

# NETWORKING NUANCES

## ANALYSING SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE ARTS

Vanessa Maria Mirza

## ABSTRACT

This research study investigates the role of networking in the arts, analysing its importance and value in management and the often hidden but real problems that persist through systemic racism as a hindrance to successful networking as well being a social injustice. Some of the key issues addressed in this dissertation include the nuances involved in this soft skill and how racist tendencies make working in an already complex field very difficult.

Using an auto-ethnographic research approach, I reflect on my personal experiences in the industry as a festival director from India and an artist belonging to an ethnic minority, to examine how these relationships that can lead to sought after partnerships, collaborations and the creation of new opportunities, can be built and developed, while reflecting on challenges faced in this process.

Placing my story as the key research material I will critique propositions related to networking from the frameworks of actor-network theory, social network analysis, insider-outsider frameworks as well as critical race and intersectionality theory citing examples from real-life situations relevant in this analysis. I also contrast and compare these to the concept of solidarity and networks of solidarity.

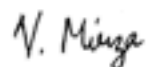
The purpose of this research is to bring into the public domain and voice through academic writing and reflective documentation, some of the silent but strong barriers that an individual can face in the international arts scene as an arts leader. The outcomes show a greater self-awareness for myself and how to negotiate racist behaviour while highlighting glaring inequalities and prejudices that still exist in the sector.

**KEYWORDS-** Culture, Identity, Networking, Racism, Contemporary Dance

## DECLARATION

The work presented in this dissertation was carried out in the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies, Birkbeck, University of London, and is entirely my own except where other authors have been referred to and acknowledged in the text. It has not previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. The views expressed in this dissertation are my own, and not those of the University.

Signed and Dated



VANESSA MARIA MIRZA

11.09.2022

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Simone Wesner for being so patient with me through this process. Thank you for your perception, kindness, understanding and guidance through the difficult and challenging moments.

Artur M. Vidal thank you for listening as I processed ideas, for your thoughtful provocation and counter-arguments that enabled me to research deeper, and for your care and consideration in generous library book loans.

Special thanks to my family, colleagues and friends in India, USA, UK and France. My sincere gratitude is also extended to The British Library and staff and fellow researchers at Birkbeck.



## CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
List of Abbreviations.....	8
Introduction.....	9
Context.....	9
Research Objectives .....	10
Relevance.....	10
Chapter Overview.....	11
Key terms defined.....	12
Chapter 1 Methodology.....	15
Research paradigm & Design.....	15
Autoethnography, Dance & Body Language.....	16
Data Sources & Collection.....	17
Limitations.....	17
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	18
Networking theories.....	18
Social Network Theory and Analysis.....	18
Actor-Network Theory.....	19
Network Theory of Exchange.....	20
Networks of solidarity.....	21
Insider-Outsider Perceptions.....	21
Critical Race Theory.....	22
Intersectionality.....	23

Chapter 3 Personal Narrative: Collected stories of dance, identity and racism .....	25
Remembering (1984-2014).....	25
Dance Bridges Festival & International Networking (2014-2022).....	28
British Dance Edition Cardiff Wales.....	28
American Dance Recon.....	30
ARThink South Asia Fellowship.....	33
Biennale de la Danse de Lyon.....	33
Secondment at Tanzfabrik Berlin.....	35
A Global Pandemic and Transitions to London.....	38
 Chapter 4 Analysis & Findings.....	 41
Perceptions on Identity and Positioning.....	41
Networking Power, Racial Intersections and Hierarchies.....	42
Solidarity and Respect in Networking.....	43
Insider-outsider perspectives and privilege.....	44
Contrasting experiences within organisations and events.....	45
Entanglements of time in racial and empathetic encounters.....	46
Body Language in Networking relationships.....	46
Arts Institutions and Dance Conservatoires- Closed Doors.....	47
Analysis of Racist Encounters on Self.....	48
Outcomes- Impact of the Research on Self.....	50
 Conclusions.....	 52
References.....	54
Appendices.....	58

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANT	Actor-Network Theory
ADF	Artistic Directors' of the Future
ATSA	ARThink South Asia
BDE	British Dance Edition
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DBF	Dance Bridges Festival
HKAPA	Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts
LIFT	London International Festival of Theatre
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SNT	Social Network Theory
TNUA	Taipei National University of the Arts
TPAM	Tokyo Performing Arts Market
WDA	World Dance Alliance

## INTRODUCTION

### Context

*'And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger.'*

(Lorde, 2017, p.3)

On arriving in London and commencing research studies at Birkbeck, issues related to diversity and equality soon came to the forefront of my interest of academic investigation. As a woman of colour in the arts, the more I researched, the more I wanted to research this aspect within different assignments required of an M.A. candidate in Arts Policy and Management. But I began this particular research study because of very unusual circumstances. I never once imagined I would ever dare to tell my own story as a female Indian artist and festival director from the perspective of racist encounters and through the lens of networking in an autoethnographic research based dissertation. But it seems important and necessary, to speak out.

My research objective is to unravel an interpretation of socio-political constructs and cultural practice that will be very revealing of contemporary experience for people of diverse backgrounds in the arts in real life. I had a very revolutionary meeting with my supervisor from Birkbeck, Dr. Simone Wesner that was quite the epiphany of realisation as well as the beginning of a wave of change within me. An excerpt from an email<sup>1</sup> I wrote describes my inhibition as:

*She said, 'There is a problem in the way you are thinking, you are always choosing an area or organization that you know, where you have contacts... you obviously have a high value for contacts...'*

---

<sup>1</sup> The email was written to my friend Artur Vidal the same afternoon with the subject line, 'The weeping dissertation meeting' and is available to read in Appendix B.

(Mirza, 2021)

It led me to tears in recognising why I had this bias. The limited access and numerous barriers I had experienced and the real struggles in developing a festival of contemporary dance in India made me realize contacts were everything. But I had never understood why and how this had become a serious impediment in my mind-set.

### **Research Objectives**

This research is very personal given the nature of the subject and content for analysis, and yet it is my version of a story that I am certain exists with many renditions, across different arts organisations and for many individuals particularly people of colour. Racism is still not discussed as openly or acknowledged to the extent that it should be. The act of networking can be taught but that isn't anything close to the actual practice and the multitude of factors relating to power, identity and culture that come into play here. And there are invisible barriers, several of them that as a woman of colour have taken me a long time to overcome and still are often very difficult to navigate. Should these power games have an equal playing ground or should they continue with these inequalities? I don't advocate a forcing of connections but I do believe social injustices such as racist acts should be eradicated and persisting colonial mind-sets rooted in exploitation and inequality should be changed. This dissertation aims to unravel and comprehend some of the complexities involved within the arts sector internationally, and to identify how people might act consciously and subconsciously as a result of attitudes based on racial discrimination, white supremacy and privilege; as well as critique the normalcy perceived in systemic racism.

### **Research Relevance**

Racism exists today. It is rampant everywhere, even in some arts organisations with the most exhaustive diversity policies and anti-racist statements displayed on their websites, the wide disparities between policy and practice are unnerving. Through the personal stories enumerated in this research, with stories I have not shared publicly, for the first time, I disclose some of the shocking moments of discrimination and abuse that I faced, sometimes covertly others as more obvious examples. The negative impact that had on

me as a person of colour and how I am overcoming the disempowerment of the past as well as negotiating the present, would I believe prove useful to other arts professionals and leaders working across cultures and intersectionalities. The instances of solidarity in interpersonal relations that provide the contrasting side of racist behaviour, with positive networking with respect, empathy and understanding, present the power of networking and why more people need to be open-minded, willing to reevaluate their own prejudices and bridge these socio-economic and racial divides

### **Chapter Overview**

In the first chapter on Methodology, I highlight the way in which I approach autoethnography and the importance of this as a research tool. Documenting personal stories which are then scrutinised from the lens of cultural practice and social interpretations provide a useful base to understanding complex issues such as racism within the arts. I also describe the process of self-reflection, collection of data and the methods used to analyse this. Auto-ethnographic ethics are also discussed as well as the limitations within this research methodology.

The second chapter provides a literature review focussing primarily on networking theories such as social network theory and analysis as well as Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory. Key concepts that describe the nuances of power relations, social capital, strong and weak ties, human and non-human actors that form a part of networking within performing arts are enumerated. I briefly explain the concepts from inside-outsider theory and a counterpoint to racist attitudes in networking from the perspective of solidarity and networks based on solidarity. This chapter also outlines the arguments and tenets put forth by proponents of Critical Race theory and the modern day developments. Thereafter, I explain Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality and how analysing incidences of racial discrimination from this prism and the lens of gender, class and race among other factors can change our conclusions.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I provide a collection of stories that document incidences of both racism in networking and as well as positive networking resulting in new opportunities, support and solidarity. This is divided into two sections, the first part provides a contextual background (1984-2014) which covers my cultural heritage as an Anglo-Indian, my early years in India and dance training abroad in Taiwan, my first

recognisable racist encounters and the foundation of Dance Bridges Festival, a contemporary dance festival in Kolkata. The next section covers moments from professional life as a programmer and festival director in international networking platforms and placements. It also focuses through an online diary and the changes that doing this research in London has brought with it at. Additionally, I highlight the impact of being chosen for the Board Shadowing fellowship awarded by Artistic Directors' of the Future (ADF) in collaboration with Dance Umbrella and Without Walls.

The final chapter is titled Analysis & Interpretation, where I critically review the narrative and personal experiences in the light of networking theory, critical race theory and intersectionality with deductive techniques and using mind maps. This reveals the sharp contrast between racist attitudes that can exist side by side with anti-racist individuals in the same organisation, that these encounters can happen within very close time frames, and that not only white people are racist.

### **Key terms defined**

#### *Culture*

Culture comprises of different meanings for different people. In this research it refers to the cultural values, beliefs and ideas of society as well as reflects the artistic context of culture in terms of dance, art, music, language as expressions of culture. Smith (2008, p. 80) describes it as 'cultures consist of components that are individual, unique qualities embedded into a single society, resulting in an exclusive approach to tradition and way of life.'

#### *Identity*

In my perspective your identity is how you define yourself, and this identity changes through the passage of time and with collected journeys and experiences. But the identity that others see in you tends to be rather myopic and often reflects a very narrow understanding. Different authors classify identity with variations that include personal identity, social identity, human identity as well as a collective identity and national

identity (Parekh, 2008, p.9). Stuart Hall and Du Gay (1996) enumerate conceptions of identity as the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the post-modernist subject. The Enlightenment subject is largely individualistic, while the sociological subject 'bridges the gap between the inside and the outside'. The post-modernist subject implies the constantly shifting states of identity with 'no fixed state' (p. 275-277). Bhavani and Pheonix (1994, p.6) state that the term identity 'captures succinctly the possibilities of unravelling the complexities of the relationship between 'structure' and 'agency'...'

### *Contemporary Dance*

Contemporary dance is often defined as form of dance combining techniques and trends in choreography that developed from modern dance expressions at the beginning of the twentieth century in America and Germany. It is influenced by a multiplicity of forms and avante-garde styles of dramaturgy, performance, staging and choreography often using post-modernist thinking in improvisational methods. Famous contemporary dance choreographers include Pina Bausch, Akram Khan, Ohad Naharin and Maguy Marin among others.

### Networking

Networking has emerged as an invaluable management skill that for both artists and arts managers can build the foundation of an enormous resource. It is often linked to wealth and even net-worth in business and commercial contexts. Miriam Webster Dictionary (2022) defines it as: 'the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions *specifically*: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business'. In the context of the arts Networking platforms such as festivals and showcases exist to present local or regional artists to international programmers to promote touring. Networking events also exist in the arts to cultivate patrons, new partners, sponsors and collaborators.



## Racism

'The term racism was coined in the 1930's, primarily as a response to the Nazi project of making Germany judenrein, or 'clean the jews'' (Rattansi, 2007 p4). However the roots of the word can be seen in the creation of classification of the African people by a Portuguese writer asserting they were 'inferior' and 'beastly' (Biewen, 2022, 10'-10'.15"). Racist attitudes led to disparities occurring among white people and people of colour and social injustices occur across all sectors of society.

## CHAPTER 1

# METHODOLOGY

*'All researchers have a self, but how many understand how their self informs their identity and world view?'*

(Struthers, 2004, p.3)

For the purpose of this research study I use an autoethnographic research approach, I reflect on my personal experiences in the industry as a festival director from India and an artist belonging to an ethnic minority. The documentation process has emerged as a narrative that unravels a collection of stories and memories from my life as a dancer and later as a festival director and programmer in India and at international forums.

### **Research paradigm and design**

I approach the world with the belief that everyone has a right to their own opinion and convictions even if they are different from my own. I think it is valid that there can exist many different possibilities and answers to a given question. I investigate this study as a structural interpretivist documenting my own story as an arts manager and artist and then using conceptual frameworks to analyse it.

I will be using autoethnography and literature review in this research study. Thereafter, I will be using deductive techniques and analyzing the incidents in the personal narrative to find recurring themes, compare incidents, look at contexts, and contrast the past and present, the social constructs involved as well as other measures of interpretation. Using the theoretical frames mentioned I uncover a deeper perspective on the broader social elements involved in these personal incidents.

### **Autoethnography, Dance & Body Language**

Autoethnography as Chang states 'combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details' (2008, p.46). He explains that the value of the autoethnographers account lies in this broader application and connection with society by understanding prevalent socio-cultural practices through these personal stories which become the data of the research. Chang quoting Ellis and Bochner (2000) elaborates that autoethnography can be defined as 'autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation' (p.742). However Chang reiterates the need for 'connecting the personal to the cultural'. Sarah Wall (2006) in her article on learning about autoethnography talks about the concept of reflexivity of voice being present but autoethnography still being a newer method that challenges the traditional paradigm of scientific collection and quoting Ellis (1991) lays emphasis on the autoethnographer being in fact the best suited person to tell their stories. Further Adams, Bochner and Ellis (2011) write about autoethnographers often writing about epiphanies or key moments in their lives that stand out and are unique to them but in analysing bring out wider social and cultural relevance and interpretation.

In this autoethnographic research, from my perspective as a dancer and choreographer, I have also been sensitive to noting body language and the narratives carried in the body. In addition to body language forming a key part of our non-verbal communication, being a constant observer of the body as a crucial part of my artistic practice and that of any contemporary dance choreographer, there is a heightened awareness of the attitudes and gestures, facial expressions and lack that is transmitted to me. The sense of the body as an embodiment of culture and personhood is expressed well by Bochner (2008, p. 3) when she says '...minds never existed without fleshy bodies. Consequently, I felt it was more relevant to develop an understanding of embodiment rather than of the body as distinct from the mind or as a 'house' for the mind.'

As part of the ethical perspective of autoethnography I have used pseudonyms for those who might be negatively implicated by my account of these racial incidents and have

also changed the names of friends or associates who I was not able to get permission from or requested this. I have however retained the original names of those who are not compromised by my accounts and have given consent. I have also kept the original names of certain artistic directors and cultural professionals who are too well-known in their organisations and internationally for a pseudonym to work. In addition I felt it important to state the names of all organisations for authenticity however in some cases designations have been changed.

