3 In Touch With the Mindful Body

Moving With Women and Girls at the Za'atari Refugee Camp

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Introduction

For me, the question of decolonising has always been a practical one. Stating my privilege makes visible the structures that position me as a researcher, and by so doing I can alleviate my own guilt, but it is not enough. Actions must be taken with an awareness of privilege. Thus, I have been asking myself the following questions. What are the actions through which I can work toward decolonisation in my own research and pedagogic practice? How do I move and relate to others as a body in an unjust world?

In this chapter, I propose an embodied view of decolonising—in other words, a strategy of bringing bodies into focus and proximity. I emphasise that this is a *proposition* of ideas to think with. By embodiment, I mean rethinking the way research is founded upon binaries of emotion and rationality, body and mind—thus, overriding a central tenet in Western epistemology. Decolonising through embodiment means rethinking methodology and asking: Whose knowledge is privileged? I use as an example of an embodied research interest a short trip I made to the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan in January 2018 for a study on capoeira (Hast, 2019). The purpose of this writing is to propose that engagement with embodied knowledge is one possible way to study the lived experience of young Syrian women and girls. Movement is a tool through which we can think about corporeal strategies of decolonising participatory research.

I begin with a short introduction to the Za'atari camp, trauma and capoeira projects I was conducting research on. Next, I discuss how the body is the site of emotion and knowledge, and I explain my feminist curiosity toward healing practices and children's agency instead of pain stories. I then provide examples of movement techniques which can provide access to embodied knowledge and self-awareness. In the conclusions, I propose that the participants in the capoeira classes are attuning their bodies and (re)connecting themselves as bodies.

Capoeira at the Za'atari Camp

In early 2018, over 170 children and adolescents were taking part in capoeira programmes run by the founders of Capoeira al-Shababi, Lauren Hales, Ramzy Natsheh and Hussein Zaben, at the Za'atari refugee camp. Capoeira classes took place at the Peace Oasis of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Makani Center of Relief International for children and youth from the ages of 9–19, as well as Syrian facilitators training as capoeira trainers. Unfortunately, the programmes were discontinued

after the authorities began to view capoeira as a problem for the camp's security, and the small organisation lacked resources to explain that their work was designed to protect all those involved.

My own interest in capoeira comes from personal experience. Capoeira changed me—it changed me as a researcher, as a woman and as a survivor of violence. I learned about the use of capoeira to empower and heal, and through my capoeira contacts, I got in touch with Hales, who was one of the founders of Capoeira al-Shababi and who was working in Jordan. I travelled to Jordan because I was welcomed and because I felt I could be of use. Through an embodied dialogue with the young capoeiristas, I hoped to make visible the movement that was emerging in the margins. In this chapter, I do not discuss in detail my collaboration with Capoeira al-Shababi (see e.g. Hast, 2019), but focus on participation through sharing movement with young Syrian women and girls.

The camp is over an hour's drive from Amman, the capital of Jordan. The terrain is dry, and roadsides are covered with piles of rocks and plastic trash. After a bumpy ride of the last kilometres, we arrived at the Za'atari refugee camp, and from afar I could see the immense size of the camp, housing 80,000 Syrian refugees in densely placed metal containers. The camp was established in 2012 by the Jordanian government and the United Nations Refugee Agency. Different humanitarian agencies offer services for the camp's inhabitants, such as medical care, education and food.

The camp is a militarised space—fenced and guarded—a form of structural and institutional violence descending from the concentration camp models (Bushnell & Nakase, 2018, p. 30). A refugee camp is not a safe haven or an escape from war—it is war's continuation. The very day I arrived at the camp, two boys—brothers, I later learned—drowned in a well which had been left open without a cover.

