […] And for many many other reasons I feel it’s very different. It’s a very huge research.”

Ali was thus very interested in finding a local quality of movement. He found a source for his research in funeral rituals: “I feel that there’s a lot of very interesting quality of movement and very interesting presence of the body at funerals, because there are all these rules for the space, for religion and everything, and there is a very specific mood. The very interesting thing for me is how the body reacts in this space.” Ali specifically referred to the Tazia ritual performed by Shi’a during Ashura, where believers slap themselves and sometimes make cuts in their heads. Ali further explained that in the past few years, funeral rituals have become a common occurrence on television and in the streets of Beirut: “Everywhere you see women, they’re slapping themselves, they’re crying, so it’s part from our life. It’s... it’s everywhere, and I felt that if I want to do a research that is linked to the local quality of movement, this is the most daily life movement. And we can’t submerge the political and the religious side.”

Ali explained that in order to explore the topic of movement in funerals and the reaction of the body under sadness and shock, he wanted to work with people who were not trained as dancers. “I decided to work with non-dancers. Just to explore this initial quality of movement, and how they can – for these two girls, Rania and Umama, they live in their city, they have their background, their history, they know this situation very well – so how can they explore all these things on stage without [me] saying ‘do this, and now do this, and 1, 2, 3, 4’ and do a fixed choreography.” Ali explained how he and the dancers constructed the movement for the performance: “We watched a lot of videos, and real daily life material, and I transform it in an aesthetic way. It’s very violent, because it’s if you want to do a local quality of movement, or local dance, it is violent.” When I asked Ali what he meant by the body being violent, he replied: “The body is very present without any effort. […] But even the relation between the two bodies is very violent. They are slapping themselves in a very real way, it’s not a choreographed performance. It’s an exploration of many situations of the body from Rania’s and Umama’s and my background, and our culture.”

Can You And I Really Dance Together?

While in Beirut, I interviewed actor, dancer and film director Wafa’a Halawi. She had just finished her latest dance film *Can You And I Really Dance Together?*[114], which was later shown at Cinedans in Amsterdam. The film featured two dancers in two different buildings. At first, they danced in their own space. However, suddenly the spaces and the dancers came together. Their settings seemed to have merged, and for a while, they both danced in seemingly the same space. Then the dancers in their spaces were drifted apart again, and danced separately in their own setting.

About this encounter, Wafa’a said: “It was shot between Paris and Beirut, and basically it's a fictive encounter between two dancers who never met. So basically one is in Paris, one is in Beirut, we shot them separately, but you see them together on screen. […] The one in Paris is in a very polished place and a beautiful building, all white with wooden floors and all that. And the dancer in Beirut was in an abandoned factory. […] So what happened is that in the beginning I introduced each space and each dancer, but at some point you actually see the spaces merge. So you can see that the two spaces become one, and the two dancers who were dancing separately danced together in this mixed space.” Wafa’a explained that she was very interested in space and time:

> “When I was doing my thesis in film I discussed the representation of Beirut in contemporary Lebanese cinema. So obviously the representation of a space, especially a space like Beirut with its history, is very tightly linked to the temporal aspect also. So this is when I started to understand that I was very interested in these issues of space and time. The other thing is, I think it's fascinating, because space and time give movement. And it's very interesting that with the camera and with the editing, we actually have the technical tools to play with this as much as we like, and actually re-present like, present again in a new perspective, space and time, not as we know it in our concrete life, or not as we maybe were used to experience it when we watch a traditional dance show or performance, so.. and probably also it's linked to the fact that I moved a lot, I changed a lot, I lived in a lot of countries growing up, so space and time were

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[114] Wafa’a Celine Halawi, “Can You And I Really Dance Together,” Vimeo video, 3:42, 2014, https://vimeo.com/76804431.

> always things that are, that were with, in me, but I recently found my fascination for them. And... yeah I guess that's it, I guess it's just, how can I play with space and time with dance.”

About the choice for the two buildings, Wafa’a said:

> “I needed this destroyed feeling, this you know, space that lived that was broken down. […] Because I wanted to play on this contrast between a very polished space and a very destroyed space. And I guess... it's not as simplistic as saying: it's my perspective of how Paris is or how Beirut is or how it's seen by media or by its history or whatever. But I guess somehow it is a bit related to this, even though you never know when you're in Paris and when you're in Beirut. […] You don't know if it's in different countries because it's in interiors anyway, you don't see the setting. But I just wanted this contrast between a polished space and a destroyed space. Maybe also to kind of... on a personal level maybe... maybe I saw it that way because it's a way to combine two cultures I grew up in. I don't know exactly what it is. And aesthetically it was very nice to have very opposite spaces combined, because then you can actually really see a contrast.”

Wafa’a explained that the history and space of Beirut are not particularly noticeable in her dance films so far:

> “You can’t really see it in my work, to be honest, at least in the dance films. You can see it through the setting, it’s a backdrop, it’s not a main element. […] I don’t know if it’s just in my head that I relate this destroyed space to Beirut because of you know the war and all that, and I guess that people may instinctively do that, but other than that I don’t think it’s a very, it’s not very obvious in my films. […] But maybe in the future they will be more related to the actual space. […] And I think maybe once I explore that, maybe then you can link it a bit more to Beirut or its history or the space or whatever comes with it. […] Maybe because I want to relate this new dance film to a specific time and space. It’s a specific experience of this country, maybe.”

When I asked her if this would be her personal experience or an experience for other people to relate to, she replied:

> “No, of course for other people to relate to, but I think when you’re trying to express things through dance or through film, you’re experiencing them second-hand. But at the same time the outcome can be very beautiful, because it can help, maybe it can help me understand things and get over certain things, and maybe it can help other people feel, in a beautiful way, a personal experience that’s actually universal to everyone who has lived the war.”