### **Data Sources & Collection**

I have documented from memory, journal/diary entries, email exchanges and social media messages. In addition there are some photographs of examples of solidarity that are included and 3 reports from international networking events for further reading are in the supplements.

### **Limitations of Auto-ethnographic research**

The limitations of this research remain that this is subjective data that is from a personal perspective. Although I have attempted to include as many documents that were written earlier, it was not always possible to retrieve older conversations on whatsapp from six-seven years ago and in most cases my discussions of these incidents were verbal and not written. Hence without the original voice, there could be censorship within what I narrate and minor alterations to my version recalled through this research frame.

Also there is the possibility that though pseudonyms have been used in some cases the narrowing down of individuals in smaller organisations could be made, and hence designations had to be changed which might not give as much clarity in intersectional perspectives.

## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Frameworks and Theories

This chapter presents key concepts and theories that are linked to relevant aspects of Network Theory that relate to networking in the arts and the particular focus of this autoethnographic research study investigating networking and racial discrimination. Thereafter I will discuss the origins and development in discourses in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality as a further lens of analysing social status and power relations from the perspectives of race, gender, class among other variables. These academic frameworks lend value to the importance of continuing studies in the area of networking and racism, while providing the language for critical understanding of the subject and providing authenticity and validation for this reflective investigation while keeping in consideration its limitations.

#### **Network Theory**

From the vast body of literature that surrounds Network Theory I trace a thread through the development of concepts that remain pertinent to my narrative of systemic racism as an arts manager, programmer and festival director. These include a brief explanation of Social Network Theory (SNT) along with Social Network Analysis (SNA), Actor Network Theory (ANT), Network Theory of Power and Network Exchange Theory.

#### ***Social Network Theory and Analysis***

Social Network Theory with possible roots in the Greek civilization has seen 20<sup>th</sup> century development taking place with the first sociograms or graphical maps being created by scholar Jacob Moreno in the 1930s which he termed as 'sociometry, Borgetti & Ofem (2010, p.17). The principle concept from this was that the positions people hold in society carry a certain impact

and influence for the said individual. Using this tenet research within the fields of psychology and mathematics during the 1940's and 1950's allowed these sociological concepts to evolve further with graph theory and other applications in science and later communications arising. As Borgetti & Ofem (2010, p.17-29) discuss further in their writings, notions such as 'groups and social circles' came into being for objective mathematical analysis as the first results for network data. By the 1980's Social Network Analysis was widely known and applications of SNA are seen across the political sciences, anthropology, economics and medicine, with rapid developments occurring in the years to follow.

Some integral research to the formulation of SNA was the work of academic John S. Granovetter of John Hopkins University and his explanation of weak ties and strong ties determined by the level of contact, relationship and communication within networks, Claywell (2022). As Borgetti & Hagin (2011, p.1) summarise, 'Network theory refers to the mechanisms and processes that interact with network structures to yield certain outcomes for individuals and groups'. For the purpose of this research study, a fundamental concept from this theoretical framework is the notion of a 'network' described as actors or nodes which can be interpreted as individuals, organisations and firms and the set of ties that connect these different elements forming networks.

In Borgetti & Ofem's (2010, p.20) terms, in contrast to traditional social theory which relate 'outcomes as a function of individual attribute', in network theory, one 'takes into account the web of relationships in which actors are embedded that both constrain and create opportunities' These are further categorised in terms of similarities (location, membership, attribute), social relations (kinship or other role), mental relations (affective/cognitive), interactions and transactions and flows within networks. While Network theory has enabled vast understanding in the study of large groups and with applications across a varied range of fields the limitation is felt within the fact that the study of these network relationships is often quite subjective.

### ***Actor Network Theory***

Bruno Latour is often accredited as the main proponent of Actor-Network Theory, although this body of research saw contributions from several others including Michel Callon, John Law, Vicky Singleton, Antoine Hennion, Madeleine Akrich, Vololona Rabeharisoa and Annemarie Mol, Blok

A. et al (2020). In a lecture at an international seminar at USC Annenberg, Latour (2010, 10.33-11.07 minutes) describes his concept of a network as, 'You see that I take the word network not simply to designate things in the world that have a shape of a net by opposition let's say to juxtapose the main surfaces delineated by borders, impenetrable volumes, and not either as an opposition between hierarchy and market but mainly to designate a mode of enquiry that make, that learns to list at the occasion of a trial the unexpected beings necessary for any entity to exist.'

Simply explained in ANT which developed foremost by Parisian scholars in science and technology, Latour, (2005) both humans and objects or non-humans, animate and inanimate beings are given consideration in the understanding of network relations, activity and construction. For example while analysing a criminal case, the suspects would be considered as the human actors, while issues such as race of these suspects are representative of non-human actors (M'charek and Oorschot, 2020). These are considered as agents that create connections and as Latour (2010, 13.33-13.50 minutes) says, '...it's this complete reversibility, an actor is nothing but a network and a network is nothing but an actor' and there exists a strong interrelationship and value between a person and the network they hold.

Hunter & Swan link ANT to diversity studies in their paper 'Oscillating politics and shifting agencies' looking at the connections in human actor and non-human actors and the ways networks are formed and feminist challenges within the UK context. Using ANT they propose ways of overcoming racism and sexism as a result of 'oversimplification' that fails to acknowledge 'heterogeneity and multiplicity of being' largely due to discriminatory actions being caused by organisation and thought on the subject arising from dualities rather than consistent policy.

### ***Network Theory of Power & Exchange***

Manuel Castells (2011) has enumerated the importance of network and power relations in society defining the differences in networking power, network power, networked power and network-making power. These constructs allow one to further analyse the nature of relationships and how power acquired and desired affect negotiations. In the arts this most certainly leads one to reflect on who has more power within a networking context and how is this power manipulated by factors concerning race, gender, class and socio-economic variables.

Within these ideas it is also worthy to consider Network Exchange theory and the interpretations of power within social theory that exists both as control and a benefit, (Willer, 1999). In a social exchange viewpoint which does not uphold the value of power structures, exchange arises as a result of inherent power within the exchange relation. Network exchange theory on the other hand acknowledges the significance of structure in power relations and emphasises its research and analysis into the conditions that exist in these structures that cause alternate types of behaviour.

### ***Networks of solidarity***

These refer to the positive circumstances and networks where people aid and support each other using the advantage of personal position and disregarding hierarchies while showing solidarity through systems of mutual aid among others. Solidarity networks emerged strongly in the pandemic and at times of crisis. In the context of networking this applies to individuals or organisations in a position of privilege extending their support to be more inclusive as well as sometimes the generosity is without any visible agenda but out of a position of human empathy. Solidarity networks are intentional, they are not authoritarian and ‘they make the most vulnerable their priority.’(A Beautiful Resistance, 2022)

### ***Insider outsider theory***

The insider-outsider perspectives in the networking context draws upon economic theory and wage-labour relations between employers and employees where the employer takes the role of the insider who has more power to leverage as well as a more favourable position for determining the outcome of negotiations. The outsider on the other hand is the labourer with an inequitable position of negotiation being dependent on the insider for a livelihood. (Lindbeck and Snower,1988)

These different network theories provide the background for this research to then consider how networking realities are coloured so to speak by the developments in diversity studies by theorists originally in America and thereafter world-wide relating to CRT and intersectionality.



## **Critical Race Theory: Origins, Key tenets and Modern Day Development**

Critical Race theory has put forward a body of scholarship by academics and activists from the 1970's such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Alan Freeman among others, creating a global movement aimed at researching and changing the existing norms in race, racial discrimination and power relationships, Delgado (2017). A glossary of terms by Delgado, describe race as the 'notion of a distinct biological type of human being, usually based on skin colour or other physical characteristics' and racism as 'any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group.' (p.182)

However within the basic tenets of CRT scholars have emphasised otherwise that race is not in fact a 'biological or genetic reality' but rather a result of 'social construction'. While it is not biological it continues to be a tool of exploitation in the hands of white people (Beigen 2022, 10'-10.15'). Other key principles of CRT cover the aspects of racism being ordinary and commonplace like every other science, which lead to the issues of colour-blindness where racism is not acknowledged because it is so much a part of the usual way of business or life being practised.

Thereafter CRT brings to light the existence of both elite whites and working class whites benefitting materially or psychically by racial constructs through a convergence of interest. More recent developments include the concepts of differentialised racialism leading to the formulation of intersectionality and anti-essentialism and the application in education, sociology, culture studies and other areas of research.

Modern day critical theory is well critiqued by academicians such as Paul Warmington whose writings elucidate the impact and opposition on CRT in England. There exist many antagonists of CRT who disregard its claims viewing it as 'an unwelcome guest', Gillborn and Warmington (2015, p.1) as quoted by Warmington (2020). He outlines the racial bias that continues to persist when 'schools, universities, welfare systems and police forces deny their institutional racism by depicting their own cultures and practices as race-neutral and meritocratic.' (Warmington 2020).

The aspect of microaggressions is one that people of colour face continually and it makes one question the reality of the act of offense being in themselves so minute and then again so real.

Warmington (2020) defines these very articulately as 'At micro level institutional racism is reproduced through microaggressions: those small, unremarked, daily acts of disparagement that-intentionally or unintentionally-diminish people of colour in their encounters with those racialized as white.' And then again one wonders how strong the impact of CRT really is with this statement-

'People can explain away microaggressions. Who can I talk to if I am called a nigger?'

Taken from the Barbican Stories (2021, p.33) which are a collection of stories anonymously told in the light of the Black Lives Matters movement and subsequent impact of protests to enforce change within organisations, including in the arts sector; this complaint from an employee at the Barbican reveals how much is yet to be transformed in society, in hierarchies and systems in management structures, power relations and daily perceptions. Whiteness, white supremacy and white privilege are terms that evolved through CRT but also studies by other scholars such as Pankaj Mishra who is of the opinion that white supremacy advanced globally in the later part of the nineteenth century, as a consequence of American and European powers wanting to 'solve, through exclusion and degradation, the problems of establishing political order' (Mishra 2017 quoted by Warmington 2020).

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality was introduced into academic circles by Kimberlé Crenshaw 'to address the marginalisation of Black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics' (Carbado et al 2013,303) and is seen as 'a method, a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool'. Her earliest writings were to investigate the correlations between race and gender that were apparent in acts of violence against women of color. (Crenshaw et al, 1995). The development of intersectionality in the broader area of diversity and culture studies portrays that discrimination in society, is not only due to race but also the considerations of gender, sexual orientation, class, socio-economic backgrounds and disability.

The use of intersectionality can be considered as a prism or lens by which the complex nuances of discrimination can be clarified and these have been extended from various sectors such as law enforcement, education, women's studies, cultural studies, social and political sciences to name a

few and help to fight injustices such as heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia and ableism. With the help of intersectionality studies we can have a more nuanced approach to justice.

As Bilge & Collins (2016) suggest, that through intersectionality we are able to analyse more deeply the complexities in our society which are often affected by multiple circumstances and issues. Intersectionality therefore is useful, 'When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other...' (p.2) It is advantageous to apply intersectionality so that even a lay person can 'grapple with the complex discriminations that they face' (p.3). Although some critics of Intersectionality believe it fosters 'separatism, overemphasizes cultural recognition, and exaggerates victimhood,' (p.131-132), these are weak arguments in the face of the value that these studies bring to understand racial prejudices and the double disadvantage people suffer as a result of their identity as seen through race, gender and class.

Romero summarises it when she says-'Only by recognizing the interconnectedness of gender and race can we understand how systems of oppression interact and reinforce each other.' (2018, p.48). And indeed ignoring privilege does not eradicate it from the system.

## **Summary**

These theories and conceptual frameworks highlight the nuances to be considered in networking and power relations with a view to the impact of race, gender and class on this. The various networking theories provide the foundation for a clearer understanding of the connections, links and applications of CRT and intersectionality as pertinent to the narrative. A study of these constructs and the effect of these factors on how networking takes places will provide a theoretical context to the analysis of my personal story in the chapters to follow dealing with issues in racial discrimination and building networks.

## CHAPTER 3

### A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

#### Collective stories of dance, identity and racism

##### Remembering (1984-2014)

I was born in Calcutta, now called Kolkata in 1984. I am the youngest of three daughters, all of whom grew up in the Indian state of West Bengal. English is my mother tongue, unlike most of my friends at school who spoke Bengali or Hindi at home. I come from a family with an Anglo-Indian heritage. I grew up with quite a mixed culture given my mother's side has Portuguese and Catholic roots and my father's family line arises from a North Indian and Bangladeshi lineage, having strong Islamic beliefs. I am told that we are related by marriage to the descendants of Tipu Sultan in Hyderabad. But I was always more influenced by European and American culture than traditional Indian aesthetics. It wasn't so much about being modern or western, being Anglo-Indian just integrated these influences seamlessly.

Dance was a discovery for me when I was very young, and my sisters and I watched classical ballet videos from the British Council library at home. In terms of Indian dance, my mother tried to get us to learn some bharatnatyam when I was about 3 or 4 years old but it didn't quite feel right for my body and I knew this even though I was little. The dance training that I did take on was at the Calcutta School of Music at the age of eleven in an informal program for ballet, modern dance and jazz in 1995. While I was still in St. Xavier's College completing a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration (with a Marketing specialization) I got my first paid dance job offer at Modern High School. This came at a very strategic point in my life, when I was disillusioned with the corporate world while doing an internship at a prestigious company. With my love for dance growing and finding my creativity untapped to the extent that I wanted it to be used in marketing, I began the dialogue with my family about venturing into dance professionally.

Nobody was or had been a dancer or at least not a professional dancer/choreographer/artist in our family line. It was a battle both internal and with my family members for about two years before I decided and was allowed to venture into this as a career.

My first opportunity to train abroad, was in 2006 at Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts for a week at the Hong Kong Dance Festival and later at TAIPEIDEA, a three week professional dance training workshop at Taipei National University of the Arts. These were monumental moments in my life where I struggled to feel like I belonged in the international dance and cultural scene, beginning as a raw dancer with what was negligible skills in comparison to conservatory trained dancers. I was discouraged but I persevered. This brought me two years later in 2008 to being accepted to Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) in the Master of Fine Arts, Choreography and Performance programme.

There were many challenges during dance school life and this is in fact where my earliest understanding of racism came into being. I was so naïve. I didn't understand why other students would be so rude to me, they wouldn't smile back, they would look at me as if I was a wall not a human being, and in general all social interactions were quite limited. I had a better rapport with the teachers but not all of them were keen that I'd been brought in as the first non-Chinese international student into the programme.<sup>2</sup>

But coming back to the racist treatment I faced at dance college, it was never very direct, always quite indirect and I never knew that this was possibly a racist reaction or just a dislike based on the nascent level of my dance skills. It was not until a Russian friend and student in Taiwan told me her impression about it, two years into my studies that I recognized it. Her words were something like this-

*'I think from what you are telling me about the way your teachers and the students treat you, that they are racist. They don't like the fact that you are Indian or not Chinese. I have faced this too but in different ways in my university though not to the extent you have.'*

I was a bit shocked. The bad behavior and mistreatment was terrible, but realizing this was probably a clear example of xenophobia was more devastating. Why did they not like my culture?