Capoeira is an art which originated from movements of enslaved Africans brought to Brazil by the Portuguese. In Brazil, capoeira was illegal from 1889 until 1938, associated with gang violence, and it was spread to the US and Europe by Brazilians in exile after the fascist junta seized power in Brazil in 1964 (Delamont et al., 2017, p. 6). Capoeira is a game which is played in a circle formation called a *roda* (wheel). It involves training of movements around a swinging step or *ginga* (swing): kicks, escapes and sidesteps (*esquivas*) and acrobatics. An important part of capoeira is singing capoeira songs and playing musical instruments. Capoeira is tied to resistance and social justice as it resists the forgetting of racial violence and injustice in Brazil, but it is also tied to social projects amongst marginalised and unprivileged communities (Downey, 2005, p. 63). Capoeira al-Shababi was using capoeira at the camp as a psychosocial tool, offering the children the possibility to explore movement and music in a safe space, similarly to other social projects, such as capoeira classes for former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (United Nations International Children's Fund, 2015) or capoeira in young offenders' rehabilitation in Canada (Joseph, 2015), for example.

Sophie Fuggle (2008) has described capoeira as a discourse of subversion, carried out in the form of a negotiation aimed at finding a way out, to escape socially imposed rules and limitations. Rather than an escape to the outside, this means playing with the limits and transforming them. Capoeira engages with power relations and resistance, providing alternatives to fixed solutions. The subversions are expressed as false attacks, changing directions, playfulness and unpredictability. While capoeira is historically not built upon white or Eurocentric knowledge, as a practice now globally

known, it is neither oppressive nor liberating in itself. Any form of activity can reproduce inequality. It is through choices in pedagogy and methodology that we can experiment, question and develop different ways of being together. I believe it is possible to experience and envision different relations of power through movement.

Capoeira was used at the camp as a therapeutic tool, in addition to being a recreational activity. The benefits of a body-based approach to trauma have been extensively researched (see e.g. Van der Kolk, 2014). In such therapies, it is understood that, since the body stores traumatic memories, the body needs to heal, as well. A healing body is a body in movement. As the body psychotherapist Laura-Hope Steckler (2017, p. 142) has noted, non-habitual movement seems to refresh the nervous system, enhancing the ability to deal with challenging life circumstances. Movement affects the brain positively. Judith Lynne Hanna (2014) explains that dancing sparks the creation of new brain cells and their connections (neuroplasticity), increases neurotransmitters and nerve growth factors, helps regulate stress and boosts brain chemicals that enhance learning. By engaging with art, children can express their creativity and have fun, and this self-expression is essential for both healing and living to the fullest (Brown, 2012).

There are no data on the extent of trauma amongst the children who took part in the capoeira classes. Yet, research has been conducted on how post-traumatic stress disorder and depression are common amongst refugee children (see e.g. Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Ugurlu et al., 2016). Children are not only plagued by traumatic memories, but also by the dire daily circumstances at the camp, as well as loss of home, work, family members and friends due to displacement. Children are also affected by family members suffering from trauma and loss. The camp as a living environment is a place of scarcity and imprisonment. It poses an additional challenge to the rights of girls who at the camp are at higher risk of being married at a young age (see e.g. Sahbani et al., 2016). In these circumstances, the capoeira class presented a space of safety and creativity.

The Body Knows

I argue that language is not the only and most important form of knowledge. I also propose that if language is too abstract, to the point of being abstracted from experience, it is not accessible. I struggle with writing high-level theory because it rarely speaks to those I would like to include in the discussion. Language provides access to certain places of knowledge, but it also maintains hierarchies. One way to manage the tension created by this dichotomy is to consider the possibilities of knowledge that is corporeal and descriptive. To gain a more comprehensive view of knowledge, I have adopted the concept of *enactivism* (Varela et al., 1993), by which I mean a body full of soul (Sheets-Johnstone, 2018, p. 11), the entire living body as minded or mindful (Colombetti, 2014), the living body (and not just the mind) as the locus of subjectivity (Parviainen, 1998, p. 25) and freeing the senses from the captivity of reason (Manning, 2007, p. xii).