Les Pleureuses

Finally, in Beirut I interviewed photographer and dancer Rima Maroun about her stop-motion dance film *Les Pleureuses*[115], of which I saw the projection in the original size at the Cinedans 2014 edition. The meters long black-and-white projection filled a large part of a white wall, which gave the work a more powerful quality when compared to being watched on a computer screen. The work consisted of three separate projections side by side, on which the same dancer could be seen. The dancer's movements were in stop-motion, and they were alternately the same and different per projection. The atmosphere of the work was one of stillness. The movement was largely confined to a detailed movement of the arms. The dancer's head was often bowed.

The synopsis of the work reads: "Ever since the Antiquity, the mourners are moaning weeping women imploring the sky during funerals. They exhibit themselves representing and dramatizing the pain. Through repeating their words and movements they perform a ritual that helps the grieved ones externalize their sorrow. I felt the need to weep the absence. I listened to my body and searched for a way to express its state of "a body in tears". I then transformed my continuous movements within time into frozen images. I juxtaposed my images, multiplied, repeated and duplicated them, creating three bodies in tears crying in chorus, until the images themselves became a cry."[116]

Rima explained that she was interested in exploring the relationship between photography and dance. In *Les Pleureuses*, she examined the notion of absence, related to "the people who are not there anymore". She referred to the car bomb which killed civilians and damaged the Iranian Embassy just the day before, and stated that such events occur every month. She needed to address this topic because citizens of Lebanon and other Arab countries are constantly facing the loss of people: "The portraits that you see in the city of people who died, martyrs, they're there! And I don't think that we know how to deal with it. We *don't* deal with it. […] We don't have the time to mourn because there are so many of them, and the government is not really taking care of the situation. […] You know… We turn the page and continue. It's not easy."

About the way in which she created *Les Pleureuses*, Rima said: "The mourners are women by the person who died, and through their mourning they help people to get through the mourning process, that is actually their function in society. They come, they cry, they help you to cry also, to help you express and get out of yourself... what you need to get out." The three dancing bodies in the projection are reflecting the mourning women. The images all belong to one dancer, however. Through repetition, the mourners became three: "In this project I worked on the repetitions on the notion of the ritual, because the ritual dances are about repetition. And I worked on the relationship with the floor. […] Repetition came with it, so I repeated my images, I created three dancing bodies. [But] I shot myself once."

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[115] "Les Pleureuses," Rima Maroun, accessed August 9, 2015, http://rimamaroun.com/work/les-pleureuses.

[116] "Les Pleureuses," Rima Maroun, accessed August 9, 2015, http://rimamaroun.com/work/les-pleureuses.

Rima was also thinking on a new project. She considered working on the topic of secrets. When I asked why, she laughed, and said:

> "There are so many unsaid things, unsaid things that we don't know. We don't know what happened, and there are a lot of things in the families and in the culture that you don't talk about. Until they are said, they remain secrets. […] We all have somebody who died in the war in our family. A lot of people have like, the-uncle-of-the-friend of the I-don't-know-who, who got killed in I-don't-know-how. The how – what happened, how he died – we don't know. And for me this is a way not to recognize the past."

Thematic focus of the performances

The above descriptions of the dance works demonstrate the various themes dancers dealt with in their performances. Very often dancers talked directly about the thematic content of their performance, without explicitly identifying it as a particular "theme". When dancers used particular terms, they used words like "worry", "proposition", "theme" and "subject". I have chosen to use the term "theme" in analyzing the thematic content of dance performances. In the present section I clarify the themes addressed in the performances, and explain how they relate to each other, as well as to the context in which dances practice contemporary dance as explained in the previous chapter.

Danas and *That Part Of Heaven* are both thematically related to the civil war. Departing from the phenomenon of mass graves in Beirut, *Danas* worked on memories and death by displaying raw movement. The performance was thus contextually related to the presence of mass graves in Beirut, which are a remnant of the civil war. Further, an often-associated problem with the remembrance of the civil war is the state of collective amnesia in Lebanon. After the war, the ruling authorities prioritized building up the economy and re-establishing a political system over pursuing justice for those who committed crimes in the war. According to Sune Haugbolle, many political leaders who reconstructed Lebanon after the war were themselves guilty of crimes, and thus were not eager to dig up past events. In addition, citizens of Lebanon were long unwilling to make efforts for collective memory. The general amnesty law in 1991, which absolves all crimes before that date, contributed to closing any opportunities for public memory.[117]

That Part Of Heaven revealed how the civil war physically and mentally affected survivors. The dancers who performed explained how they experienced these effects on a daily basis, in both their own and their fellow citizens' physical and mental conditions. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many other dancers expressed how they experienced the city of Beirut as "crazy" and its citizens as traumatized. Sune Haugbolle has noted that psychoanalysts working in post-war Lebanon have witnessed widespread trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder.[118] Importantly, as goes for many dancers, the performance was stirred by an interest in research in movement, and it used the context in which it was produced as a basis for creation of movement.

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[117] Sune Haugbolle, "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 25, no. 1 (2005): 191-203, https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/comparative_studies_of_south_asia_africa_and_the_middle_east/v025/25.1haugbolle.html.