---

<sup>2</sup> Till date I am the only Indian student to be enrolled in a full-time programme at TNUA.

Why did they not like that I was Indian? What did I do to deserve this? I thought Indian culture even though not perfect was respected in Taiwan for its long history.<sup>3</sup>

I fast forward to my final year in university in Taiwan. I was not granted my MFA degree because they claimed my choreography was not to TNUA's standards or perhaps Taiwanese enough. This was after I passed the pre-exam where in fact this is already assessed. Someone on the final committee actually advised me to be a writer, after 4 years of master's level training and practice in dance and choreography with high grades in my eighties and nineties. I told them they were entitled to their opinion and could refrain from giving me a degree but it would certainly not stop me from dancing and choreographing.

I had learned a lot and that would stand me in good stead. I returned to India, and after a few months found work as a faculty member for choreography with Rhythmosaic dance company. The following year I presented a comparative research study of my experiences in dance working as a choreographer in Taiwan and India at a conference in France. It was a global summit for WDA in Angers at the Centre National de Danse Contemporaine, and as expected was a grand meeting point of artists and dance companies, dance programmers, researchers, choreographers and students. It's where the first concept of starting a dance festival in Kolkata had emerged and interest made known for a platform of artistic exchange in India.

I close this section of my narrative here and relate my experiences as the Founder- Director of Dance Bridges Festival in the next section.

---

<sup>3</sup> I must say here that despite the predominant feeling of not being liked or popular, I did make some very good friends and supporters while I was at TNUA. These include Taiwanese colleagues whom I consider as mentors, friends and collaborators even today.

# Dance Bridges Festival and International Networking

(2014-2022)

Perhaps the idea of a bridge and creating a community of dance artists and a connecting point to India was because of the lack of community that I had felt in Taiwan. It was also a subconscious reaction to the racist behavior I had dealt with there. I wanted people to understand each other's cultures and artistic practice to forge a better understanding and appreciation of different ways of thinking, living and creating. This led to the foundation of Dance Bridges Festival, an international platform of exchange in artistic dialogues and choreography (Dance Bridges, 2022). I was certain that while Indian artists could learn and gain new insights in their journey in dance as creative practitioners, that artists visiting from other parts of the world had a lot that they could benefit from being in India.

Through the development of the festival<sup>4</sup> I was invited to several contemporary dance festivals and networking platforms internationally, as well as a number of social gatherings by embassies and cultural organizations in India that I wasn't invited to before. I choose particular incidents for this narrative. I will focus on the act of racism where it was more overt and explain these almost as journal entries, re-living the incident for the most precise accuracy of emotion and thought, as well as share excerpts from my diary, with some images and social media references. Details about these platforms, the kinds of people attending, the importance of the event in terms of the festival might precede or follow the incident depending on the situation described. I also include a couple of instances where positive, friendly and encouraging interactions led to many new opportunities.

## **British Dance Edition (Cardiff, Wales, UK) March 2016**

I remember being very excited for this event. It was my very first international dance event as a festival director. I had never been to Wales and never attended a festival for British dance before.

I was the only Indian attending from overseas and there were so many foreigners around me. Though in fact I was a foreigner, the sense of being abroad to represent a young festival in Calcutta

---

<sup>4</sup> from a one-off platform to a regular biennial event and later an organization holding interim events

was heightened. I was nervous but I didn't show it. My friend Mark from Malaysia and a representative from the Arts department of the British Council in Kuala Lumpur was there too.

On the first day I remember feeling quite alone until I met Mark and then we were a little group of three Asians going from showcase to showcase. Arnold<sup>5</sup>, was coming the day after and I was really grateful for that. He's European and well Caucasian, and he's been in the United Kingdom for over ten years, he's a producer, and he knows people. And my expectation was well met, Arnold on arrival the next day while networking for his company, very gregariously introduced me left, right and centre to more people than I can remember now. Of course these included key delegates from the UK dance sector, but also programmers, artists and artistic directors from other parts of the world.

He introduced me to Liam Goodman, a person who would play a very influential role in my life. Liam was a key person of the Theatre department for Chapter Arts for many years. He was to soon transition into a programming role at the British Council. In our first introduction itself I remember how kind he was, a tall gentlemen, fair, looking very distinguished in a long overcoat. Liam was always swarmed by people because I suppose everyone wanted to talk to him and he was well known in Wales. I think it was Liam who introduced me to Adele Adams, a high ranking official with the British Council. She looked like she had many years of experience in the sector. I think I remember her saying hello and something polite about the festival when I mentioned it. She possibly even welcomed me to the event as I was attending as a British Council delegate from India.

The next day, Arnold left. It was sad because now I'd have to make so much more effort to talk to people. But at least his introductions had given me a head-start. The shows were quite wonderful and just being in the massive Welsh theatre was stunning. I remember going in for one of the shows at the larger theatre. And then per chance I saw Adele Adams. I recognized her hair and spectacles and the rather dark shade of lipstick. She sat down with one seat of a gap next to me, with a few other colleagues from the British Council. Of course I turned to catch her eye and

---

<sup>5</sup> Arnold is now a part of Dance Bridges subsequent to the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Festival in the 2015.

I first met him in Angers, where he had attended as the producer of a UK based company, and after BDE I invited him to join Dance Bridges. We had become good friends through the time spent with the company in India, and I was due to spend some days in London with him and other artists after BDE.



say hello. It was the only polite thing to do. And I remember her staring at my smiling warm face with the coldest eyes I have ever seen. She had the hint of a frown and as she faced me, her lips were in a thin curt line. It was as if she couldn't see me or hear me and some kind of a wall existed between us.

I was confused and hurt and swallowed hard trying to make sense of what just happened. If she didn't recognize me was it so hard to just smile politely back. This was a closed showcase not open to the public, I had my delegate badge on, so obviously I wasn't someone random. I wondered if I should try to say hello again but decided it was best to leave it.

I missed Arnold who had shielded me from this the day before. I wished Liam hadn't introduced me to her. I wanted to be invisible in that moment but I sat and watched the rest of the show and then ignored Adele as I left the theatre. Later on I remember talking to Arnold about it, he apologized and empathized and said sadly there are many racist people within the dance and arts sector unfortunately.

#### **American Dance Recon, Philadelphia, USA, July 2017**

I can still picture it. We were a lively group of programmers and presenters at a brunch table outside in a sunny café in Philadelphia. This was the meeting point before the afternoon showcase, most of us had travelled the night/day before. It was one of our first interactions with the host and I was curious to know how they had discovered Dance Bridges Festival. I was very glad for this invitation and the opportunity to discover more about American Dance. Penelope Ray, a very warm friendly American face from my initial impression of her, began telling me about how they research new festivals, markets and programmers. And that someone had recommended us from TPAM<sup>6</sup>, in Yokohama, Japan earlier that year. Penelope had been there when I was but we somehow didn't cross paths at all.

She then proceeded to say in front of all these new programmers how an Indian festival comes into a B-grade festival, similarly the representative from China was also told he had a B-grade festival, while all the other festivals from Europe and Canada were described as A-grade festivals.

---

<sup>6</sup> TPAM held initially in Tokyo but which had shifted to Yokohama and was also changing the 'market' format to more of a platform of exchange and collaboration of multidisciplinary art forms. A report from my visit is available in Appendix B.

I was incredulous as she uttered these words, but I remember trying to act indifferent to what most certainly felt like an “in your face insult”. She went on to explain that because of resources and infrastructure, development of markets and touring possibilities this gradation was informally how they assessed who to invite. But programmers from both B-grade festivals and A-grade festivals were equally important to American dancers to explore.

My head was exploding every time she referred to Dance Bridges as B-grade. I had never before heard of an assessment of a festival in these terms and talked about in such a blatantly insensitive and crude way. Did she have any idea how hard it was to start a contemporary dance festival with international artists in India, with barely any funding and only a developing audience? Yes, some festivals are larger than others, more well known, with larger networks, but how could you describe this to a festival director so unflinchingly, as simply as A, B, C?

I wasn't sure if this was the way westerners talked about dance festivals, and I remember telling Arnold again later. He was as aghast as I was. He has met Penelope in Germany where he did not remember her being very nice. I clearly can hear him saying to me, “I don't believe she actually said that!! That is so racist”.

There was a subsequent incident with Penelope two years later when she was throwing her weight about to get contacts to the American Embassy in Kolkata. She implied that the Embassy wouldn't give money to the local organizer but that as an American she would have access to more of their budget.<sup>7</sup> She based this theory on an instance in Yerevan. It made me so angry. She had no idea of the landscape in India, how local diplomatic missions operated, and just wanted to copy paste experience, without asking to learn more. She felt entitled to be dictating how things should be done. I stayed calm, stood my ground, only shared contacts when approval came to do so and told her that in fact the American Centre in Kolkata was very glad to pay the local vendor directly and in no circumstance was going to transfer hotel charges to a third party organization in the US that they had no prior interaction with.

---

<sup>7</sup> Refer Appendix A.

## **AEROWAVES, Sophia, Bulgaria, March 2018**

I was walking down the snow-filled roads of Sophia to the theatre with my East European friend Bartek by my side. Aerowaves has this tradition of walking between venues so artists and producers, programmers and cultural managers have a chance to interact. I quite liked it, except coming from very hot weather in India, this snowy 'Spring Forward' was very cold. My friend Bartek is a programmer with a well-known festival in Europe, and like Arnold was very kind to introduce me to colleagues and friends attending Aerowaves. I had heard a lot about this platform and was excited to finally experience it for myself. I had met Bartek in America and we were catching up in a rather deep conversation when someone interrupted. I didn't recognize the person, he was tall and had a European accent when speaking English possibly French. He said something to Bartek that dis-acknowledged me completely. Again although I was right there, I was invisible. He made no eye contact, no polite smile. Didn't say hello. Was not in the least bit apologetic in interrupting. I don't remember exactly what the exchange was, something to do with an event and how it went.

Henri, walked ahead a few steps, head in the air. I remember him being tall, almost as if he was too tall to take notice of a person like me. And very strangely my friend Bartek apologized and said this was a kind of summons that he needed to do to continue a conversation with Henri. It was complicated, but a way to drop a hint that he was being invited to a conversation. I nodded and said it was fine, not feeling like it was fine at all. I felt excluded. I walked for a bit on my own, until Arnold found me, he had been chatting with a few other programmers and was on this trip too. He asked me why I was on my own, and I explained the situation that had happened with Bartek and Henri. I remember him thinking how weird that was.

Later I asked Bartek about it and told him it hadn't been a great moment for me. He said he was sorry, he hadn't meant to abandon me but professionally these conversations are tricky to manage when the person is influential and at the press of a button can say yes or no to funding. He did say then something I won't ever forget. "Just wait till you are a twenty-twenty five year old Festival, you will look back on moments like this and laugh. No one will dare to ignore you then."

### **ARThink South Asia Fellowship (ATSA)- May 2018**

Even though we had only two editions of Dance Bridges Festival and I was still only an emerging leader in the arts in India, I was selected as an ATSA Fellow for 2018-2019 a programme for capacity building of cultural managers in South Asia. (Khoj Studios 2021)

As part of the ARThink South Asia fellowship we had a two week training in Gurgaon with facilitators from India, Canada and the UK leading a cohort of about 15 arts managers from South Asia. It was a time of many positive connections meeting peers in similar cultural contexts from other arts disciplines and cities in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Iran and Afghanistan for my year of the fellowship.

After this training we were given the opportunity of a funded secondment either in Germany or in the United Kingdom as Goethe Institut and the British Council supported the fellowship. Initially my approved options by the British Council London included Sadler's Wells and a few other festivals in Manchester and Birmingham. I was only keen in being in London and tried through a number of routes to get a positive response from Sadler's Wells, but it was difficult.<sup>8</sup> It was over several months of trying different contacts but their response was the same about no availability, whether the reason being another placement already being offered to a co-producing partner in Luxembourg or just no staff capacity. I found similar reasons echoed 4 years later when I applied for a placement while studying at Birkbeck.

Through ATSA I met Alice Brunot from Institut Français and she later connected me to Claire Verlet, who was visiting India as part of the Prakriti Excellence in Contemporary Dance Awards (PECDA), for which I had been selected for the final competition.

### **Biennale de la Danse de Lyon, September 2018**

My first meeting with Claire Verlet was phenomenal. I had seen her at one of the other Prakriti Foundation (Chennai) events that happened in Mumbai in 2017. One of the advisers for Dance Bridges had wanted to introduce her to me then but she had been swamped. This time as a mentor for the PECDA competition, she wrote to me to let me know she was in Calcutta and

---

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of email communications are available for further reading in Appendix A, Email thread 2.

managed to watch my rehearsal as well as decided to have lunch and hear more about the festival which Alice had told her about. In a social media post on Instagram and Facebook I wrote:

*'Such a fantastic pleasure to spend an afternoon with #ClaireVerlet, Head of Programming at Theatre de la ville, Paris! I'm a little tired here post-rehearsal, but my mind and spirit are so invigorated by everything Claire had to share! Umm...and yeah she stepped in to watch our rehearsal too!'*

(Mirza, 2018)

She had mentioned the festival the Biennale de la Danse de Lyon then, but it was 3 weeks away. I told her it would be impossible for me to go. For that time she set it aside but during the competition a few days later in Chennai, we had a meeting set up with Alice outside the theatre before my choreography was being presented. It was the strangest kind of meeting in the gardens of the Museum Theatre Chennai, discreet, informal and yet such an important moment in my life. Claire proposed again that I should attend the Biennale in Lyon. And Alice was not sure she would manage to arrange things but said she would look into it. I think it was less than 36 hours of a lot of emails, that the visit was confirmed. My piece, a male solo 'Somebody', was well received, I didn't win that competition but I felt I had won a much bigger prize. I described it in my blog as:

*'Very soon I will be in la belle France, Paris and Lyon for festivals and artist meets. It's a great, great delight. No one knows just how excited I am for this one, it goes deep, deeper than the distance of the ocean bed from the sky.'*

(Mirza 2018)

The trip was a life changing time for me, of meeting new people, seeing a wide range of performances and being welcomed into the dance community in France like I hadn't been anywhere else.<sup>9</sup> I have the best memories of both cities, but particularly of Paris and being hosted in Claire's beautiful home.

---

<sup>9</sup> The report from this French trip is in Appendix B

## **SECONDMENT AT TANZFABRIK, February-March 2019**

I remember being in Berlin, finding it easy to lose my way. The long names of the streets and the dark roads at night with freezing February temperatures often confused me. My internet never seemed to work quite well with the temporary SIM card I had.

My days at Tanzfabrik were insightful to say the least. I didn't speak German so I missed sometimes the key information and jokes that the team had. But usually one of them would translate for me. Ludger Orlok in particular was so encouraging, so kind, and so inspiring. I remember the introductory lunch over soup, bread and coffee that was arranged for me. It was the moment I had to discuss his experience in Germany and with Tanzfabrik. I discovered much later that Ludger had been a dancer, this was somehow even more wonderful to me to know of his being an artist first and then an artistic director.