Overlooking the tactile, kinaesthetic and affective body has meant that the body counts for very little within the knowledge hierarchies in many scholarly disciplines, but so it does as well in the society at large: 'if society is disembodied, perhaps it is also because there is sole reliance on talk and an absence of relating to each other in the silence of movement' (Sheets-Johnstone, 2018, p. 8). The body talks with silence or sounds other

than words. Maxine Sheets-Johnston (2018) has proposed changing the point of view from an embodied mind to a mindful body. The body is not inhabiting the mind or the soul, but the body is the mind and the soul. She goes on to distinguish ‘having a body’ from ‘being a body’, the latter being the intuitive experience of infants: they experience themselves as living bodies, not selves who possess a body (p. 19). Rather than perceiving the body as an object, the flow of the body’s dynamics is felt in movement.

Body and self belong together, making a *bodyself*. Self-processes are underpinned by the capacity to know the body, and the (body)self is known to the mind because it generates emotions and feelings (Damasio, 2010). Emotions are first experienced as changes in the body, which the brain maps visually and non-visually. Only after that we become aware of our feelings (Damasio, 2010). Thus, the body is the locus of emotion. Yet, the mindful body, or ‘kinaesthetic consciousness’ (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011), is inter-subjective, so a body is constantly changing and emoting in an environment with other living creatures. Moving with other bodies is then an exploration not only of how the body is minded, but also how the self is deeply relational.

The body knows and the body remembers. Knowing is experiential (see Rothschild, 2000, p. 26), and memory is constructed in active engagement with the world (Damasio, 2010, p. 132). Identities are rooted in our bodily experiences, while our embodied existence can also limit our ability to be and feel part of the world (Anttila, 2004, p. 41). Everything that goes into the brain goes through flesh, via the body’s surface (Damasio, 2010, p. 91). So, despite how much we like to consider the mind as being separate from the body as the thinking, feeling, problem-solving, decision-making and perceiving self, this is not the case.

Self is in the flesh, emotions emerge in the body and making sense of the world relies on our bodily senses. The question of how to be a body is especially relevant for traumatised individuals, who often avoid feeling their bodies, and are often disconnected from their sensations (Levine, 2015). Thus, attending to and acknowledging the body in all its visceral dimensions is essential for being in charge of one’s life and for healing (Van der Kolk, 2014). Becoming aware of the felt sense of the body means accessing the implicit procedural or body memories: movement patterns, motor skills, visceral sensations (Levine, 2015). This awareness can then produce new experiences of release, relaxation, safety or expansion.

As I move with other bodies trying to understand something of their lived experience, I do that as a researcher mindful of her own body and emotions. Kindon et al. (2007, p. 3) use the term ‘extended epistemology’ to convey that in participatory action research knowledge comes in diverse forms, and it is collected for the purpose of change. For me, this means participating as a body, being present as a body and thinking of ways through which I can practice change as a body.

Refusal to Focus on Pain Stories

Tuck and Yang (2014, p. 223) state that ‘Social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification’. They also point out how damage-centred researchers rely on Western notions of power as scarce and concentrated, leaving communities with a narrative that tells them they are powerless (p. 227). In our fascination with scarred bodies, the existence of the scarred is predicated on pain. The refugee, in order to represent what the saviour needs, has to be a victim, and not an agent.

When I had interviews with the Syrian facilitators training to become capoeira trainers, I did not ask them about their pain, and I did not intend to tell their pain stories. I asked about capoeira, and when they wanted, they told me about their pain, too. I had the feeling already when we had these conversations that none of the pain stories were meant to be told in that particular context. Instead of making pain the focus, I asked about how they felt when clapping hands or doing a cartwheel. By my refusal to narrate pain, I hope to shift something in the refugee—victim narrative in my own practice and writing.