Elgha2 highlighted the oppression of women, with regard to both religious conservatism and the mass rape of women during the Arab revolutions. The dancer who performed *Elgha2* was highly bothered by what he identified as "religious macho behavior" and stories of sexual assault in countries close-by. In addition, the dancer was appalled by the wave of violent deaths of women as a result of domestic violence in Lebanon. During the fieldwork, the papers regularly reported on marital abuse with fatal results for women, and the incidents provoked demonstrations in Beirut against domestic violence. [119]

On a high level of abstraction, *Mahalli* revealed the consumption of women as objectified and fake images. This theme was grounded in a concern with consumerism more generally. More dancers addressed the matter of consumerism, and I relate this concern to the superficiality dancers detected in Lebanese society. Further, *Mahalli* explored a concern with territory, in terms of one's body, one's home, and one's country. Even though these matters of territory remain highly abstract in the performance, the dancer explained how in the background, the geo-political context in which she lives informed the performance as a metaphor for territorial concerns. Finally, *Mahalli* exposed the exhaustion of the woman, though related to the exhausted state of society more generally. This theme of exhaustion also informed the performance *Mes Mains Sont Plus Agées Que Moi*, by the same choreographer. This time the exhaustion was related to the particular moment after an act of killing. The theme was based on the interest of the choreographer in criminalities, and the deep violence she experienced in her context, which is hidden but suddenly explodes. Finally, the performance revealed the relation between the victim and the perpetrator and the witness as an active conscience. In this way, the performance explored the distance between "us and us as criminals".

The performance *Fatmeh* was a research on the local quality of movement in the context where the performance was produced. The source for this research features of body movement during funeral rituals and the Ashura ritual Tazia. The choreographer explained that due to the effects of the war in Syria, funerals have become so common on TV and on the streets that they constituted a daily experience, on which movement research could be based. Further, *Fatmeh* explored the movement of the local body in relation to political and religious situations, according to the choreographer merely because the context in which local bodies move is strongly influenced by politics and religion. The movement research in *Fatmeh* is thus strongly related to a political and religious context as experienced by the choreographer and dancers, and particularly to a situation which has become more and more characterized by death and funeral rituals.

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[118] Haugbolle, "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War ," 194.

[119] Stephan Kalin, "Lebanese march against domestic violence in rare non-partisan protest," *Reuters*, March 8, 2014, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/08/us-lebanon-protest-women-idUSBREA270LS20140308.

The dance film *Can You And I Really Dance Together?* played with the notions of space and time. While the film was shot between a destroyed building in Beirut and a well-maintained monumental building in Paris, it did not directly address the obvious association with a damaged Beirut due to conflict. However, a future film project may more directly deal with a specific space and time related to the war and the city. The damaging effects of the war on buildings in Beirut are indeed still noticeable; some houses are bullet-ridden, while the bullet holes in many others are visibly patched. In addition, a newly constructed sophisticated Downtown replaced the old district, which became highly damaged during the war.[120]

Finally, *Les Pleureuses* mourned the absence of the people who died in violent events in Beirut and the wider Arab region. Similar to other dancers quoted in the previous chapter, the artist who created *Les Pleureuses* observed a structure of violence in Lebanon, which in recent years has become characterized by car bombings and suicide attacks. Further, the artist was thinking of a new project centering on the theme of secrets. Like several other dancers, she mentioned that many secrecies of the civil war have never been unraveled: committers of crimes were not put on trial, and many citizens who disappeared were never retraced. This secrecy is a result of collective amnesia, and the idea for this new artwork is in this way closely related to the theme of memories in *Danas*. It responds to the need dancers observe to recognize what has happened during the civil war, and to break amnesia. According to Sune Haugbolle, since the beginning of the civil war artists have addressed questions of memory. However, these attempts have not been able to involve the broader public in memory debates, since artists usually operate in elitist circles. According to Haugbolle, mass media and social advocacy groups are better tools to reach wider participation.[121] However, as we will see below, many dancers felt that the way in which mass media approaches social and political issues is not productive in critically reflecting on these.

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[120] Tarek Saad Ragab, "The crisis of cultural identity in rehabilitating historic Beirut-downtown," *Elsevier Cities* 28, no. 1 (2011): 107, doi: 10.1016/j.cities.2010.04.001.

[121] Sune Haugbolle, "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 25, no. 1 (2005): 195, https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/comparative_studies_of_south_asia_africa_and_the_middle_east/v025/25.1haugbolle.html.

Societally engaged dance works: questions of authenticity, tiredness, and funding

The themes discussed above are strongly related to social, religious and political contexts, and address particular features of these contexts. Therefore, I consider these performances as societally engaged. However, the performances address different themes, in a variety of ways. First of all, the level of abstraction in terms of the clarity of the theme differs per performance. For example, to me *Danas* and *Les Pleureuses* were more abstract than *Elgha2* and *That Part of Heaven*. Further, many performances were multi-layered, which is most true for *Mahalli*. Dancers' purposes varied as well: they sought to reveal, to propose, to question, to mourn, to criticize, to research, or to share. As will be discussed below, most dancers shared a strong belief in the importance of arts for society and the role of the artist as a critical reflector on society. Many saw a tendency of dealing with societal and political questions in Lebanese dance and art production. They had highly different opinions on how to deal with societal themes in performances, however. These were mainly related to concerns with authenticity of engaged dance works, a weariness of both the dancers and the public with talking about social and political problems, a – on the contrary – superficial desire of Lebanese publics to see dramatic art, and, related, considerations of interesting aesthetics. Yet many dancers noted that making dance works which do not deal with societal questions was simply impossible for them, due to the challenging social and political context in which they practice their dancing. Further, some felt that "the situation" in which they practiced their dancing had an effect on their bodies and thus also on their dancing.