But my happy experiences in Berlin were tainted by one association. There was someone in the Uferstudios administration that I was in close contact with for working as an intern that started on a friendly note but turned sour rather quickly and surprisingly. This was expressed in harsh critiques, complaints, snide comments, lack of appreciation for work done and in general a surly, sarcastic attitude when it came to me as well as the other intern. What was surprising was that this was a person of colour, someone who I would have identified as understanding at least a little about what it was being different working in the arts and internationally. Pedro was not of European origin, but at that time had told me he had studied and worked in Germany for the last 10 years. On my arrival to Berlin he had warned me that German people were not very friendly, and that this might be a lonely secondment for me but not to lose heart. I thought it was a strange thing for him to say on my arrival but thought perhaps he meant well.

I was however renting a room from a friend, a musician who had been part of the first Dance Bridges residency. Anna was very sociable and was able to connect easily with artists and the like. She invited me to meet a whole host of her friends in Berlin at birthday parties and Sunday brunches, at exhibitions and music concerts. It was a wonderful way to relax and understand more of German culture outside of the festival setting. I think Pedro resented this somehow. He would

see me talking to the HZT dancers and call me away to do something inconsequential even if I was on a break. There was a day he was very rude to me and I cried for hours almost missing my visit to Potsdam. At one point I confronted him about it, he apologized but was evasive. I wanted to talk about this in my ATSA report<sup>10</sup> but I didn't, I thought it best to leave it out.



Image 1 (top left): Welcome gathering of international and local artists at Dance Bridges Festival 2017, Café 4/1, Kolkata August 2017. Photo Arunangsho Chatterjee.

Image 2 (bottom left): 'Ladies in black', A group of fellows and delegates from the ATSA 2018 presentation. Alice Brunot is on the extreme right and I am third from the left, Gurgaon, India, May 2018. Photo: ATSA

Image 3 (right centre): In the streets of Sophia, AEROWAVES 'Spring Forward' 2018. Photo: Dance Bridges

---

<sup>10</sup> The full report of my Tanzfabrik experiences is in Appendix B





Image 4 (left) My first meeting with Claire Verlet in Calcutta, August 2018 Photo: The Country House Café

Image 5 (right) A picture of myself and Ludger Orlok Artistic Director of Tanzfabrik Berlin. Photo: Tanzfabrik Berlin



## **A Global Pandemic & Transitions to London**

During the pandemic I often attended online panels and discussions that inevitably involved networking, but this was always cordial and friendly being mostly Indian and Bangladeshi initiatives. In September 2022 I moved to London to pursue a master's in Arts Policy and Management. Subsequent to my choice of topic after my first dissertation meeting with Simone I started to feel bolder and more empowered. I took the off chance to apply for the Artistic Directors of the Future's (ADF) award-winning Board Shadowing programme<sup>11</sup> and I was selected. Below include impressions from my interactions through the fellowship.

**London, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

*'Thursday, my interview with Dance Umbrella and Without Walls was on Monday, I got the news of the selection at the tail end of my LIFT interview. Sarita the Creative Producer was asking me to resend some documents, and I opened my email to check where I had them...*

*It was incredible. Getting to meet them felt like a once in a lifetime kind of opportunity. I was so excited to meet all of these people. It was truly unbelievable. I received an email from Peter the administrative coordinator for the program and I was so excited I wanted to run, I had so much energy, I needed to run.'*

I was one of four who was chosen to the programme, and began to attend training sessions and board meetings online in February 2022. Later in March I had my first encounter with Freddie Opoku Addaie, the Artistic Director of Dance Umbrella at a performance of a South Asian dance choreographer at Rich Mix. It is possible we were both at some dance platforms such as Aerowaves before, but I didn't get to speak to him then.

---

<sup>11</sup> Artistic Directors of the Future is directed at opening networking opportunities to people of diverse backgrounds and allowing them to train as board members to offset the inequalities of senior management in the UK. This year's fellowship is in conjunction with Dance Umbrella and Without Walls.

**Rich Mix London, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

*'I met Freddie Opoku Addaie. I met him in person. It was crazy. I didn't dare assume that the black man masked so I couldn't see his face was Freddie Opoku Addaie, Artistic Director of Dance Umbrella.*

*I think what was more astonishing was that someone in such a senior position recognised me and came up to say hello. It would be a first. I am so used to be dis-acknowledged. Sometimes it could be unintentional but I also know that it's not always the case.*

*And I need to reintroduce myself. I have to remind them that we have met, that we have worked together.*

*But Freddie he smiled. He knew me and warmly said hello.'*

**Norwich and Norfolk Festival, May 21<sup>st</sup> 2002**

*'It was a beautiful train ride to Norwich, and I felt as beautiful, powerful and emboldened as the perfect morning sun. I passed green fields of the English countryside and saw sheep and horses grazing that added to the picturesque sensibility that train rides outside of London bring. I had been overcome with excitement since the day before.*

*Walking out of Norwich train station after a quick bite for breakfast I passed by a group of guys and one of them looked in my direction and said, "Brown, meh!" '*

I remember that I was a bit bewildered considering what he was referring to, brown sauce- I had that in a sandwich- my coat perhaps but it was more of a rose pink/blush or beige colour, till finally it dawned on me that he was referring to my skin tone.

I wanted to laugh, it was such a ridiculous thing to consider on such a beautiful day. I felt sorry for him that this was the only thought that could come to his mind on such a lovely Sunday morning. I felt sorry for his lack of sensibility and understanding about difference, the failings of perhaps his education and upbringing, a prejudice that certainly must close and confine his world in so many ways.

But I felt powerful and so beautiful. It was funny.

The Without Walls gathering was phenomenal and their hospitality particularly of David Morgan the programme head as well as Maggie Clark and others, was just lovely.

#### **Stockton Riverside International Festival, August 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

This festival was oh so stunning, particularly the opening night performances. The Without Walls team was warm and welcoming as usual but again there was a moment that was extra special. I was staying at the Premiere Inn with a number of other delegates and often I'd see programmers I knew who were at the festival and probably guests of XTRAX, but I didn't manage more than a polite hello in the elevator or smile at the breakfast lounge. I had wanted to have a conversation, but it was almost like all these male programmers were too shy or not quite sure how to converse with the Indian lady. They knew each other and were often at each other's breakfast tables.

On the last day, before I was leaving I happened to be eating breakfast on my own. I didn't really mind this but I was pleasantly surprised when one of the core team from Without Walls, came over and invited me to join their table. It was the same group of programmers from the Netherlands, Romania and Denmark who I had seen earlier. We were joined by an XTRAX Development team member and we had the most delightful conversation for over an hour talking about each other's festivals, learning about funding structures, audience strategies as well as other fun anecdotes from each other's cultural experiences. It was a very happy memorable time, of being welcomed into an inner circle.

#### **London, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022**

*'I'm sitting on my balcony listening to the soundtrack of Intouchables and crying. I realized for the first time that I am able to forgive the ones who insulted me and racially abused me. I can let go. I can have the memory, remember the incident but not be angry by it. I don't even feel hurt anymore.'*

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter I review the personal narrative shared in the light of the literature review and using a deductive approach provide an analytical context. It has been close to a year of reflection, research and provocation and my understanding of these past and recent incidents have grown phenomenally. The theoretical frames relating to networking, power, solidarity, critical race theory and intersectionality will both be viewed in an integrated way as well as with some examples independently and I will also contrast incidents to look at varying factors at play in the past and present. One of the tools I apply is the technique of mind mapping that has helped me process these informative and collective experiences. I also include a timeline to show the complexity of positive networking and negative incidents that take place almost simultaneously and are entangled within the same event, same year and even the same organization. My conclusion looks at the changes that doing this research over the past year has had on me and the impact it can bring, for others reading this dissertation and in my subsequent interactions with other people sharing these reflections and findings.

#### **Perceptions of Identity and Positioning**

In the light of the narrative shared it would be meaningful to first and foremost look at how I viewed myself, my identity and the comparison with how others saw me in terms of race, gender and class as well as my networking value or 'social capital', my status in the international arts sector and the worth of the designation to my name. Having grown up with a blend of Indian and European/American influences both inherent to my family and by the influence of globalization and media I often saw myself as very aligned and not as different to people I met in these dance platforms in Europe/abroad. However they always saw me as Indian and often in our conversations I understood their very stereotypical views of an Indian woman. They would be surprised that I was programming

contemporary dance, that I was not only Artistic Director but also the Founder-Director. And they saw me as 'brown' - my dark black hair, mixed but still Indian accent, colourful clothing often created perceptions I wasn't aware of or did not pay attention to. I always represented myself as Indian and usually was one of very few Indians flying from India for a festival. Of course in Taipei, I was the only Indian on a sprawling campus of dance, fine arts, music, drama and film departments.

### **Networking Power, Racial Intersections and Hierarchies**

As the head of an organization and its founder, I felt I had a strong standing even though I was leading a young festival. But my positioning was viewed rather differently as can be seen in Penelope's description of a "B grade festival", or from what my friend Bartek's remark implied that after twenty years people would easily recognize and acknowledge me. This disparity in perceptions of worth are conflicting to me till this date. While I might present on different occasions the value of my large networks in Asia and beyond, this is not perceived by everyone in the same way. The weight of the connections of an Indian festival director, or perhaps it's because I am a "female" Indian festival director are somehow less than those who appreciate the diversity and richness of Indian culture, recognize its developing market for contemporary dance and my value as a female leader in the arts. For the latter, I am a much sought after individual and regular interactions in person and on social media persist so that these dance artists/producers/future collaborators potentially have a chance to visit and/or participate in the next edition of Dance Bridges Festival. It is quite a bipolarity to coexist with and I am now more sensitive to what other people perceive of me, of the festival and of Indian culture.

The question of class and gender and the intersections of this with race while considering networking power and status cannot be ignored. I didn't ever think that being a woman should make a difference to how I am treated outside of India, but I realize that the patriarchy of my country exists in other variations around the world, even in the most developed countries and society. This is probably the most evident in the case of Henri not thinking it worth his time to politely acknowledge me while interrupting our conversation, as well as in Pedro using his position as a male supervisor to abuse me emotionally and mentally with covert verbal assaults. 'She's a girl, she's not going to say

anything if I behave in this way' and 'She's a woman, I can do what I want', I don't care' are possible thoughts and attitudes that might have affirmed their actions if indeed they ever had a doubt or consideration about what they were doing.

And as for class, I know now, that money matters, your background matters, your family's social status matters, and being middle class in India (a developing country, that often gets designated as a third world country inseparably tied with the image of poverty, corruption, lack of infrastructure and pollution) might be equated to being very poor in western countries. One of the first questions I am asked by programmers and artists alike is about funding and how the festival is run. Sometimes they slip in the question about what transport I use while working. In India my family has two cars, but its family wealth that I use as a benefit of families being so close in India. In London right now this would be impossible. But I am also changing in my ideas, I'm starting to cycle as a more sustainable means of transport. I give this example to state that identities change, and I am different to most Indians one would meet, not only because of my heritage, but because of living and working abroad, and being a contemporary dancer that thrives on international connectivity.

There is also the issue of age in these intersections that is not to be set aside in this discussion. For instance we see racial domination reaffirmed by a seniority in age and positioning, such as in the case of Penelope in Philadelphia and Adele in Cardiff.

### **Solidarity and Respect in Networking**

It is worthwhile mentioning here the difference of my experience in France and Japan, as well as within the ADF Board Shadowing programme. With Claire, I became a friend, she knew economically I had limitations, and she extended her generosity to me. During my 2018 visit, particularly for the days in Paris, when Institut Français was unable to support accommodation, Claire hosted me. She never once made me feel embarrassed because I was a young Indian artist and arts manager of limited means. And yet in Calcutta when I wanted to pay for lunch, she received this kindness graciously. It's true I wouldn't be able to afford to pay the bill of lunch in a Parisian restaurant then, but in Calcutta though she hesitated at first she agreed for me to be her host when I offered this.

I don't mention it at great length in this narrative, but being a guest in Japan was where I felt the most honored and respected. I think this is because of Japanese culture more than anything else, and from the highest ranking officials of TPAM to the front of house and ticket staff, everyone in the festival was courteous, kind and polite at all times. It was remarkable and provides a high standard for every other international dance platform I attend.

Through the ADF Board Shadowing programme with Dance Umbrella and Without Walls, this fellowship is a concerted intentional effort to change the disadvantage that people of colour have faced in the United Kingdom to reach positions of higher management and be recognized for their skills. I was on several occasions, brought into an "inner circle" like with the programmers in Stockton and also asked to introduce myself at meetings. I felt value and respect given to who I am and what I do. The mentors in the programme are the Chairs of the Board and Artistic Director/Executive Producer/Programme Head. The board shadowers were given the rare opportunity to regularly attend meetings and interact with high level management. I was excited just to have been interviewed by them, but being selected to this award-winning programme was phenomenal as I express when I say "I wanted to run, I needed to run".

### **Insider-outsider perspective and privilege**

To reiterate this analysis, one can also view this from the lens of the insider exerting more power and being in a more favourable position to the outsider. Is there an elitism related to being white European/American festival directors and programmers? I have often heard them described by peers in the dance and performing arts sector as "snooty". But again this is not true for all of them as illustrated above. But I often had the sense of not belonging as in the case of my first experiences in HKAPA and TNUA when I say "*I struggled to feel like I belonged in the international dance and cultural scene...*" and though this diminished over the years it was still something I carried particularly in European dance platforms which are often with an attendee list that is less diverse. From this point of view being accompanied by my friend and colleague Arnold at networking events and meeting any known faces is always a solace to me. I benefitted greatly by introductions through a connection, and here we can clearly see the power of relationships in a network as SNA describes. I am accepted in the light of the connection of another

and what they are perceived as then affects how I am both perceived, received, and treated at least while in their company. There is also something to reflect upon with regard to the politics of contemporary dance as a form, and the origins of this being in American and German modern dance, as well as its early development being more visible in western countries has also influenced hierarchies within the dance world globally. In this context an Indian programmer and festival director is then even more of an outsider.

However offsetting this imbalance is seen through the fellowships such as ATSA and ADF where key introductions are made for talented emerging arts leaders, as well as by individuals such as Claire using her positioning and influence as an insider to support young artists and festival directors like myself. A phrase that Freddie uses often is to widen the circle and genuinely being more inclusive in how Dance Umbrella operates. I believe more organisations, institutions and artistic directors should follow this in how they operate.

### **Contrasting experiences within organizations and events**

What is still perplexing and surprising to me is how within the same organization and event I encountered people in a networking context who were the sweetest, kindest version of themselves, when they were most certainly in the position of a higher networking status being well established in the industry such as Liam Goodman. And yet while Liam was soon to work at the British Council, his colleague Adele from the same organization, had a very different attitude to me. Similarly the contrast between Pedro and all the other Uferstudios employees I met was very different and interestingly one can consider this within my experiences at other platforms such as American Dance Abroad and Aerowaves. In Taiwan the percentage of those who were kind and respectful at TNUA was less equitable but this kind of duality is a dichotomy that still exists. It's hard to comprehend why except to say that, for certain from my experiences I know that, not all white people are racist. Some white people are more open, welcoming, accepting than people of colour sometimes.