In my earlier study on war experience in Chechnya, I attempted to avoid reproducing macabre aesthetics of war bodies. Instead, my focus was on dance, love and compassion (Hast, 2018b). I was also curious about children in war beyond victimhood: children whose insights are easily sidelined as subordinate to adults' experience, knowledge and agency. I wanted to see children beyond the dualism of weakness (children) and capacity (adults). Children are needy bodies, but they are not mute unless muted. When children are viewed as incapable, their insights are written out of the sagas on war and agency.

Johannes Gunesch notes how political scientists often proceed deductively: 'First, we name the beast, then we try to tame it' (Gunesch & Nolte, 2020, p. 51). The beast we are up against here is 'white patriarchal capitalist coloniality' (Motta, 2018, p. 4), of which I am a part of as a white person. I am not able to tame the beast, and the beast inhabits me, but I can at least try to deconstruct some aspects of the beast through situated, contested, propositional, changing, different and many *movements*.

Body Practice as Participatory Research

A Finnish scholar visiting a refugee camp seems like the epitome of using privilege to get into spaces for one's own purposes. I was able to visit: to go in and get out. The imprisonment of the camp's residents, and my freedom to move, troubled me every day I was there, and it still troubles me—and it should.

I did not visit the camp only as a researcher, but also as a *capoeirista*. I did not see exotic bodies different from me, but capoeira bodies. Most of the time, I was learning in the class just like the rest of the participants. I was an experiencing body. Breaths, touches, silences, sounds, steps, laughter, falls and different emotions were the 'data' I was collecting in my body. My body is a trauma body, and I have studied and explored movement techniques in order to better understand the role of the body in healing from trauma. With a personal background in late childhood trauma, I was not distanced, and often I was not particularly analytical. I was taking part as an empathetic and curious witness, and relied on the participation to be the method through which I might be able to overcome some of the problems of an assessing, judging and evaluating gaze that often characterise these kinds of settings. With the privileges I had, I could embody several positions, just like I could come and leave the camp. But it was also my *responsibility*, then, to move beyond any one role that would set me above from those who allowed me to see into their lives. This is why I chose to be a capoeirista first, a scholar second. When I conducted interviews, I could feel how the hierarchical relationship of the researcher and researched was established in the stillness of bodies. An interview was in stark contrast to the intimate dynamic of moving together. Movement was an exchange, interview felt like extraction.

Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008) explain how the use of participatory theatre as an action research methodology not only challenges the disembodied research process but brings social impact right to the heart of research. I wanted to offer my own movement, touch and laughter to those present, and not only abstract their knowledge for my own use. Through exchange of knowledge, I proposed movement exercises, and asked the participants how they felt about them.

Three Body Techniques for Awareness

During my visit to the camp, an opportunity arose to explore ‘roots of the mind in its body’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 3) when Hales asked me if I wanted to lead some exercises during classes. I happily agreed, and decided on exercises, hoping I could learn about the participants’ felt states and body awareness. In the following, I describe these exercises in detail. I want to present these exercises and the knowledge they can produce as concrete examples of experimentation that is a possibility with problematics. In the context of decolonising, it would be counterproductive to generally declare that body work is healing or that, through art, we can ethically engage in research. We can do harm even when we try to do good, so we need to critically study different artistic methods in their contexts to understand both their benefits and pitfalls.

My position was that of an outsider. The first problem was that I did not know the girls and young women, their language and their life-worlds. On the other hand, I had been participating in the classes a few times. We had laughed together, and our bodies had already spoken in movement and become tuned with each other. This was the trust upon which I could ask the participants to move. I also knew they were used to talking about their feelings at the end of the class, so I could expect some verbal feedback on the exercises. In fact, the movement exercises we performed in class replaced interviews which were not a possibility practically and ethically. Hales, their teacher, was there facilitating and translating.

The exercises I introduced to the group can be grouped into three: 1) sensing the self as a body by touch or by focusing on breathing; 2) moving another body and being moved—exploring intersubjectivity; and 3) changing between extended and contracted body poses in order to explore how emotions change in movement. I had learned these in different contexts—all of which are Western—and had used them in movement work with immigrant women.