Many dancers expressed the view that dance and arts more generally are important for society; some used words like "urgency" or "necessity" of arts to emphasize this point. According to some, artists are in a particular position which enables them to point out and critically reflect on problems in society. For that reason, they saw it as their responsibility to address societal issues. One dancer even used the word "mission". Several dancers also mentioned that art should not just be created "for the sake of art". Asked why she thought art was important for society, a dancer replied: "Because art is the way to open up the society. That's why. I believe that artists *can* make a change in society, are open to dialogue, which is what we so much need in Lebanon." Passionately, another dancer stated: "I truly believe that art can change lives. […] Yes, I truly believe. I truly believe that it's the most impactful and peaceful way to change, in general. I truly believe that. I really think that a film can change your life, I really believe that a piece of art can change our life. Because if it touches you and it makes you feel things, it makes you think things." These dancers thus were convinced of the ability of art to change the way that people perceive the world, and thus to change society in the end. Some dancers also noted that they found it important to bring dance to people who would not easily come into contact with art: people who were not part of artistic circles or who live in rural areas.

For example, several dancers were concerned with the problem of memory, and thought addressing this in art was important. One dancer felt very strongly about this:

> "Yes, I find it important because I think memories last, there is a kind of memory work we have to do. Because you cannot just switch and forget about what happened and behave as if nothing happened. Plus it is part of our actual society, because the actual society lived the war, and the actual behavior of people is due to what they lived. So they're, sometimes they may be aggressive, selfish, too emotional, anxious, insecure, and this is related to what they lived during the war." […] "Our children have to learn about this experience, and they have to know that war is a terrible thing. And they have to work and be educated in order to avoid it in the future. […] They have to know how it was, and we have to tell them and we have to share this and we have to, not to forget about it. I really think it's a responsibility that we have."

Several dancers indeed detected a tendency of political dance and art production more generally in Lebanon. One dancer observed: "I think it's a very interesting question, here it's a very interesting question to ask. Most of our creations are related to politics and war." Another dancer reflected: "Maybe it's a way for them [artists] to take it out of their system. In cinema, theater, dance – everything is about the war." She felt that this was important, though she also questioned the limited focus of much artistic work on the civil war: "*Khalas*, as we say here, it has to stop, you know. I think we should explore other things. But I understand why, because we have a problem in the country, with memory, especially."

Several dancers felt that choreographers need to carefully think about *how* to address sensitive political and social themes in their performances, for a number of reasons. Some dancers were concerned with the effects such performances can have on the public when they are not cautiously created: "I understand these are big things that touch the choreographers, but I still feel it's very tricky, really." This dancer felt that even though "we are all people living in the same political system", this does not mean that everyone has the same experience of the situation which would potentially be addressed in a performance. Related to this, some dancers felt that an experience of such a situation has to be authentic, and should not be "faked". This again struck me as an instance of a concern of dancers with sincerity in dance performances.

Further, several dancers noted that they noticed a weariness of many Lebanese citizens with regard to addressing the civil war or current political problems. Therefore, people do not want to see performances dealing with such themes: "People are already suffocating from all this media. […] It's not easy to address these things and not to address them in a way like politics or media do." As we have seen in the above, dancers nevertheless address sensitive themes in their performances, and one dancer noticed that the public reacts very differently: "Some of them were so much touched that they used to cry in the theater. Others rejected the thing completely. A little bit aggressive." Some people did not want to live the situation addressed in the performance again: "It was part of the past, and we lived this, and now we want to live something that is more light. Beautiful and light and more entertainment, than really going back to this emotional experience and ugliness and hardness." Dancers sometimes felt the same: "I'm already living this during the day, I don't want to take this and transport it to the studio and do it more and more and more." Such feelings may explain why the entertaining dance shows of *Caracalla* are more popular amongst Lebanese publics than are contemporary dance performances about heavy social themes.

On the other hand, some dancers noted that choreographers often also abide to a desire of Lebanese publics for drama. One dancer said:

> "90% of the population, if they don't cry over a film they think that the film is not good, or if they don't get shocked by a dance performance they think that the performance is weak. You know, all this misconception of how to evaluate an artwork. […] You are very controlled by how the media communicate images and sounds. I think it's important to do works that are not like this. It's not okay that we are against violence, and that the performance itself is violent. […] Some dancers have this complex to be very [dramatic], because they want to be appreciated. And I understand where it comes from, because they're not appreciated at all."

Both this quote and the quote in the paragraph above suggest a desire of Lebanese publics for superficial entertainment – whether joyful and light, or dramatic and heavy. Most dancers felt that neither of the two approaches is desirable in their dance performances. I suggest that the love for entertainment is related to the consumerist attitudes identified by Samir Khalaf, as discussed in chapter two.[122]

Dancers felt that dancers should not compromise on the artistic value of a performance in order to address a social theme. One dancer said about her own performance: "[It was] a very beautiful project, very sweet also, although the theme was very difficult, but I treated it in a very light way. In a very positive way. There's no drama at all in the [work] – on the contrary. But to go through this process asks a lot of courage, because you're going through something very personal, very deep, very brutal. It's a big issue, and then to make an art form out of it and not to fall into the danger of becoming in a situation of being trapped in what you are trying to say." She explained that if you are working on a heavy topic as an artist, “it’s very easy to fall into something too dramatic, or something too sad. And it's difficult to make art out of this.”

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[122] Juan Romero, "Lebanon Adrift: From Battleground to Playground Lebanon: The Politics of a Penetrated Society The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War, and the International Drug Traffic," review of *Lebanon Adrift: From Battleground to Playground,* by Samir Khalaf, *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 6 (2012): 1015-1021, doi: 10.1080/00263206.2012.723877.

Other dancers made a similar observation, stating that addressing societal issues in a “direct” way in performances was in their view not artistically interesting: “Aesthetically, I don’t like literality in stories. […] I’m simply not interested in these aesthetics.” Others felt that reproducing the reality in a performance would not reflect on reality, and, worse, would even reduce it. One dancer said about her way of working on social themes: “I’m trying to keep all this as a background, and finally I think I will start from a very physical way of working, maybe not linked directly to this, but I think having all this in the background, it will direct the work, it will affect the work of course, but I will not start from this.”