### **Entanglements of time in racial and empathetic encounters**

Similarly one can observe that racial encounters can occur in very close time frames of each other. This was not something I dealt with only as a young dancer or festival director but it is something I continue to negotiate. And again the sense of solidarity and kindness within the networking circles and events I attend is also present, but this certainly makes racial discrimination even more confusing to comprehend. I present this scenario for a better understanding of the closeness between these encounters in Table 1 on the subsequent page.

### **Body language in Networking Relationships**

Given that body language and non-verbal cues form a large part of communication, it's worthwhile acknowledging the power of silent abuse through facial expressions, posture, a glance or the look in someone's eyes, gestures and in many cases the absence of socially expected formalities of acknowledging peers, such as a nod or a smile. The unfriendly and cold attitudes expressed through the body language of fellow students at TNUA, still remain vivid in my memory.

Similarly at Cardiff with Adele, the invisibility I faced with her and with Henri probably affected me even more so because I had been subjected to this invisibility day in and day out for the better part of 4 years in Taiwan. Pedro's body language was also a signal to my hypersensitive artistic persona to know something was not right and a sense of alarm would come upon me sometimes when he entered the room. I would dread what might follow next, his case would be the best to describe 'micro-aggressions' that were subtly thrown at you.

From the images displayed (1, 2, 4 and 5) are all pictures I look at often, as positive reinforcement of a physical memory of body language and solidarity that has powerful associations of exuberance, common ground and support. Particularly the ones with Ludger in Germany and with Claire in Calcutta standing side by side, when festival work gets hard these memories inspire and encourage me.

NETWORKING TIMELINE			
Date/Year	Event/Country	Positive Encounter	Negative Encounter
2008-2013	TNUA/ Taiwan	Partly positive	Predominantly negative
2016	BDE/UK	Positive Encounter(Liam, Arnold's introductions, Mark and colleague )	Negative Encounter-with Adele
2017 Feb	TPAM/ Japan	Positive Encounters	
2017 July-Aug	American Dance Recon/USA	Positive connections with others	Negative Encounter with Penelope
2018 Apr	Aerowaves/Bulgaria	Positive connections with some others	Negative Encounter with Henri
2018 May	ATSA/India	Positive Encounters	
2018 Aug-Sep	PECDA/India	Positive Encounters	
	Biennale de la danse de Lyon and Paris visit	Positive Encounters	
2018 Aug-Sep	Sadler's Wells ATSA Application, UK		Negative Encounter/Closed Response
2019 Feb-March	Tanzfabrik Berlin-ATSA Secondment, Germany	Positive connections with others	Negative Encounter with Pedro
2019 Jul-Aug	DBF 2019 and Penelope Emails, USA/India		Negative Encounter with Penelope
2021 Dec	Dissertation Research begins		
2022 Feb-Mar	ADF Selection Board Shadowing begins	Positive Encounters- Met Freddie in person	
2022 Feb-May	Sadler's Wells Placement conversations		Negative Encounter/Closed Response
2022 May	Norwich and Norfolk Festival	Positive encounters with Without Walls	Negative encounter at station
2022 August	Stockton International Riverside Festival	Positive Encounters	

Table. 1 Networking Timeline

### **Arts Institutions and Dance Conservatoires- Closed Doors**

Power, positioning and the social politics of race in intersection with gender and class can often tip the scales where discrimination occurs to very high proportions. The instance of my communications with Sadler's Wells and the closed nature of their management systems in offering placements proposes insights on the lack of diversity in practice.

It's interesting to read Nancy's first email responding for Alistair Spalding that includes the line about continuing support to them which always struck me as odd and was probably a copy-paste from another template. Why would you tell a placement application you rejected that you want their continued support? When I was advised to apply to them while studying at Birkbeck I felt it was quite a futile effort but I did it on the advice of my tutors and to test if there would be any change. But both departments of Touring and Producing as well as Human Resources remained very similar in their responses. It is true perhaps I just don't fit their criteria.

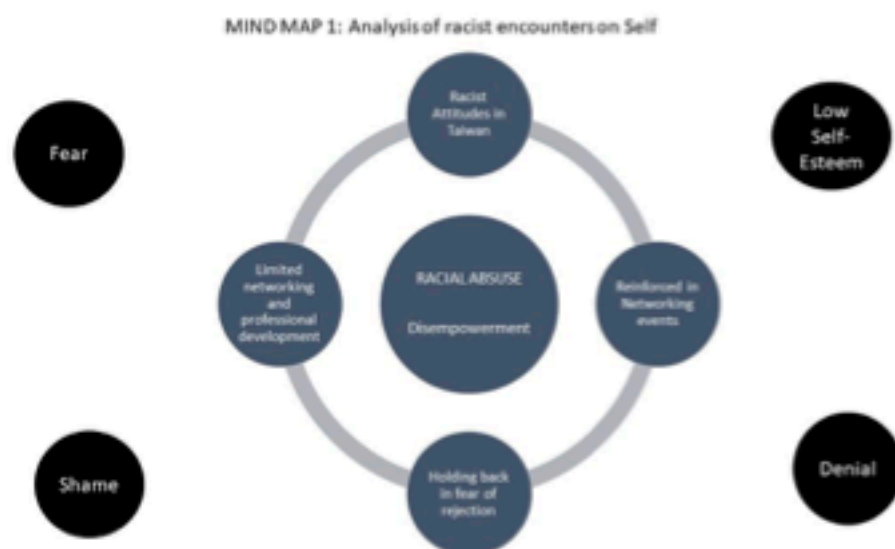
On their advice I have applied to some vacancies without any positive response providing quite a strong image of a closed door in practice despite their proclaimed intention of diversifying. On the placement I secured with LIFT, I spent a few days working at Sadler's Wells, and for the largest portion of my first day was one of only two people of colour in amongst close to 60 employees that were in the foyer.

In Taipei, of course it was an extremely difficult application process, with a conditional first year that I passed with flying colours, only to not be granted a degree after 4 years of study despite very high overall grades. There is something not right with an educational system that allows this kind of procedure where institutional racism can influence such crucial decisions.

### **Analysis of Racist Encounters on Self**

Issues of race are so emotional, and while a lot of positive encounters occurred over the years the impact of these incidences remained very powerful. I find it hard to talk about it verbally as can be seen from the second email written to my friend Artur describing the powerpoint presentation at Birkbeck. Dealing with the implications of these

circumstances has been accompanied by many tears shed, but my realizations and personal findings have also led to change thereafter. As I expand on these ideas I include a mind map that visually explains the analysis of racist encounters on self.



### ***Denial and Doubt***

I find the recurring theme of denial or at least doubt about a racial incident. The event always makes me question if it is really racial abuse. And so often people can brush it aside as rude behavior. But it is not just rude behavior, the cause is much more deep-rooted and insidious. In Taiwan, my friend's revelation proved so timely to me. All of the confusion of the mistreatment and being disvalued was actually not only attributed to being a less technically trained dancer when I arrived but was because I was *"Indian and not Chinese"*.

And yet, there was a sense of surprise every time it happened, I am taken aback and I always sought confirmation-from Arnold at networking events or my Russian friend in Taiwan-until Norwich, May 2022 when I recognized it and believed it once it struck me that I was the "brown" the passer-by objected to. It's as if this support system to validate what had actually happened was necessary, and only when a white person identified the racist act and confirmed it did I accept it.

There are perhaps even more colonial mindsets that I myself operate under given the fact that I've lived the largest part of my life in India where foreigners or I should clarify foreigners who are white always get preferential treatment. They might need to pay higher entry fees to tourist sites, but everywhere else they are treated better, people fawn around them and the press and media go wild blasting the photographs of Calcutta's expat community and international cultural heads every week in the papers. Even in my own country the double standards exist.

### ***Fear and shame***

Sara Ahmed makes the case for complaint as diversity in action (Ahmed 2019), but I have been afraid to complain. I have prior to this research study barely mentioned these incidents to anyone except a very close inner circle of friends. But by keeping quiet I am an accomplice to the perpetration of systemic racism by my non-action. Whether it be in a fellowship programme or educational institution like a dance/arts conservatory or as reflected in the hiring practices of an organization, abuse will exist, disempowerment will continue, injustice, bias, prejudice will lead to less jobs and opportunities for people of colour, unless we speak out and make people listen. I know though that I didn't talk about it because I felt ashamed, as if by talking about it would make me weaker,

### ***Disempowerment***

The disempowerment that comes from these racial encounters has as afore-mentioned very deep impacts on one's psyche. I wanted to be invisible when Adele disacknowledged me and in fear of rejection of cumulative racial abuse I closed myself off to new networks as my supervisor Simone noted when I wanted to conduct research. I preferred to stay with the safe zone of known contacts. But along with this there must have been so many other instances that my self-esteem and confidence must have been affected by the situation.

### **Outcomes-Impact of the Research on Self**

Doing this autoethnographic study have brought with it phenomenal change in how I feel and approach the world. I now have an understanding of the subconscious impact that acts of racism have had on me and how I can change this. When I talk to others about this research I get mixed responses, but its building awareness and I am already so much more

vocal about issues of race and diversity. I have been able to uncover the social constructs and historical roots to racist and colonized mindsets in my own context and I am working through the conflicts this causes in my actions and thought processes.

I'm bolder now to confront people/speak up/voice my opinion in moments where I feel what was said was not appropriate/ or not said in an appropriate way. This research has led me to uncover patterns of behavior, analyzing cycles of disempowered behaviour that repeated itself, and I continue to work on breaking those cycles.

The last journal entry mentions how I became aware of the resentment I subconsciously carried and this seems to have been something I've been able to deal with and let go to a great extent. I don't feel as disempowered even though there could be undesired events (such as the incident in Norwich), in fact my attitude has shifted and my mindset and reaction is now diametrically opposite.

The positive joy when people in the arts, particularly in positions of power act with respect, kindness and humility when they engage with others moves me- that this is possible assures me there is hope. Along with the ADF Board Shadowing programme opportunities, I continue to build bridges through Dance Bridges Festival and I am discovering more of London's positive dance communities and networks. Most recently being at The Playground, Rambert was a delightfully warm and artistically energizing experience. I am keen to explore and reach out even if it means sometimes hitting a wall or a closed door.

## CONCLUSIONS

Reading the news about Chris Kaba, a 24 year old black man shot on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022, in London by Metropolitan Police on the suspicion that he had a firearm, is tragic to say the least. He was soon to become a father. Media images and social media posts report that his parents and family are devastated. (Guardian 2022). How can this injustice persist? Institutional racism exists and it can reach terrifying proportions.

History reflects numerous examples of the tragedy, and loss of human life, property and dignity that xenophobia brutally demonstrated in the Holocaust brought with it, not to mention years of colonization, exploitation, slavery and discrimination. And while these are more obvious lessons from our past, the less noticeable evil of systemic racism in the present continues to infiltrate many parts of our lives. Particularly for women who are people of colour of ethnic minorities within the arts and in contemporary dance circles and institutions, be it at networking events, festivals, conferences or other professional activities the challenges posed by racial discrimination and white supremacy are potent and the disadvantage of bias higher.

This autoethnographic research documents my personal journey as a festival director and contemporary dance practitioner of mixed heritage from India and demonstrates the reality of these circumstances through lived experiences across cultures. The narrative presents stories at both individual and organizational level commenting on networking interactions that were positive and negative. The theoretical frames that enable a heightened understanding include Networking theories such as SNA, ANT and theories of power relations as well as analyzing insider-outsider perspectives in the applications of CRT and the intersectionalities of race, gender and class.

The analysis presents through contrasting cases and timelines, cultural perspectives and recurring themes the underlying factors why such acts of systemic racism exist and gravitate towards power instead of solidarity, respect and empathy in networking. A deeper understanding of these past encounters have also enabled me to better understand how I have been impacted and have brought about gradual but steady change in my personal outlook, and how I negotiate racial encounters.

Networking remains a very important and strategic management tool within the arts and arts institutions and professionals should view their personal prejudices with more diligence to create more empowered communities and with the potential of meaningful long term relationships and collaborations.



## List of References

- A Beautiful Resistance. (2022) *Solidarity Networks*. Available at :<https://abeautifulresistance.org/site/2016/11/12/solidarity-networks> Accessed: 10/09/2022.
- Adams T. E.,Bochner A. P. & Ellis C. (2011) Autoethnography: An Overview. Available at: <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095> Accessed 29/8/2022. Volume 12, No. 1, Art. 10.1Forum Qualitative Social Research
- Ahmed S. (2019) On Complaint. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j\\_BwPJoPTE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_BwPJoPTE) Accessed: 17/01/2022
- Barbican Stories. (2021). *Barbican Stories. An indispensable record of discrimination in the workplace*. 29. Available at: <https://www.barbicanstories.com/> Accessed 9/12/2021
- Barbour K. (2004) *Embodied Ways of Knowing*. Waikaito Journal of Education 10. (p.3)
- Bhavani K. & Phoenix Ann. (1994) *Shifting identities Shifting Racisms*. Sage. (p.6)
- Biewen J. (2022), *The lie that invented racism*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIZDtqWX6Fk> Accessed: 10/09/2022 (10'-10'.15").
- Bilge S. & Collins P.H. (2016) *Intersectionality*. Polity Press. (p.2,3, 131-132 )
- Blok, A., Farias, I., & Roberts, C. (2020). *The Routledge companion to actor-network theory*.
- Borgatti, S. P., & Halgin (2011) *Of Network Theory*. Organisation Science. INFORMS (p.1)

Borgatti, S. P., & Ofem, B. (2010). *Social network theory and analysis*. Social network theory and educational change. (p.17-29)

Carbado D.W., Crenshaw K.W., Mays V.M., Tomlinson B.,(2020) Intersectionality, Mapping the Movements of a Theory. Du Bois Review (p.303-312)

Castells M., (2011) *A Theory of Network*. Journal of Communications(5)  
Available at: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1136/553>. Accessed 26/03/3033

Choi, J. (2017) *Creating A Multivocal self. Autoethnography as method*. Taylor & Francis (p.

Chang H. (2008) *Autoethnography as Method*. Left Coast Press Inc. (p.46)

Claywell R. (2022) What is Social Network theory? LoveToKnowMedia. Available at [https://socialnetworking.lovetoknow.com/What\\_is\\_Social\\_Network\\_Theory](https://socialnetworking.lovetoknow.com/What_is_Social_Network_Theory) Accessed 27/03/2022

Crenshaw K., Gotanda N. Peller G. Kendall T. (1995) *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings that formed the Movement*. The New York Press.

Dance Bridges (2022) Available at: [www.dancebridges.in](http://www.dancebridges.in) Accessed: 20/08/2022

Desai, J. (2020). *This Work Isn't For Us*. Available at: <https://sourceful.us/doc/337/this-work-isnt-for-us--by-jemma-desai> Accessed 12/12/2021

Delgado R. (2017) *Critical Race Theory An Introduction*. New York University Press

Dill B, t. et al (2009) *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice*. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bbk/reader.action?docID=420821> Rutgers University Press.

Hall, S. and Du Gay, P. eds., (1996). *Questions of Cultural Identity: SAGE Publications*. Sage. (p.275-277)

Hunter, S., & Swan, E. (2007). *Oscillating politics and shifting agencies: equalities and diversity work and actor-network theory*. *Equal Opportunities International*.