My analysis in the following pages is ‘incomplete and detached from the realm it points to’ (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 1), yet I do not see this as failure. Amina Nolte refutes the idea of fieldwork as failure by explaining how to ‘accept the partiality and limitedness of one’s own perspective is a big chance and relief’ (Gunesch & Nolte, 2020, p. 57). I believe an important part of decolonising research is the ability to talk about failure straight on. This is not the same thing as feeling guilty. Acknowledging our fallibility and complicity is a practice of responsibility. This is a question that haunts me: What right did I have to go to the camp in the first place? The power imbalance cannot be reconciled, no matter how I try; it cannot be explained away. I had not thought about this question seriously enough until I was there, and as soon as we passed the guarded gates, I realised that I had been too focused on getting access. It had become so important for me to ‘be there’ that being there, in my mind, equalled success for my study. This was my failure.

Another problem that I need to express here is that even if I attempt to decolonise research by using embodied methods, I still work through Western academic conceptions and language. A framework is provided, analysis conducted and text written from a perspective that does not adequately reflect on the situatedness of those whose lived experiences are being studied. Capoeira is the only framework that is of non-Western origin here. Moreover, I cannot know the experience of the children I met. I can only propose meanings through an interaction we had. At the same time, it would be a form of epistemic violence to exclude those whose knowledge is not communicated on my terms (see Vaittinen, 2017, p. 49). I cannot eliminate the stark power relations between myself and the inhabitants of the camp, but through an embodied approach, I have attempted to resist the ‘thingification’ (Wheatley & Hartmann, 2013) of the war body and of the body of a child.

I have made the choice to write about the girls and young women I could play capoeira with, and I hope that, through my writing, I can convey some insights into how bodies and co-movement can bring forth new insights.

Being a Bodyself

Around 15 female students took part in each class. Girls and young women did not have many possibilities for sports at the camp, especially after marriage, so the class was a rare opportunity for them. The capoeira classes typically began with singing and playing instruments together. The singing was loud and energetic, and yet there was a silence embedded in it. It was like shouting into the world a deeper truth, which cannot be talked about, or a dream which is too big to be believed in. The truth of the voice, the dream of the body. What followed the musical part were different kinds of exercises: capoeira movements, acrobatics and sequences.

Body awareness was already part of the male and female classes alike. Many exercises were done in pairs or in a circle mirroring, mimicking or synching—attuned to and simulating the body state of another. For vulnerable children and youth, capoeira—with exercises such as mirroring—offers the opportunity to be in the present moment by focusing on their inner physical experience in relation to those around them. They can explore pressure, risk and release. Playing capoeira and singing capoeira songs create a break from one’s daily struggles, but more than that, they present the possibility to connect with one’s body and, thus, one’s self.

In the first exercise, we tapped our own bodies with the palm of the hand gently from head to toe, in order to get a sense of the body’s boundaries and to feel safe. The tap is a neutral touch, giving neither pain nor pleasure, and it assists in becoming aware of how the body is part of the self, not something separate from it. Another version, or a follow-up to tapping which I used with one group, was to squeeze the muscles, an exercise adopted from Peter Levine (2003). It does much the same as the tapping, but instead of activating the skin’s nerves, the touch goes all the way to the muscles—this is a stronger way to explore one’s sensations. Especially when a body is storing trauma, tapping and squeezing can activate the link between awareness and body sensations.

Instead of tapping, I tried a breathing exercise in one of the classes with young women, which resulted in giggles. Breathing in silence was awkward and difficult, and we did not manage to do it very long because of the eruptions into laughter. Nevertheless, one of the students said after the exercise that she felt calmer after breathing, and another student explained how she could feel the breath travel from her chest toward

the throat and out of her mouth. This kind of body work can teach how to develop an awareness of sensations as well as how changes in the body alter how we feel. What breath or touch can do is to prepare the body for meeting other bodies, by first feeling safe and calm in one's own skin. Then, being a body means being a body in relation to others, as a self in the present moment.