Another dancer explained that she did not treat political problems directly in her work: “Because I think I’m not a political person. And when I say this I’m not saying that my work is not political – it is. […] It is political because it questions political issues, because it questions society, because it questions our place in society, because it questions our reflection. This is why it is political. […] But I mean that to work directly on the subject you would have to be someone who has all the arguments to defend this, while my arguments are not the political arguments. So I’m not able actually. I’m simply not able to treat it directly. And I’m not interested to treat it directly. If I’m interested to treat it directly I would be an activist.”

Several dancers pointed out that it is impossible for them to avoid societal issues in their work, first of all because they are part of society, and secondly because the context in which they practice contemporary dance is particularly invasive. As one dancer put it: “Because in the way I see myself, I am part of society. I’m not out of the society. I am part of it and specifically being here, in this context, it’s impossible to be in a [bubble] and forget about what’s happening. It’s impossible.” Another said: “You always relate things to yourself, you as related to the context, you living in the kind of political social context you’re in, and you cannot *not* feel concerned by these things.” As we have seen in the above, many dancers worked on themes in their performances which they had been confronted with for several years. They often expressed a necessity to work on themes related to the context in which they lived, as working on other subjects or on aesthetical questions was simply impossible for them: “And this is actually why I call my subjects more worries than subjects. Because I don’t think I’m able to do a work that is purely aesthetical – and I’m not criticizing this, because I can enjoy watching something like this, but I’m not able to do it.”

Some dancers also spoke about the effect of “the situation” in Lebanon on the way they danced and on their bodies more generally. One dancer said: “I think you’re influenced by the space you live in. Of course, I’m sure. Not only in the way you dance, [but also in] the way you move.” Some dancers noted that during dance improvisation sessions, particular states of physicality could occur even if dancers are not consciously thinking about a particular political context or adopting an emotional state of mind – which is an often-employed technique to generate choreographic material in contemporary dance. By this, the dancers meant that tensions are present in dancers' bodies. However, not all dancers felt physically affected by the tense atmosphere in Beirut, which highlights the fact that such an experience is highly personal.

A final concern many dancers raised with regard to creating societally engaged dance performances was related to funding practices, especially by Western funding bodies. Dancers observed that the mission or vision of many funding bodies guides a particular funding agenda. A dancer said about this: "There are a lot of local and international funds. And I don't think they're bad. I'm not saying that at all. But some of them have a clear agenda, and if you don't fit the agenda, they don't fund you. Simply. […] It has nothing to do with art, nothing to do with dance or theater, but it directly influences what is being funded and what is not. And this means that this directly influences what the public is seeing." The quote demonstrates a strong awareness of funding agendas and their effects on dance production, and other dancers expressed a similar consciousness.[123]

According to several dancers, Western funding agendas are very often focused on encouraging art production which is highly engaged with political and social problems. About her attempt to gain funding for a performance, a dancer told me: "We didn't want a narrative, we didn't want to tell a story or something. And we were very upset, because all the funds require [stories] about suffering, and death, and war." Another dancer felt that the West is looking for a particular discourse with regard to the Middle East, which is the discourse of the victim. According to him, curators and funders all think this way. Another dancer was annoyed by the selection criteria of festivals and funds, which often focus on artistic work which deals with "issues from the region". Slightly annoyed, she exclaimed: "What the hell does it mean, 'issues from the region'? Can I have other issues than the Arab Spring?" She felt that artists use the Arab revolutions in unacceptable ways to gain funding.

Dancers observed that in abiding to Western funding agendas, performances which explicitly deal with social problems or promote particular values One dancer spoke about adding "pseudo-political layers" to performances in order to appeal to European publics. Other dancers include a reference to values such as "democracy" in order to increase their chances to be selected for funding. About this, a dancer said: "How am I going to talk about dance spreading democracy? […] Dance brings democracy – it's just weird." The dancer who found out that all funds call for proposals dealing with war, asked rhetorically: "Come on, do I really have to twist my texts?"

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[123] Dancers' responsiveness to funding strategies was further demonstrated when a dancer recommended that if I were to apply for funding from the Netherlands Embassy for an extension of my research in Egypt, I should emphasize that I were to work in collaboration with "locals". Working with "locals" has good changes for funding, according to this dancer.

Though relevant, the central issue here is not even whether or not artists themselves agree with the importance of the themes funding bodies promote. The problem for most dancers is that through their funding strategies, particularly Western funding bodies generate a form of cultural imperialism. One dancer asked: “What kind of power dynamic is being imposed, or what kind of power dynamic am I submitting to?” She gave the example of an American funding organization whose aim is to spread “democracy” through art. Even if the artist would acknowledge the value of democracy – a concept which is not even self-evident – the fact that the value is imposed on his or her artistic work is seen as problematic by many dancers.

In order to avoid funding agendas, some dancers tried to create performances without applying for funding. They were also sometimes less eager to perform at particular festivals based on selection criteria. On dancer explained that she would accept funding from certain organizations, while not from others. Whether the funding came from an embassy, a cultural organization, or a corporate business influenced these decisions. In addition, where these bodies are based, where they in turn get their money from, and what their underlying motivations informed such decisions. During a debate organized by *Maqamat Dance Theatr*e during the 2013 edition of the Arab Dance Platform, this particular issue was addressed. A programmer of a Dutch funding organization pointed out that funding bodies are in the end also subjected to the agendas of the parties which invest in their organization. From my own experience I know that in The Netherlands these can involve corporate businesses, other funding bodies, lotteries, private individual investors, and political ministries. How these influences work depends per organization, but their existence is certain.