Khoj Studios. (2022) *ARThink South Asia Fellowship*. Available at: <https://khojstudios.org/arthink-south-asia/> Accessed (11/9/2022)

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Latour B. (2010), *International Seminar on Network Theory* organised by USC Annenberg. (10.33-11.07, 13.33-13.50 minutes) Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj7EDMRJrbU> Accessed 27/03/2022 Accessed 27/03/2022

Lee J. & Lutz J. *Situating "Race" and Racisms in Space, Time, and Theory*. Mac-Gill-Queen's University Press.

Lindbeck A. and Snower D. J. (1988) *The Insider-Outsider Theory of Employment and Unemployment*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England. (p.61-73)

Lorde A. (2017) *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. Silver Press. (p.3)

Meriam Webster Dictionary. *Networking*. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/networking> Accessed 13/9/2022

M'charek A. & Oorschot I. V. (2020), *The Routledge Companion to Actor Network Theory, What about race?* Routledge. (p.235)

O'Neil s. (2022) *Met Police suspend officer involved in fatal shooting of Chris Kaba- The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/12/met-officer-who-shot-chris-kaba-suspended-from-frontline-duties> Accessed: 13/09/2022

Parekh B.(2008) *A New Politics of Identity*. Palgrave Macmillian. (p.9)

Rattansi A. (2007) *Racism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford (p.4)

Romero M. (2018) *Introducing Intersectionality*, (p.48)

Smith L. (2008) *DANCELINES 'In-between spaces': an investigation into the embodiment of culture in contemporary dance*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Vol 9. No.1. (p.79-86)

Struthers, J. (2014). Analytic autoethnography: One story of the method. In *Theory and method in higher education research II*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. (p.3)

Tator C. and et al. (1998) *Challenging Racism in the Arts- Case Studies of Controversy and Conflict*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto Buffalo London. (p.182)

Vanessa Maria Mirza (2020) Art and Choreography Blog. Available at: [vanessmariamirza.wordpress.com](http://vanessmariamirza.wordpress.com) Accessed: 9/11/2022

Warmington P. (2020) *Critical race theory in England: impact and opposition*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis group. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol 27, No 1, 20-37

Wall S. (2006) *An Autoethnography on learning about Autoethnography*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. (p.1-15)

Willer D. (1999). *Network Exchange Theory*. Praeger Publishers.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### **Email Reference Thread 1: Communications with Sadler's Wells**

**September 2018- May 2022**

#### **Email to Alistair Spalding**

June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018

#### **ARThink South Asia Fellowship: Request for a Secondment at Sadler's Wells Vanessa Mirza**

Dear Mr. Alistair Spalding,

We have met briefly when I was studying in Taipei and you made an address at TNUA for a dance conference and later when I was at the British Dance Edition in Cardiff in 2016, I was able to say hello. I work as a choreographer and visual artist based in Kolkata, India and I am the Artistic Director of Dance Bridges Festival. In Taipei I was studying in the MFA (Choreography) program between 2008-2010 & 2011-2013. (I am attaching a brief profile for your reference)

I write you now to ask about a possible secondment opportunity with Sadler's Wells. I was recently selected as one of the fellows for ARThink South Asia (ATSA) (<http://arthinksouthasia.org/about-us/>), a programme supported by the British Council, Goethe Institut, Piramal Foundation and Khoj Foundation. We recently completed a two week residential course, covering different areas of strategic planning, marketing, finance, art & law and human resource planning. We had an excellent group of international mentors including XXXXX (CFO at the Barbican Centre) and XXXXX (Marketing head at Southbank Centre) from the UK, teaching the finance and marketing modules respectively.

We are given the opportunity by ATSA to do a fully sponsored month long secondment in the UK/Germany or somewhere in South Asia. Since I have been developing connections with the UK and I have seen the fantastic performance spaces and arts organisations in London, I would like to do my secondment there if possible. Sadler's Wells is my top choice given the excellent

programming, beautiful venue, festivals and events that you run, especially with a large number of dance companies being showcased. My areas of interest would be understanding the overall management with a focus on marketing and production.

The secondment is an opportunity for me to learn about arts management in the gap areas in my organisation, so I can help develop from what I learn and see to strengthen the work I do in India. I would also like to offer my services to an international projects/areas of interest or research for your organisation where my background and expertise can be of help. I'm looking at doing this somewhere between October-November 2018.

At Dance Bridges we mainly have a biennale festival (next edition August 1-5, 2019) and do smaller events between festival years. (You can read more about us here <http://dancebridges.in/about/organization/>) And the longer term project is to develop an arts space, first perhaps as a smaller project with two studios and a small theatre, and later a building to have multiple facilities.

I know you may not have the time to follow up with me on this directly. I would however appreciate you considering my request and connecting me to the person in charge. Thank you for your time! I look forward to a positive response soon.

With best wishes,

Vanessa

**Vanessa Maria Mirza**

Director, Dance Bridges Festival

.....  
**Reply of Nancy Redman for Alistair Spalding (Human Resources, Sadler's Wells)**  
**Mon, June 25, 2018**

Re: ARThink South Asia Fellowship: Request for a Secondment at Sadler's Wells

Dear Vanessa,

Thank you for your email and, for thinking of us for your personal and professional development. Sadler's Wells is keen to support and nurture talent, as such we do offer inclusive paid work opportunities – Therefore we publish our vacancies for open application.

As you can imagine, we have to plan any work opportunities around our activity and unfortunately, at this stage, we do not have any placements available. However, please do keep a look out on [www.sadlerswells.com/vacancies](http://www.sadlerswells.com/vacancies) as we will post any further opportunities on our website. You will also be able to register your details should you wish to be alerted of suitable roles for your interests.

I must say, it is great to see how proactive you have been and it is always great to see a well thought out application.

We appreciate you(r) continued support and look forward to seeing you at future events.

Best,

Nancy Redman

Human Resources Department Sadler's Wells

.....

August 24, 2018

Email to Ana Sanders with subject line:

**References : Claire Verlet (Theatre de la Ville), Cathy Gomez (British Council) Vanessa Mirza**

Dear Ms. Ana Sanders,

I had written to you earlier this week about doing my ATSA secondment at Sadler's Wells. I know this might take a bit more time to process and I look forward to hearing more from you soon.

I just wanted to share with you I met with Claire Verlet, Head of Programming at Theatre de la Ville (Paris) and she says you know each other well. Claire is in India attending a few different festivals and while in Calcutta she wanted to know more about Dance Bridges, so we connected. When I mentioned I had been in touch with you regarding this possibility, she said she would be glad to recommend me/give a reference on my behalf, should you need this. I am happy to say

she is very pleased with what she sees Dance Bridges doing and was very positive and encouraging. She felt indeed Sadler's Wells would be an ideal fit should you be able to arrange this.

Also I would like to share with you the British Council contact overseeing my secondment proposal. If you need any information from them, please write to XXXX (Email:XXXXXXXXXX ) who is the Programme & Communications Manager, Theatre and Dance based in the British Council office in London. And should you need a recommendation from the ARThink South Asia committee, you can contact XXXX directly at (Email: XXXXXXXXX) or I can ask them to prepare this and send this to you.

Please do let me know should you need anything else.

With best wishes,  
Vanessa

.....

**Reply from Ana Sanders**

Sep 7, 2018

Dear Vanessa,

Thank you for your email and I am very sorry for the delay in getting back to you. I have been in and out of the office the whole of August, at conferences and on holidays.

We have to plan hosting secondments a few months in advance and this year we are already hosting a secondment from Luxembourg in September and most of our department will be out on tour from October all the way to end of November. We are also unfortunately not able to host secondments often because we have a very busy workload and cannot dedicate time to secondments, which means our department would not be ideal. The person coming to us in September is from a co-producing venue and will be working on a specific production they will also be presenting.



Therefore it is unfortunately not possible for us to host your secondment. I did pass your email to our HR and programming departments in case programming is able to host you and they will be in touch if that is the case. If your secondment with programming doesn't work, I would suggest the Barbican or The Place as great organisations to spend some time at.

Wishing you all the best,

Ana

Producing & Touring, Sadler's Wells

---

Sep 7, 2018

Dear Ana,

Thank you for writing to me. And yes, I had realized it is quite a busy time for you. I appreciate you forwarding my email to HR and the Programming departments since you feel unable to host my secondment. I would actually be happy to work across multiple departments in case that is a more feasible option. I am also open to a different time frame in case that suits you better.

We are required to complete this fellowship by late April 2019.

Thank you again for your time in considering this.

With best wishes,

Vanessa

---

Sep 7, 2018

Dear Vanessa,

Thank you for letting us know.

All the best,

Ana

Producing & Touring  
Sadler's Wells, London

---

I heard nothing further from any team member. Fours years later, as part of a conversation for a placement during my studies at Birkbeck.

Feb 3, 2022,

Email Subj: **Introducing Vanessa**

Dear Nancy,

Please let me introduce you to Vanessa Mirza who is an MA Arts Policy & Management student at Birkbeck College, University of London. Vanessa is a dance professional and has worked across different posts in the sector mainly in India. While she's studying in London, she is very keen to explore more of the European and international dance scene through a work placement at Sadler's. She will share with you more information on what she might be able to do and how this might benefit her career. Vanessa comes with recommendations from a professor with whom I have worked closely in the past during my studies in the same department.

I think it would be great if we could support her, should an opportunity come up.

Vanessa, I let you liaise directly with Nancy Redman, in HR who is best placed to guide you through this journey.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance,

With many thanks,

Charmane

**Touring and Producing**

May 3, 2022

---

**3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022**

Dear Nancy,

I appreciate you being open to a conversation about me doing a shorter placement/research study with Sadler'sWells. In case Charmane has not yet shared my CV with you I can send it across again, just let me know. As mentioned, I am currently doing an MA, Arts Policy & Management at Birkbeck, and I am due to support creative production in a placement for LIFT's 2022 edition (in the final stages of confirmation). I believe one of the pieces will in fact be at Sadler's Wells' Lilian Baylis Studio.

In my recent discussion with Charmane, I found the work of the touring and production department for in-house commissions quite fascinating, as also what she shared about production planning for bringing in an international company. As a dance programmer/curator for my own festival and other Indian/international events artistic programming is also an interesting area though perhaps not as pertinent for this placement, but I'm open to different possibilities.

Do let me know your thoughts on what might be feasible and when might be a good time for this. I will complete my project with LIFT in mid-July and then will be submitting final term essays and my dissertation through August/early September.

Ideally sometime later in the year/ end of the summer would be good but I might also be able to arrange things before if needed.

I definitely have a lot of experience working with South Asian/ South-East Asian artists, but my Festival has also worked with many companies in Europe, and in fact artists from 30 countries worldwide. I'm also quite the francophone, I have been learning French for the last few years and done a number of artistic collaborations with the support of Institut Francais in India. Should there be a French/francophone project I could help on, it would be wonderful as well.

Let me know your thoughts and how we might proceed with something fruitful for Sadler's Wells and for my research/ professional interests.

Have a great evening and thank you for your time!

Warm wishes,

Vanessa

---

23 Feb 2022,

Hi Vanessa,

Thanks for your email, and your interest in our work. My apologies for the delay in getting back to you.

We are working to slowly reintroduce our placements offer. As we return back to activity, we do need to ensure we have the capacity in the team to support a valuable experience for placement students, so I'm unable to agree a placement for you at this time I'm afraid.

If we are able to accommodate placements we will be in touch in the Spring or publish vacancies on our opportunities page here:[www.sadlerswells.com/vacancies](http://www.sadlerswells.com/vacancies). Please do keep a look out, or indeed feel free to get in touch later in the year.

Best,

Nancy

**Email Reference Thread 2: Communications between Vanessa and Penelope working at American Dance Abroad**

27 June 2019

Dear Vanessa,

...“Do you have any flexibility with the number of nights of housing considering how far Shiela (artist) is travelling? What expenses is the Embassy covering and do you think it would be possible to go back to them? We would not want to interfere with your relationship with the Embassy, but we could also try to ask them, if you want to share your contact with us.”...

Best,

Penelope

.....

1<sup>st</sup> July 2019

Dear Vanessa,

My apologies that my email triggered you to write such a long and, perhaps, overly revealing email about the internal workings of your festival. I am sure it took some time and I know you must be very busy. Nevertheless, it was very interesting and informative for me to gain insight into how many small pieces goes into your festival. First, congratulations on getting the support that you have managed from the American Embassy. This is not easy as you have found out, but the first result is the hardest and the next time will be easier. You might already know this, but the most important to befriend at the Embassy is the FSN (Foreign Service National). Each Embassy is like a small fiefdom and to a large extent they set their own rules and priorities. We are currently working with the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan and I wanted so much that they would have paid the local vendors directly, but they insisted on funneling the money through us, which has been a lot more work. Could you please share with us the name(s), title(s) and contact emails (s) for the Embassy personnel with whom you are working? Have no fear, they are not protected by European data laws as they are considered public servants of the U.S. We are trying to keep a listing of the contacts in Embassies, especially of the FSNs who work for the Embassy, since the Foreign Service Officers are replaced every 3 years, but the FSNs stay forever. Also, I would like to write to them and thank them for supporting the Americans in

your festival. They love to be acknowledged for the work that they do which overtime might encourage them to help you again.

As for Shiela (artist), I am talking with Rachel in about 30 minutes and we will see what is possible. Thank you for the proactive and creative way that you use the resources that you have. We will do what we can.

Best,

Penelope

.....

July 3 2019

Hi Penelope,

It is a busy time indeed! And I wrote in detail so you might appreciate the nitty-gritties of the situation. I have mentioned you will connect to Arpita and this is her id XXXXXXXXXX. I doubt you would get funding directly from the Embassy for this project, they are in fact paying local vendors here directly, and the budget has been fixed. Also it's not about data laws at all but just a personal work ethic and reflection of work culture in India, and to ensure your email is acknowledged, that I waited to clear sharing things with Arpita.

And I trust you will be careful in your communications, as our relationship is new and fragile. Too much pressure and further demands could seriously jeopardise what we have in place. Particularly as far as travel support goes, the local American centre said clearly from the start they couldn't help with that. Hoping that when you connect it can lay the groundwork to future collaborations.

Thank you for your understanding and discretion.

Warmest,

Vanessa

**Email Reference 3:** Emails to my friend/ flatmate Artur M. Vidal since October 2021. Artur is a musician, sound artist and researcher born in Spain, who grew up in Paris and has been living in London for over a decade. The first email I wrote immediately after my first dissertation supervision meeting in December. The second email documents my emotional response once again while doing a presentation of this research in May 2022.

December 15, 2021

**Subj: The weeping dissertation meeting**

Oh my goodness Artur... I can't believe what just happened... thank you for letting me process this with you...and like before, no need to reply...enjoy your holiday... but just writing about this will help me... None of my other friends are quite in the loop of my studies like you are, so I choose to tell you for now... perhaps you will also know just how dedicated, caring and insightful the faculty are at Birkbeck or at least in my programme.