Relating to Others in Space

In an exercise I call *the marionette*, two bodies communicate—in the silence of movement—by one giving a gentle movement impulse by touch, and the other receiving it with movement. In such an exercise, the participant may become aware of the sensations and feelings which are generated by giving the movement impulse, and by being touched and moved. Bodywork practitioner Licia Sky, in an interview with Bessel Van der Kolk (2014, p. 535), explains that 'When you are touched, you wake up to the body part which is being touched'. Touching and touched bodies are changing, creating and inventing worlds 'by drawing the other into a relation, thereby qualitatively altering the limits of the emerging touched-touching bodies' (Manning, 2007, p. xiv).

The idea is that the *marionette* is not coerced or forced into movement but is given an impulse or a suggestion. The receiver of touch is not passively following orders; she can choose the way she interprets the impulse, take her space and improvise. Touch is transformed to movement through choice. I asked the participants to touch different parts of the body: hands, legs, waist, back and others, and not just the shoulder, which is easiest to do. I did not give any instructions on how to move or how to touch. I participated myself, always doing the exercise with one of the participants. Thus, I could not fully observe, as I was engaged in the exercise myself. In the beginning, some of the students just stood watching, hesitating, but little by little, more joined, and yet even more after we changed the roles with the partner. Their movement language was mainly capoeira—it was a capoeira class, after all.

We did the exercise with three groups. The discussion which followed was translated by Hales and a trainee, Samah Hourani. Talking about the exercise afterwards enhances awareness of emotions experienced in the body's movement. During the discussion, we stood in a circle. The circle is an equal way to organise bodies in space, and it was often preferred by the girls and women themselves. I asked how it felt to be moved or pushed, and moving or pushing another. I used the word 'push', which was easier to translate and understand than movement impulse. With respect to interpretations, it is hard to say exactly in what way the participants understood the question, and translating from lived bodily experience to language is not always easy—thus, I am drawing conclusions with caution.

The children who answered the question said pushing was easy and that it felt like *being in control*. They felt more comfortable in the role of the leader, than being the one who moves. One young woman answered:

Feels like someone is controlling us. Like we are a doll and they are controlling us. The moves we make are from them. I feel like a remote control is controlling me, like there is someone above me dictating my every move.

One young woman said, 'I honestly don't like someone controlling me, but when someone pushes me, I know how to move'. One of the facilitators said that it was

nice to experience both roles, having the power to lead, and then having someone lead you. I was often touched, kissed and hugged by the girls and young women, but in the marionette exercise, all my partners hesitated to touch me, and I tried signalling with my body that they could really use their hands to move me. They girls were thus not shy to touch me, but hesitant to move my body.

One of the younger girls said that to be pushed or moved felt like self-defence: 'When they come at me, I defend myself'. She also said that when she is pushed, she becomes more active and moves away from the other person. Another participant said she felt like the person pushing her wanted to control her. She continued to explain that the exercise was like a question and answer: 'When they ask, I answer correctly', suggesting that the person being moved will move according to the impulse given. When asked how it feels to be the one who pushes, a participant answered: 'I feel happy'.

The participants who voiced their feelings in the circle disliked the role of the marionette (feeling controlled) and preferred to be the one giving the movement impulse (feeling in control). The act of pushing then had a negative connotation as something imposed on another person. On the other hand, the participants said the exercise was fun and easy to do; thus, any feelings of discomfort had been mild and within limits of tolerance.

In movement, one can study corporeally how it feels to be touched and asked to move and how it feels to be leading or led, and one can practice sensing and reading another body. How a person experiences such an exercise depends on how it is framed, but also on the interaction with the other person, on how one is feeling at the moment of the exercise, and on the social norms and codes related to bodies and movement. The participants interpreted the movement through control and power. It is likely that, because of the context of capoeira, the participants interpreted the exercise as an attack and defence and not, for example, as a dance. This is speculation, but perhaps feelings related to control also surfaced due to the children's daily life at the refugee camp, or their experiences as females with various constraints and demands imposed on their bodies.