Dancers stated that dance works lose artistic qualities when attempting to conceptualize dance works according to the vision of a funding organization. In addition, according to some, by promoting particular strands of engaged dance production, funding agendas limit local artistic production: “Very rarely people [funders] accept abstract projects and abstract ideas. Very rarely. […] For example, if someone is doing research on a very scientific approach to movement, [he/she] has of course less chance to get funds, than if somebody’s talking about frustrated women in the Middle East. Let’s face it.” The dancer’s comment echoed concerns with superficiality dancers raised with regard to societally engaged dance production in general. Since funding agendas often require explicit references to social questions in performances, they can be regarded as promoting a type of performances which many dancer consider superficial.

More generally, European hegemonic policies towards the Middle Eastern region have been heavily criticized, principally in literature assessing the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).[124] In particular regard to democracy promotion, Peter Seeberg has suggested that the problems the European Union faces in Lebanon are due to the country's sectarian political system, and that the adaptive strategies the ENP employs in Lebanon reveal a pragmatic approach, instead of a normative one.[125] However, thus far there is no attention in academic research for Western funding strategies directed at cultural production in the Middle East. Artistic development is not part of ENP's agenda,[126] though it is the focus of major funding bodies like the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), which for the period 2013-2016 focuses on the theme "Culture, Creative Communities and Democracy".[127]

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[124] Hiski Haukkala, “The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon: The Case of European Neighborhood Policy,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 9 (2008): 1601-1622, doi: 10.1080/09668130802362342; Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Tobias Schumacher, “From EMP to ENP: What’s at Stake with the European

I therefore suggest European funding strategies as a topic for further research. Such research focus on analyzing the missions of European funding bodies, and how these are translated in funding criteria. Further, artistic applications to these funding bodies could be examined, as well as the grounds for approving or rejecting projects by the funding organization. Artists could be interviewed on the application strategies they employed, for example in terms of "twisting texts". Finally, the artistic productions of grantees could be assessed in order to see if and how artists indeed address the values promoted by the granting funder.

Concluding remarks

This chapter offered descriptions and analysis of the actual production of contemporary dance practices in Beirut. It highlights how the performances are highly societally engaged in character. Importantly, the dance works discussed in this chapter form a particular selection of the works I was able to witness, and which I discussed most in-depth with the dancers. The selection thus does not represent all dance works dancers created in Beirut in recent years. I discussed more previous performances or ideas for new performances with dancers, and their thematic contents highlight the variety of themes which inform performances. Dancers were inspired by the topics of relations, communication, *sarab* ("traditional oriental music"), and Greek mythology. Some performances focused very much on technical rather than societal aspects, such as rhythmic subdivisions, and a work which for example explored of horizontal and vertical dimensions in dance.

Yet most dancers feel that it is the role of art and artists to critically reflect on this context. They had strong views on the way in which social and political themes should be addressed in dance performances, however. They were mainly concerned with the authenticity of dance performances as

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Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10, no. 1 (2005): 17–38, http://hdl.handle.net/1814/3431.

[125] Peter Seeberg, "The EU as a realist actor in normative clothes: EU democracy promotion in Lebanon and the European Neighbourhood Policy," *Democratization* 16, no. 1 (2009): 94, doi: 10.1080/13510340802575858.

[126] "Foreign Affairs," European Union External Action, accessed August 9, 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/policies/index_en.htm.

[127] "Connected Action for the Commons," European Cultural Foundation, accessed August 9, 2015, http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/thematic-focus.

opposed to superficial entertainment, and with their artistic and aesthetic value. Dancers often expressed a disinterest in dealing directly with societal themes in a work. However, several dancers noted that performances are always influenced by the social and political context in which they are created, because artists are intrinsically part of this context. Since many dancers experienced social and political problems in the context of Lebanon, their performances often addressed these issues. In addition, some dancers felt that the atmosphere of this context, which they often experienced as tense and traumatized, likewise had an effect on their body.

A major issue that troubled dancers in terms of societally engaged performance production concerned funding strategies. Dancers noted that particularly Western funders and curators of festivals have specific funding agendas. Based on dancers' observations, this thesis suggests that such funding practices promote a particular strand of artistic production according to a Western understanding of societal values and social engagement. Such practices restrict local autonomous artistic development. European hegemony has been criticized with regard to the policies of the European Neighbourhood Program, and I propose to examine the policies European of funding bodies with regard to the MENA region.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to answer the question "How do dancers practice contemporary dance in Beirut?" The thesis examined the ways dancers practiced contemporary dance in Beirut on four different levels. First, chapter one addressed the practical organization of contemporary dance practices in Beirut. It mainly addressed the challenges dancers faced in practicing their dance, since challenges were most dominant in dancers' accounts. The chapter offered a review of the different educational paths dancers followed, in terms of dance training as well as other (often university) education. This discussion highlighted the difficulty for dancers to obtain a professional level in dancing, with regard to technique, as well as to have a professional dance career. Few dancers managed to make a living from dancing alone, and often had an additional job out of financial reasons. Importantly, dancers observed that in the international dance circuit, the level of technique and professional careers are measured according to Western standards. These are however difficult to achieve in the organizational context for contemporary dance for Lebanon – which, according to most dancers, is still developing.

The organizational infrastructure of contemporary dance practices in Beirut was further characterized by an absence of governmental support, in terms of institutionalized education and funding for performance production. According to the dancers, due to the political crisis in the region, especially in Syria, the government's policies were directed at political and safety instability rather than at artistic development. Dancers felt that this was problematic, since they viewed arts as highly important for societal wellbeing. Since governmental support for dance production is non-existent, dancers turn to regional and international funds. In the funding practices of mainly Western funding bodies, dancers identified a tendency to encourage societally engaged dance production in the MENA-region.