So since I was sick, I hadn't done a lot of reading, but I had preliminary ideas in place about connecting what I was calling cultural policy- (though I discovered I meant more state policy)- with practices in a dance organization- eg Sadler's Wells or something like this. I happened to let slip that my meeting with Robert (my mentor) last week went well, and it made me more curious about Arts Council England-- and in fact, he said he could introduce me to colleagues if I wanted to interview them. We began with looking at factors, research problems, time frames etc, but Simone, my professor, didn't seem as convinced with my proposed ideas. And as for finding a connecting point, between ACE and Sadler's it diverged a lot from sustainability to accessibility- as the probable focus.

I also shared a bit about the research I'm doing with Sadler's Wells, for the core module final essay, relating to their response to the BLM movement and data in a report with revealing statistics on race and ethnicity. Simone found this interesting but since it was for the essay we moved back to the dissertation topic and to find/define a research problem. We talked a bit about public vs private funding, and sustainability too from environmental and managerial aspects, and a longer discussion on philanthropy in the UK... but this UK scene is still very unknown to me, and with all the provocations and suggestions, Simone found me quite hesitant I think to step out of my comfort zone. I kept returning to what was more known ground and she said something like-

**'I find you are being very strategic with your research and you want to do something where you have contacts.'**

I was a bit uncomfortable with this statement, and became a bit defensive and tried to explain the limited time frame for the dissertation, and in some ways limitations with regard to access in the pandemic... the conversation went back and forth a bit and I suggested an alternate plan, where I wrote about something in India, to analyze an organization like KCC (where I've worked)... because the UK research ideas just seemed a mammoth task that didn't fully interest or motivate me.

**And this time Simone was more firm, she said there is a problem in the way you are thinking, you are always choosing an area or organization that you know, where you have contacts... you obviously have a high value for contacts...**

This time, I stopped being defensive and broke through my wall, and I started to say, how very hard it was for me to access things, that there were always these barriers in my professional circle in the arts...

And this is when she proposed the idea of **Networking and analyzing this...** and I started to think about it, and **so many different instances came flooding back, I place such a high value on networking and introductions, because I know how differently one can be treated otherwise...** I explained this to her and couldn't hold back my tears...

She talked about her own experience of being a foreigner in the UK, and that people will accept you but only till a limit... and it's so true... I faced so much racism in Taiwan, but after that in all the international festivals and platforms I attended, embassy parties and conferences....and actually just in India too, being an ethnic minority.

So then I had like floodgates open, sobbing, sniffing and furiously taking down notes as we developed the first outline for an autoethnographic piece based on Networking theories (maybe also Network theory), and Critical race theory and Intersectional theory. Simone was nice to allow my tears to flow and not make me feel embarrassed about crying. She said it would be tearful and painful but could prove very helpful for me. She thinks this could be a very strong piece of writing and research, and these kinds of racist incidents are not talked about in networking contexts and they need to be discussed more. (I had given some examples in the UK with British Council delegates and also remembered some occasions in Europe) She feels it would be really relevant for others to read and also for me to work through this. She felt I was in fact limiting my development -in terms of freely exploring research ideas and ultimately even



networking further, because I fear limited access/racism as a result of these past reactions. And also it can affect and change how I choose to develop my (sustainable) management style.

And now I have a very precise area to work on for my dissertation proposal, its personal- I am the subject of my research (autoethnographic piece)- and management wise networking is a skill area I have practiced a lot, it will be good to reflect on this, and race and equality is a topic I am very passionate about. I was so stressed about actually being successful in being able to do the research for the other topics- whether it was interviews or surveys or access in other forms- **it feels really good not to have this pressure**. And I already feel some healing in the deep wounds I have silently carried because of the cause I believed in.

Who knew that doing a masters and research could actually be healing! Everyone should study more!! :)))))) I think I will never forget crying for half an hour in front of my professor while making dissertation notes (gosh!!!!!!)...every day is a new adventure. But in all this, I am so glad for Ferry House, the sense of home and a friend with a very good listening ear (pun intended!! ;) like you.

Merci Artur,

Vanessa x

.....

May 17<sup>th</sup> 2022

Thank you so much Artur, it means alot to me.

I couldn't say much on my return as I was quite drained. The presentation was great though, my teachers were very appreciative and had very positive responses. But I actually cried the entire time I was speaking. It was a very emotional moment for me, but I told them that it's in fact a celebration to come to this moment, to reflect, research and speak up, even if I expressed it as tears.

I danced on the balcony under some stars and lit by candles with my own playlist of course for close to 45mins.

That was good for my soul. :)

Thanks for indulging/accepting my crazy moments...not sure what the neighbours thought if they saw me, but its fine!!

Hope your day was good. I head to LIFT, nanny work and a seminar tomorrow. I hope to see you before and after. Hope today was good for you and tomorrow even better. Enjoy French and meeting your friend.

Hugs,

V.x

## **APPENDIX B**

This section contains 3 reports that highlights my experiences at dance festivals and networking events in Japan, France and Germany. I had excluded any negative experiences at Tanzfabrik and presented only the positive side. It is also insightful to see the very powerful impact these visits can lead to and that enabled a number of successful artistic collaborations for Dance Bridges and these cultural organisations.

### **TPAM PERFORMING ARTS MEETING IN YOKOHAMA, 2017 REPORT**

- **By Vanessa Maria Mirza**



Photo: Courtesy TPAM, Yokohama 2017.

It was an absolutely wonderful experience to represent Dance Bridges Festival (Kolkata, India) at TPAM 2017 from 11<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> February 2017 in Yokohama (Japan). I'm so grateful for this invitation and for the support of Japan Foundation Asia Centre (New Delhi) in making this possible. From our arrival till the closing reception, the hospitality of the Japan Foundation & TPAM teams was incredible, ensuring everything was smooth during our visit, with impeccable timing, organization and arrangements.

TPAM as an international arts meeting was fantastic in helping to network and meet more arts professionals from around the world. I found this really is an excellent platform with over 500 delegates including artists, festival directors, representatives from performing arts venues and cultural houses, producers, managers and government officials based in Japan as well as across the international arts community.

The different programmes- TPAM Direction, TPAM Exchange and TPAM Fringe- were an ideal format to connect and interact/ view artist works from different perspectives. It was wonderful to attend performance showcases by mature and upcoming artists, symposiums, artist talks, group meetings and speed networking sessions. My congratulations to the Director, Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama, Ms. Hiromi Maruoka for the very diverse and eclectic programme curation and excellent overall planning of this event.

A few highlights & key-points from my experience at TPAM 2017:

- I really appreciate the recent focus of TPAM on developing Asia as an epicentre for performing arts internationally with the growing emphasis on commissioning and producing more collaborative projects among Asian and other international artists. I hope Dance Bridges Festival can also be an active partner in this vision.
- Some of the interesting performances presented across genres included 'Fever Room', 'Performance Encyclopedia', 'Samut Thai: Unfinished Histories', 'Zero One', 'Ngoc Dai/Senyawa', 'Taipei Notes', 'Road to Evil Spirit', 'Be Careful', 'Tower'(theatre), 'Layer/Angle/Composition', 'Mr. Shi & His Lover' and 'Balabala'. It was very good as an audience member to watch these works in different performance venues and I really felt this special selection of spaces enhanced the quality of the performances.
- I enjoyed the symposium that was hosted by European Dancehouse Networks (EDN), which focusses on connecting performance venues and production houses (expanding now also to festivals). This was followed by a discussion on the possibility of an Asian network for the same. If this develops in an Asian context it will be a great way to connect artists and producers for commissioning new works, and coordinating the production and management of tours.
- Dance Bridges Festival co-lead a group meeting session on Meets Asia: Dance & Outreach, where I was a panelist along with Beijing based Festival Director Zi Xhao and Vientiane (Laos-based) We Dance Company dance artist Phanthamith (Lucky)

Phommachanh. The discussion was very well received with a number of questions about the future plans of the Festival. Several artists and producers showed a keen interest in developing projects with Dance Bridges Festival and visiting Kolkata/India for this purpose. In particular, I hope that Ms. Yukako Oguru (ROHM Theatre, Kyoto) , whom I had met previously at the British Dance Edition 2016 (Cardiff, UK) can visit us in Kolkata in August 2017 as she is keen to become a networking partner with Dance Bridges Festival, to help build projects between artists in Japan and India.

- I was very impressed by the large variety of artist residency programmes in Japan and we connected with some directors hosting programmes in Tokyo and Kyoto that are wonderful opportunities for both professional and emerging artists to apply for. I feel there is an inherent creative atmosphere in Japan across these artistic spaces conducive to research and with some of the best facilities internationally to help support dance/choreographic projects.
- The Artists' Salon hosted by a team of eleven music, theatre, digital arts and dance artists from Europe was a very informative session with a broad range of artistic expertise, talent and productions being showcased. Again it was lovely to view some of their collaborative projects with Asian artists.
- I also attended the artist talks on 'From Conversation to Co-production of Simon Says' led by Anna CY Chan (HK) which discussed the journey of a production process between the Hong Kong based artistic director Ong Yong Lock and French choreographer Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh. It was interesting to see how the process of collaboration developed, and understand more about the challenges faced as well as the resolution of these problems to finally commission and produce a new work.
- Speed Networking or just networking was absolutely fantastic at TPAM and was not limited to only the official sessions. TPAM created such a warm and friendly environment to connect that whether it was at the ticket line, coffee shop, street crossing, breakfast buffet or late night meeting point at Amazon Club, making introductions and swapping business cards was the most natural thing!
- Although our programming curation for Dance Bridges Festival 2017 is officially closed, I'd be happy to discuss the possibility of engaging with Japanese artists for

performance/workshops as well as inviting young artists/arts professionals to apply to our residency program (for dancers) and internships (in arts management). In case a collaborative project is not possible for this year I definitely hope we can invite artist(s) from Japan for the following editions of the Festival and create other platforms of exchange through associated events. Our website is now live and more details can be found at [www.dancebridges.in](http://www.dancebridges.in).

- It was my very first visit to Japan and I found it breathtakingly beautiful and loved experiencing the culture, sights, sounds, cuisine, art and lifestyle there. I had some time in Tokyo where I visited the Imperial Palace Gardens, Shinjuku Goeyan, Asagura Temple, the nearby shopping district and Skytree. In Yokohama the wonderful location of the BankArt Studio allowed us easy access to the Yokohama port area, Redbrick warehouses and Sky Garden in the Landmark Tower which were so picturesque. My brief visit to Lake Kawaguchi and Mt Fuji on the weekend was an unforgettable experience. It was very reassuring that the transport system was very easy to access and navigate and I could manage travelling on my own without any difficulties.

I was so glad to have been at TPAM 2017, and look forward to building and developing this new association with Japanese artists, producers and collaborators through the TPAM arts network and support of Japan Foundation Asia Centre for some exciting new projects through the months ahead.

## BUILDING BRIDGES: PARIS & LYON

18<sup>th</sup> September-1<sup>st</sup> October 2018



*A report by Vanessa Maria Mirza, Founder-Director, Dance Bridges Festival, attending the Biennale de la Danse in Lyon and other performances and artist meetings in Paris.*

## Encountering French artists and the dance & culture of Paris & Lyon

18<sup>th</sup> September- 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018

It was indeed a great delight for me to be invited as an international delegate for the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of the Biennale de la danse, Lyon supported by Institut Français, ONDA and Maison de la Danse. I share here some of the highlights of my visit for a two-week period in Paris and Lyon. It has been a very enriching experience that has not only inspired me personally but also proved very useful in making connections to build future collaborations with Dance Bridges (Kolkata).



Photo: View of Theatre de la Ville, Espace de Pierre Cardin, Paris

### *Artist & Producer Meetings*

I arrived in Paris and my first appointment was with Annette Leday (Artistic Director, Annette Leday Dance Company) for an interview about Dance Bridges and my work in India as an early career choreographer. She is conducting research on Contemporary Dance in India, supported by the Resources Department of the Centre National de la Danse (CND), Paris. Her initiative includes creating a documentary film of her research, and I'm keen to watch this, with the possibility of Dance Bridges screening this in the future. I had seen her work 'Cinderella Otherwise' when I was 13 years old and it toured in India and it had made quite an impression on me. So it was special that I was able to meet her in Paris, 21 years after seeing her choreography in Calcutta.

Through the weeks that followed both at the Biennale in Lyon and in Paris I was able to talk with many very interesting French and international choreographers and producers. It was lovely to meet with Saïdo Lehlouh and his producer Celine Gallet (Garde Robe), facilitated by Claire Verlet at Theatre de la Ville; and I look forward to a collaborative project with Saïdo for Dance Bridges



Festival 2019. His work 'Apaches' and 'Wild Cat' (excerpt) would be very interesting for us to present. I was also able to meet with Barbara Pierson in Miribel, producer for French artist Eric Oberdoff, whose film 'Butterfly Soul' we screened in the 2017 edition of the Festival. They are looking to explore possibilities of more presentations with us and other organisations in India. Additionally, I was able to watch a rehearsal of French-Japanese artist Kaori Ito, arranged by Karthika Nair, at the Centre National de Danse (CND) and talked with her about her work and her interests in India. (She has visited Calcutta before is keen to come back again.)

I had the pleasure to meet Damien Valette the producer for Rachid Ouramdane at a Maguy Marin performance in Paris. He mentioned his visit to India for the Attakalari Festival (Bangalore). It would be wonderful if Rachid is able to connect in some way with Dance Bridges to share more of his work in Kolkata. Particularly if he has films of his choreography or documentaries about his work, it would be wonderful for us to introduce his work to Kolkata audiences through our film screenings.

It was also good for me to connect in Lyon with Hela Fattoumi and Eric Lamoureux of Viadanse based at Centre Chorégraphique National de Bourgogne Franche-Comté à Belfort accompanied by their producer Maud Orain, who I had met at Aerowaves this year in Sofia. Another Aerowaves connection that was renewed, was with artist Fouad Boussouf (Compagnie Massala) and his producer Petya Hristova. It will be wonderful to see his work presented in India at some point as well.

Through the ONDA meetings I had the wonderful opportunity to be introduced to a number of artistic programmers from France and other countries that I was meeting for the very first time. The session I attended in Miribel on 'Dance in Public Spaces' was a very useful discussion to learn more about how other festivals and programmers have been working with artists in this area of performance in their own regions, while also getting know about many projects/artists who have interesting creations/research in this area. Later in Paris, I also had the pleasure of visiting the ONDA Office to meet with Regis Plaud to understand more about ONDA's work with performing arts and also exchange information about Dance Bridges and my own projects in India.

In the midst of a very full schedule, I also had the opportunity to meet briefly with my intern Margot Bareyt who is due to arrive back in Calcutta very soon, for a joint internship with Alliance Francaise du Bengale and Dance Bridges. It was really lovely that she was in Paris at the same time as I was and while we have worked a lot together in Calcutta, it was a special experience to see her in her own country.



***Biennale de la Danse, Lyon & Performances in Paris***

Photo: (above) ONDA meeting with Regis Plaud & visit to the Basilique du Sacre Couer de Montmartre (right) Café Danse sessions in progress in Lyon

The Focus Danse and Biennale de la Danse was one of the best dance platforms/festivals I have seen so far. I appreciated that the performances were curated across a wide range of spaces and



Photo: Interiors of the Lyon Opera House

theatres and I got to see many different performance venues.