Remembering and Forgetting

Traumatic memories are but a part of the lifelong collection of implicit, non-conscious and automated body memories. They relate the self as a bodily experience to emotions as they emerge, as well as to the individual's autobiographical memories. Body, emotion and self are inseparable. Sometimes, body memories become conscious images or sensations. For example, more than once in my dance classes with immigrant women, someone has voiced how they felt like children again when running, jumping and goofing around. Movement work can also be a mindful moment of forgetting the past and the future.

The capoeira classes were experienced by the students as a break from daily struggles and painful memories, as explained by one of the Syrian facilitators, Sara. Sara described her feelings after the capoeira class as peaceful, as she could leave all her life circumstances, and the loss of family members aside for a while. She wanted this peacefulness for the children as well, saying, 'I feel indescribable when I do the thing I love. And doing that with kids. I feel joy when I see kids happy'. She continued,

I don't want them to think that 'we just left a warzone and all'. If they don't forget about this, they will have it as a wound in them. I don't want that. At this hour, I

will put everything behind my back and walk in and have fun and empty everything inside of me and then leave.

For Sara, capoeira was a means to exit the world of war, of the past, and be present in the moment where everything is here and now. For the other facilitators and students alike, capoeira was a special and precious time of the week, an escape and relief. They expressed it as a privilege which had benefits much beyond the class. As Sara said, 'So, I am very happy I can't wait for the capoeira day to come so we can all spend time together singing and clapping and doing things. I feel like I own the world and what's in it'.

I had not planned the third exercise as memory work because it can be risky and evoke traumatic memories. But, sometimes, awareness of movement awakens the forgotten self. The purpose of the body poses exercise was to explore how movement affects emotions. What came out in the situation were body memories and feelings related to safety.

The exercise consisted of a transition between two postures: one curled up into a contracted pose, even fetus-like on the ground, and then elevating the body from that crouched position to a 'super woman pose', that is, an expanded pose with legs wide and arms up and spread apart. This exercise resonates with Peter Levine's (2015) somatic therapy of 'pendulation' between contraction and expansion, which addresses the procedural traumatic memory in which contraction has become the dominant state of existence (see Hast, 2018a). In our exercise, the movement was done with the entire body. I anticipated that the participants would feel better in an extended pose ('power posing'), but it turned out that some of the younger participants and one of the young women experienced the curled-up position, with the arms protecting the body, as safety.

The exercise was, nevertheless, not too serious. The students laughed, and I went along with their funny gestures. At least in one of the sessions, which I audio-recorded, the participants mimicked each other's voice pitch and volume when transitioning between poses. When they repeated my words (in English) 'go big, big, big', the sound was progressively deeper and louder, while when we went down into a contracted position, 'go small, small, small', the sound was higher in pitch but thinner and quieter. I do not know who led the soundscape: we collectively, I or the participants. But, as the girls and young women had trained with the music and synchronising their voices for weeks, it was easy for them to take part in the movements by using their voices. In fact, the emergence of a sense of a collective body takes place in just such moments when it becomes hard or impossible to determine who is the leader and who is the follower. Thus, as we moved, we also used our voices to reflect that movement, together, attuned with each other.

After the exercises, we discussed how they felt. In a class for young women, one facilitator said she felt strong when in an open and extended position. Hales, who was translating for me, asked those who felt better in an open position to raise their hand, and all but one did. The young woman who did not raise her hand had been hustling about the entire class, holding a feather duster in her hand and teasing others with it. During other classes, too, she sought attention, and I learned that she had experienced great losses in her life. She had difficulties concentrating, but she always joined the musical part of the class. So, the young woman who was outgoing, but easily

distracted, was the one who felt better in a small position, holding her body within her arms. 'I felt safe', she said bravely, when her experience differed from that of the others.