Partly due to funding restrictions, dance performance production is limited and irregular in the dance scene in Beirut. Dancers identified the lack of dance companies and collectives as an additional reason for this. The lack of companies they in turn associated with collaboration problems between dancers. Dancers observed that dancers found it very difficult to share their work and thoughts with each other, and to work together. They partly blamed competition for recognition and funding as causing these attitudes. However, dancers also felt that the absence of spaces to meet and dance together hampered dancers in exchanging with other dancers. Further, dancers associated collaboration problems with broader issues concerning cooperation and trust in Lebanese society at large. The above demonstrates the complex interconnectedness between different challenges for the practical organization for contemporary dance. These challenges have an effect on how dancers experienced practicing contemporary dance: they often spoke of a state of tiredness related to organizational difficulties they faced. However, the discussion on the practical organization of dance practice ends with a positive note on how dancers also experience opportunities to work creatively around the challenges they confront, which offered interesting artistic directions and new life experiences.

On a second level, this thesis addressed the social context in which contemporary dance practice occurs, with a focus on attitudes of dancers' family and the broader society towards dance in general, and contemporary dance in particular. Parents reacted differently to dancers' aspiration to dance: some were encouraging, others indifferent, and still others discouraging. Parents' attitudes were partly related to whether their dancing child was a boy or a girl; both male and female dancers observed that for boys, dancing is less accepted by parents as well as by society at large. However, female dancers experienced difficulties in pursuing a dance career. For them, dancing was often a way to reach independence, and I suggest that parents' opposition to their daughters' wish to dance was very much related to the fact that they lost parental authority over young females who made their own decisions, and, in particular, traveled to train and perform abroad. I relate these parental attitudes to a wider societal circumstances which leaves little room for young people, particularly women, to decide on their own course of life.

Parents' main concern turned out to be a financial one: they were worried that their child would not be able to sustain him or herself. In the light of the discussion on challenges dancers face in practicing dance as a professional, this concern makes absolute sense. I was slightly surprised that the reasons of parents to have ambiguous of negative attitudes towards their children's dancing seemed not so much related to religious outlooks towards dancing, which are addressed by much literature about dancing in the MENA. I suggest that these attitudes are due to the particular association of the burlesque style of *raqs al-baladi* with seduction. Contemporary dance is relatively new to the region, and while general attitudes towards dance may influence conceptions of the genre, I propose that contemporary dance is regarded as less suspicious because it has not acquired erotic connotations. While some dancers noted that broader societal attitudes towards dance are sometimes grounded in both Christian and Muslim notions of shame, the main reason they detected for an indifferent or negative attitude of many fellow citizens concerned the latter's miscomprehension of the abstractness of the genre of contemporary dance.

Dancers confronted a similar approach of their parents, who often did not "get" their children's performances. The disinterest in abstract and "difficult" performances was according to dancers related to a broader tendency of superficial consumerism in Lebanon, demonstrated by the popularity of the showy entertainment of dance troupe *Caracalla*. Academic literature has related consumerism to a lack of guidance and goals in life, grounded in an absence of political consensus on, as dancers phrased it, a “strategy for the country”.

Due to the superficial atmosphere and miscomprehension of their activity, dancers often expressed a sense of isolation and alienation from society. I suggest that their particular position as an artist, perceiving the world in a more reflective way, is partly related to this experience of isolation. The fact that most dancers were educated in university, and in my view were hence part of an intellectual strand of society, contributed to this position. I examined whether dancers also belonged to an elitist social-economic class of society. However, dancers seemed to have highly different backgrounds, and several noted that the genre of contemporary dance was more open to people from different classes than particularly classical ballet.

I identified the third level on which dancers practice contemporary dance as the broader social, political and economic context of Beirut, Lebanon, and regional and international relations. Chapter three discussed “The Situation” of the country, as dancers often referred to it. “The situation” was first related to the war in Syria, which affected Lebanon in many respects, including a political instability, safety and refugee crisis. Dancers identified a structure of violent events and instability in Lebanon, referring the bombings targeting *dahiya*, Beirut’s southern suburbs, as the most recent cases. Earlier events included the armed conflict between Hezbollah and government supporters in 2008, the 2006 July war in 2006, and the civil war. Continuous bombings in between further contributed to dancers’ observation of a structure of violence. The chapter discussed the effect this structure has on the dancers as well as other citizens of Lebanon, addressing widespread trauma identified by dancers as well as academic literature. In particular, dancers experienced a state of tiredness due to a situation which often seemed hopeless and unpredictable to them, in terms of political stability, an atmosphere of anxiety, structural violence, and struggles to make long-term plans in life. Finally, dancers identified several societal problems in society, and the chapter directs some more in-depth attention to dancers’ concerns with women’s rights, homophobia and racism.

The final chapter of the thesis examined the fourth level of contemporary dance practice in Beirut, in terms of performances or multimedia artistic works featuring dance. The chapter offered in-depth descriptions of the performances I witnessed and discussed with the dancers. I dedicated much space to dancers’ explanations of their motivations and concerns underlying the performances. The chapter identified the themes which were addressed in the performances, and demonstrated the similarities in terms of thematic directions dancers took. Many performances dealt with themes related to the civil war, such as amnesia, loss, memory, mourning, and trauma. Other themes concerned consumption, objectification of women, exhaustion, oppression of women, and religious conservatism. In addition, dancers were interested in dimensions of space and time, specifically in relation to Beirut, and in examining body movement under particular political and religious circumstances.

I suggest that the themes in the dancers' performances reflect the context in which dancers practice contemporary dance, as experienced by the dancers, mainly on the level of the social and political context as described in chapter three. The performances thus deal with social and political issues, and can hence be understood as engaged with society. Importantly however, the performances discussed are a selection of works which I witnessed and discussed during the limited period of the fieldwork, and are not representative of all dance works produced in Beirut. I discussed some other performances or ideas for performances with dancers less in-depth, which are therefore not included in chapter four. The themes of these works included mythology, research on rhythm, and an encounter between oriental music and contemporary dance. However, the thematic overlap and strong societal engagement of the performances discussed is unmistakable. In addition, dancers' thematic focus often also changed over time.