It was the first time for me to see many well-known French choreographers like Jerome Bel and Maguy Marin but also I was glad to see work from many young emerging and mid-career artists. Both in Lyon and later in Paris, I was impressed by the broad concept of dance that was reflected in the performances I saw, the use of digital technology, staging and visual elements and also the amazing skills and abilities of the performers. It was inspiring and intriguing at the same time. Rachid Ouramdance's work 'Franchir La nuit' performed at the Lyon Opera House was really beautiful, especially with the way he choreographed the piece using young dancers. Yoann Bourgeois' 'Histories

Naturalles 24 Tentatives, D'Approches D'Un Point de

Suspension' performed at Musee Guimet, was also stunning in the techniques used and ideas explored, woven within a tightly knit choreography.

In Paris, I enjoyed very much watching Israel Galvan's brilliant 'Gatomaquia' (a flamenco solo performed in a circus tent and incorporating the Romanian gypsies from the circus into this version of the performance), Circe Plume 'La Derniere Saison' (a contemporary French circus in their last season performing with strong dramatic content, live music and exceptionally beautiful sets and lighting) and Maguy Marin's 'Cinderella' performed by the Lyon Opera-Ballet Company (eloquent and fascinating in her interpretation of the story and particularly with the use of masques). I was also able to watch a number of interesting works at the Les Plateaux Festival at Theatre Jean Vilar and at La Briqueterie by mostly emerging artists.

Also at Dansathon which I was able to attend on the last day of the Biennale in Lyon, I saw some very exciting presentations. The participants engaged with dance and technology in new ways using augmented and virtual reality to bring dance closer to the wider public. The prize winning project was 'An Internet Connected Dance Space' where through a mobile app, dancers at different points of the globe could dance at the same time and share in an experience with the help of digital media. We also saw videos of the simultaneous process that has taken place in London and Liege.



Photo: Closing ceremony of the Dansathon

While I don't list all the names and artists here, I was able to watch about 26 different pieces through my visit, and it was absolutely fantastic for me both as an artist and programmer.

### *Performance Venue visits in Paris*

It was a special privilege for me to have visit and tour a few venues for dance creation and performance including Theatre de la Ville, Parc de la Villete, La Briqueterie and Centre National de Danse in Paris. It was exhilarating for me to learn more about how things operate at each of these spaces, but also understand more about the design, concept and planning that went into each of them. I had many interesting conversations on how they engage with artists and the community. Some of these host several festivals through the year as well as many international projects and I was really glad to know how they prepare and programme for this. It really was inspiring and thought provoking on different levels as with Dance Bridges our long term project is to have a space of our own, and hope to expand the festival and international residencies.



Photo: (above left) Visual image of the transformation at La Briqueterie, (above right) Studio space at Centre National de Danse, Paris (below left) A tour of La Villette with Artistic Director Frederic Mazelly (below right) After the tour with Elizabetta Bisaro & Claire Verlet at La Briqueterie.





Photo: View of the gallery of the Cite de la Musique





Photo: (above) Paintings at Centre Georges Pompidou (below) External view of the Centre Georges Pompidou

### ***Art Exhibitions & Museum Visits***

A favourite part of my time in France as a visual artist and curator was being able to visit many art museums, galleries and exhibitions. I have a strong interest in the Impressionists and so was very glad to see many beautiful Impressionist paintings at the Musée de l'Orangerie and Musée Montmartre Monet. I also enjoyed the contemporary art collections at Centre Georges Pompidou which is such a fascinating space and I loved gorgeous views of Paris at sunset. I was invited by Karthika Nair to visit Musée Jacquemarte-Andre with a new exhibition on the Italian painter Caravaggio that was really exquisite and the first of its kind in Paris. She also arranged a special visit to Cité de la musique with a tour by Philippe Bruguère at the Musée de la musique, showing us the rare and beautiful collection of musical instruments. In Lyon I was able to visit the Museum of Art and was so enthralled by their fabulous collection of artwork and art objects. The architecture and gardens in so many of the museums that I visited were so beautiful.

### *Personal Reflections & Inspiration*

My time in Paris and Lyon was so special in so many different ways. I really loved the extended time I had to explore different aspects of these two cities. I actually felt very comfortable from the moment I arrived in Paris and right through my trip, whenever I encountered any difficulty, I found the French people very kind, generous, caring, friendly, hospitable and ready to help. In Lyon while visiting my friends from La Martiniere Alumni, I also met some students from Calcutta now studying in France, and they similarly shared the same views. It was heart-warming and made me feel very welcome.

Usually between appointments, I went to see quite a few tourist attractions but this time I didn't feel like a tourist. I felt more like someone experiencing life as normal in these French cities and it was a delight. From shopping at the local supermarket to changing train tickets at the SNCF boutique by myself, to whizzing around different destinations in both Paris and Lyon by metro, bus, taxi and by foot, I found my intensive daily schedule very invigorating. I really loved walking by the river and always took this scenic route if time allowed. It also gave me the opportunity to explore my travel/street photography interests as well.



Photo:  
Images of  
design as seen  
in daily life in  
France

The French sense of design and aesthetics is something I really love, from simple things like window displays to landscaping gardens, magazine layouts, architecture, food plating in even small cafes and so many other aspects of life; I enjoyed absorbing all these different visual impulses so sweet to my senses through this visit. A very special moment was attending the opening gala at Hotel de Ville, for the Biennale in Lyon. The building was so beautifully lit by night and it had such a lovely atmosphere that it is something I will always remember. In Paris I had the special treat, that by living in Passy at Claire Verlet's home, I got to see le Tour Eiffel every single day as I left home and by night as I returned. It is a ritual I quite miss now in India, but I certainly have very vivid memories of this and other wonderful times and the people I met in France.

I am quite inspired from this trip to learn French. A tight schedule only allows for me to work on this by myself for now, but I hope to join classes at the Alliance Francaise, at some point in the near future. I also feel energised to create more as a choreographer and would like to soon transition from working as an independent artist to establishing my own dance company. For Dance Bridges as mentioned earlier in this report, I hope we can build many wonderful exchanges with French artists through the years to come. Overall I am very optimistic and filled with new vision for things ahead. I hope after my upcoming ATSA fellowship secondment in Germany in March 2019, I am able to visit France again.

This trip wouldn't have been possible without certain individuals taking an interest in the work I do and I would like to thank those who conceived and orchestrated this visit on very short notice. My deep gratitude to Claire Verlet, Alice Brunot & the Institut Francais team, Regis Plaud, Karthika Nair and Thomas Belus among many others for their kind and wonderful support in making this such a rich experience for me. I am truly changed by my time in France, and I know it will have a deep impact on my person and my artistic practice. Merci beaucoup!





Photo: Le Tour Eiffel, Paris

## ATSA SECONDMENT REPORT

### TANZFABRIK BERLIN

01.02- 06.03 2019



*Photo: Tanzfabrik Berlin, Kreuzberg Premises*

#### INTRODUCTION

It was a great privilege for me to have the opportunity of a secondment/internship at Tanzfabrik Berlin over five weeks coinciding with their Open Spaces Festival in February-March 2019. At the outset of this report I would like to thank the Goethe Institut for their generous support to this fellowship programme as well as the ATSA team for the smooth facilitation of this process, that made my time in Germany comfortable and enjoyable.

I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to the entire team at Tanzfabrik Berlin, for their warm welcome and giving me access as a fellow team member and sharing their time, space and resources

with me. It was special to be immersed in their organisational environment during a busy Festival season, and I am particularly grateful to Mr. Ludger Orlok, Artistic Director of Tanzfabrik Berlin, who was always so very encouraging and inclusive. My conversations with him were always very rewarding and inspiring especially in light of the way he has developed and curated the Festival and shaped the organisation over the years. I appreciate also the contribution of Mr. Juan Gabriel Harcha, Ms. Felicitas Zeeden and Mr. Vincenz Kokot among several others, who shared their valuable expertise with me and enabled me to understand more about their respective roles within the fields of production, press/communication and organisation at Tanzfabrik Berlin.

Being at such a pivotal performing arts organisation in Berlin, with a history of over forty years, it was a very enriching experience on many different levels and I hope to elucidate something of the impact it has had on me in this report. However, I think what I have learned and gained is

more than what I can articulate here at this present time. There were so many impulses and insights that it is something I would like to keep reflecting on. There are more than a few immediate gains that I know I can implement in my work with Dance Bridges in India in the coming months for the next edition of our Festival from 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> August 2019. Over time though, I believe I can put into practice even more from the knowledge and tools acquired through this secondment, particularly in developing our future plans and vision for an arts space of our own.

## **AIMS OF THE SECONDMENT**

Tanzfabrik Berlin works as an internationally known centre for Contemporary Dance- offering space for rehearsals, production, artistic and theoretic research, advanced training, further education, workshops and regular classes. It focuses on development, presentation and agency of contemporary dance in all of its diversity of choreographic and performative approaches. This includes the promotion of young artists, the connection of theory and practice and international exchange. My main focus during the five weeks that I was with Tanzfabrik Berlin, was to work with their team to understand more about how they run their Festival and learn about their management processes in the planning and execution of different projects. I felt this would be useful in preparing for the current events and future plans of Dance Bridges. This being my first experience in Germany, I was eager to learn more about the German dance and arts scene, the management and production principles applied and what community outreach/engagement looks like.

## **MAIN ASSIGNMENTS & ACTIVITIES**

While I was at Tanzfabrik Berlin, I worked primarily with their production and press & communication associates. From the production perspective, I was able to observe and assist with various day to day tasks and assignments relating to the Festival such as the preparation of the venue, box office & ticketing, and managing front & back stage activities (foyer/bar/performance studio), security protocol, special arrangements on premiere nights for receptions and duties in closing the venue.

I supported the communications team with creating content (with images, text and videos) and publishing posts/stories over social media (on Facebook and Instagram) during the Festival. I often helped with preparing and distributing different sets of printed posters, studio announcements, signage, programmes and branding that usually needed updating according to the performance schedule. Additionally, I helped with proof-reading texts in English, adjustments

in brochures as well as interacting with festival guests and visitors to share more information about the Festival.

I was introduced to other members of the Tanzfabrik management at both venues in Kreuzberg and Wedding. On several occasions I was able to connect with different people engaged with the multiple partner dance institutions (ada Studio, The Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin-HZT, Tanzbüro Berlin) based out of Uferstudios where I worked regularly. I attended various official meetings held internally and with other stakeholders of the organization during the course of the Festival. This gave me a close inside perspective to the overall management procedures employed and daily schedule/protocol while running the Festival.



*Photo: Radialsystem, the performance venue for the opening of the Festival with 'Hopeless' by Sergiu Matis*

I participated in some evening dance technique and improvisation classes held with a range of guest teachers and covering different subjects as well as levels. It was a wonderful way to have a taste of the dance education section of Tanzfabrik Berlin. I was also able to watch the performance/general rehearsal for most of the artists presented in the Festival. It was delightful to see such a thought-provoking and powerful selection of contemporary works with an experimental/conceptual dance base that is not as common to see featured at other Festivals and

dance platforms. I saw many artists for the first time and it was lovely to get to interact with some of them to learn about their creative process and artistic practice. It was heart-warming to hear multiple reports of how the support of Tanzfabrik Berlin has been invaluable to them as professionals in the Berlin dance scene.

## KEY LEARNINGS/TAKEAWAYS

There were many things I learned from this experience but I would like to highlight three of them. The first is 'space'. I was very inspired by the space and premises itself. I was impressed by the multi-dimensional use of the office and studio space and the creative way the Tanzfabrik staff could re-arrange things to serve the purpose at hand. It felt very practical and efficient and makes our own plans to have our own space just a little more feasible and achievable. Uferstudios is created within the framework of a transport company depot that lends a raw beautiful atmosphere to all of the property. The black box style studios seem perfect whether it's for choreographic research, dance classes or shows. Similarly, the building in Kreuzberg has a wonderful location and charm that is instantly very appealing. I know both venues carry a history and individual character that also imbue the organisation and the artists working there, making it a place one wants to return to over and over again. Looking also at the economics related to rented spaces as opposed to owned spaces, I felt this model works very well for them. It could be something we emulate in developing an arts space in the future. I also felt Uferstudios as a base for multiple dance related organisations is a stimulating environment for artists at different levels of their career to be in; and it inspires me to build similar local partnerships and networks.



*Photo: View as you enter Uferstudios*

The second aspect is the 'team planning' at Tanzfabrik that was really insightful to witness and be a part of. I was very impressed with the attention to detail in ironing out even the smallest aspects of production/communication/organisation during multiple events in the Festival. But what was more impressive was to ensure everyone involved had this clearly set before them and were exactly on the same page. It could be something often taken for granted but I felt it was the key in the Festival running so smoothly. Team meetings were not often very long but they were regular and while during our own Festival it sometimes feels impossible to find the time and space for this, (because it's so intense and fast-paced), I know I would like to incorporate this as a priority.



My third key takeaway is the **'positive work culture'** within Tanzfabrik. I saw a team spirit that is very strong and how if the need arose they were able to fill in for the gap as required, never with any complaint. It was also interesting for me to analyse the flexibility in schedules and work hours for each person and how this is altered depending on the demands of the Festival programme and as framed by individual contracts. Flexible schedules gave room for some personal liberty while ensuring they met the requirements of their workload. They are a very dedicated, hard-working, committed, efficient and very competent team working long hours particularly during the Festival. In terms of contracts, some of them work with Tanzfabrik for a certain number of hours and use the rest of their time with other work assignments/organisations. I found this division interesting for me to think about for the future when we do more events and build a bigger team. I enjoyed working at such an office and with this inspiring team. It was always a warm and friendly work atmosphere at Tanzfabrik/Uferstudios that made my time with them very special.

## CONCLUSION

Being at Tanzfabrik Berlin was definitely useful for my project plans with Dance Bridges as I have shared through this report. As mentioned, there is a lot for me to think about to help build my vision for the future while also enhancing our current management systems and plans. This secondment experience was also a great way for me to meet people within the dance scene in Germany and from other parts of Europe, to share something about our work with Dance Bridges. I know many are interested in visiting India so I am glad to have had this forum to connect with them. Possibly what may have been additionally beneficial would have been if time allowed to do a longer research to look at pre-festival and post-festival phases in the organisation with more depth. However, over the five weeks, I had tremendous inputs on many aspects of Festival management and a very rich experience that I am indeed very grateful for.

I must also mention how much I enjoyed being in Berlin, even though it was winter and a bit colder than what I am accustomed to. It is an impressive city with so much to explore particularly



*Photo: Sunset at Schlachtensee Lake, Berlin*

within the performing arts and cultural area. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to visit museums, art galleries and historical sites, spend a day at a lake or the old airport and try various kinds of cuisine tasting something of life as a Berliner. I was able travel to other cities in Germany including Leipzig, Potsdam and Munich which made many more very memorable experiences.

I know that I am changed by my time spent in Berlin through this secondment at Tanzfabrik and being at Open Spaces Festival. In future trips to Europe I would definitely like to visit them again. I am once again sincerely grateful for everyone who played a role in making this possible.  
*Dankeschön!*