The way in which the performances addressed such themes differed in approach, level of abstractness, dance content, and a range of other factors. Dancers' views on ways in which to deal with social questions were equally diverse. Dancers were often concerned with the sincerity or authenticity of performances which too obviously or too directly dealt with societal issues such as the civil war. First of all, some dancers felt that dance performances could not accurately reflect a collective experience of war. Second, the concern with sincerity is related to a tendency of superficiality dancers observed amongst Lebanese publics, preferring easy entertainment over more intellectual and difficult artistic work. In addition, dancers experienced a sense of weariness with heavy topics like war and death amongst themselves, their public and in public debate in Lebanon more generally.

I suggest that the superficial consumerist attitude of many Lebanese is, aside from a mechanism to deal with a lack of direction, a response to the daily pressing environment. Taking such sensitivities into account, dancers had opposing or double feelings about whether artistic works should or should not address societal problems. On the one hand, they felt that this was needed to bring these issues out in the open; yet on the other hand, they partially identified with the tiredness of being continuously confronted with problems. Some dancers suggested that artists could also consider to make more light, though still aesthetically interesting art, for this would help society in terms of making people feel better. Paradoxically, several dancers observed that Lebanese publics also enjoy dramatized performances, which they considered as equally superficial as a desire for light entertainment.

Many dancers saw compromising on the artistic quality of a performance in favor of the theme as undesirable. Therefore, dancers needed to carefully consider the way of approaching and presenting the performance. They indeed did so in their own personal ways. Finally, funding agendas play a role on the level of dance performance practices. Dancers observed that many and in particular Western funding bodies are very much focused on supporting societally engaged performances. According to some, this causes dancers to adjust their funding proposal texts, or even their performances. In addition, funding bodies often support particular values, which are imposed on artists in the MENA. This can be regarded as a hegemonic project to guide dance performance production in the region. Besides the fact that this is inherently problematic, such practices furthermore hamper local artistic development.

Theoretical reflection and questions for further research

The matter of Western cultural hegemony over contemporary dance practices in Beirut runs as a red thread through this thesis. Dancers perceived such hegemony in the appropriation of the genre of contemporary dance by the Western dance circuit, particularly in terms of innovation and level of technique. Related, the valuing of dance education in Europe or the United States as superior to local training is another example of such hegemony; and so is the measurement of the degree of professionalism of dance careers, and the artistic quality of performances. Funding practices are the final instance of cultural hegemony discussed in this thesis. Academic literature has addressed several instances of Western hegemony listed above. However, the matter is not yet researched in relation to funding practices for dance production in the MENA, or for arts in general. I advocate for further research in this domain, with attention to funding agendas, the strategies dancers employ in response to these, and the effects on artistic production in the region.

Other instances which occurred on several levels of contemporary dance practice discussed in this thesis concern superficiality, consumerism and sincerity. Dancers observed superficiality with regard to the general public's taste for entertainment and an inability to think critically about society. They related this to a high degree of consumption – in short, superficial consumption. Dancers saw this attitude reflected in audiences' disinterest in abstract contemporary dance performances. In this way, by examining dance practices, tendencies in the broader society could be observed. I relate dancers' concern with superficial consumption to the importance many of them attributed to sincerity and authenticity: dancers considered the two instances as each other's opposite. The superficial consumerism/sincerity debate is likely to play a role in other instances of Lebanese society as well: in other artistic fields, or in entirely different domains like politics, media, or fashion. This offers opportunities for additional research on the topic.

Dancers further referred to the state of tiredness or exhaustion when talking about what I identified as different levels of contemporary dance practice in Beirut. Dancers experienced tiredness on the level of the challenges the organization of dance practices posed, particularly in terms of financial security and cooperation. Collaboration problems in the dance scene reflect wider issues of trust and cooperation in Lebanese society at large. Further research could develop this observation, and possibly relate it to historical conflicting interests and opinions between societal groups. I have no indications that dancers' collaboration problems were related to such conflicts or any sectarian-related strives. Further, dancers also observed that their fellow citizens were tired and weary of "the situation", and of addressing this situation in performances. I suggest that this is a reason for Lebanese publics to favor superficial entertainment, adding an instance of tiredness to the complex interplay in the triangle of superficiality, consumerism and sincerity. The phenomenon of tiredness in itself is interesting to explore further with regard to other instances in Lebanese society, as well as in interplay with the triangle proposed in the above.

This thesis is written from a problem-focused perspective after all. It has addressed the challenges dancers face with regard to the practical organization, the social attitudes, and the larger social and political context in which they practice contemporary dance. In addition, it has discussed dance works which all deal – albeit in very different ways – with themes which can be considered societal or political problems. In adopting this perspective, I followed the directions the dancers took during the interviews, addressing those cases which seemed most important for their experiences. The perspective of this thesis suggests an affirmation of the assumed role of dancers in detecting problems in society – however, for a more valid confirmation, a comparative study is needed between dancers' positions in comparison to the positions of other citizens.

In discussing contemporary dance practices in Beirut on the additional levels of organization, societal attitudes and broader political context, I reduced the risk of adopting a funding narrative which exclusively concentrates on a particular type of societally engaged performance. In addition, I hope that my discussion of the dance works has demonstrated the different ways in which dancers think about and artistically work with the problematic features of the context in which they live. Finally, this thesis has shown how despite numerous challenges, opportunities exist for contemporary dance practice in Beirut, highlighted by relative continuing performance production and the development of new activities for contemporary dance.

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