Hypervigilance is a frequent symptom of traumatic stress, which can be addressed through body techniques for calming the body's central nervous system (see e.g. Levine, 2017). Movement techniques are an effective approach to self-discovery and healing trauma (Van der Kolk, 2014). Movement work for emotional regulation and body awareness is an exploration into self and relationality. What I mean by exploration is that there are multiple techniques and multiple lived experiences of the same movement exercise. The effects of movement are individually and uniquely experienced, and there is no linear and universal causality. So rather than proving that a certain movement technique causes an effect, I would propose that the feedback from the participants illustrate their curiosity in what their bodies can do, and how they feel in their bodies; that is, an orientation towards embodied knowledge.

As regards the question of which pose felt better, a difference emerged amongst the young women between those who had reached their teenage years and the younger ones: while the older students felt better in an open position, the younger ones all said they liked the contracted position better (raising hands when asked). In the younger females' class, some of the students said that they felt comfortable in a contracted position, and one girl said she felt happy in this position. One girl said that, when curled up, she remembered the time when she was small. One of the facilitators explained that she also remembered her childhood in the contracted position, and in an expanded position, she felt like her problems had gone away. Next, another facilitator said that being in a curled pose made her think of her deceased mother, while being in an open position made her feel responsible and grown-up. Another facilitator said that she felt better in an open position because she felt like she could do whatever she wanted. Movement aroused body memories and emotions attached to them. Such memories emerge from the non-linguistic part of the self, the thinking body. Movement and attending to sensations are also future-oriented, as they open up possibilities. As reported by the children themselves, capoeira gave them hope (Capoeira al-Shababi, 2018).

Movement for a Mindful Body

I have proposed in this chapter a participatory method which begins with the body. Such research can only be conducted in an environment of trust. The capoeira class at the Za'atari camp was a safe space where participants trusted the teachers and trusted that no one would get hurt, and that they would be treated with respect and confidentiality.

Through different body exercises, I found out how at least some of the girls and young women taking part in the capoeira classes experienced their bodies as minded, knowing and remembering in movement. Such an exercise is hard for anyone, and it is intimate. Even though the participants had not been exploring their sensations and emotions after any particular exercise, they had a habit of creating corporeal dialogues in capoeira. Their focus was on their bodies when they were practicing capoeira. This was the result of practice. In the beginning of the programmes, Hales told me, most of the students hesitated to express themselves, but in just a couple of months, their courage to move, sing and speak up had increased significantly.

Figure 3.1 is a simplified categorisation of the exercises and how they relate to being a body as a self, as an inter-subjective self and as a self in time.

Tapping and breathing bring to mind sensations and emotions associated with them. The self is embodied, thus reconnecting with one's body is an exercise of self-awareness, reminding the individual that *I am a body*, *I am here* and *I am real*. Giving and receiving movement impulses means relating to another body in space. Emotions are then aroused in interaction with and proximity to each other. At the camp, the exercise was experienced as control of another body, and the participants were more comfortable with pushing than being pushed. Alternating between contracted and expanded poses was meant to enhance awareness of how emotions change in movement. The young women felt better in an open pose, while younger girls experienced safety when curled up. Some participants remembered their childhood in a position where they held themselves in their own arms.

Having a discussion right after the exercises helped the group to discover how movement relates to emotions. Mindful body work can assist in healing within a community by enhancing bodyself awareness and emotional regulation by creating new body memories—keeping in mind that, in such environments as a closed camp, space sets certain limits to empowerment, and that empowerment is unstable and not straightforward. Except for the tapping, squeezing and breathing, the capoeira classes in the camp were composed of just such exercises of relationality, or ‘kinespheric meetings’, such as mirroring, mimicking, playing capoeira and pendulating between contraction and expansion through attacks and escapes (Hast, 2018a).

In the group, everyone participated but not everyone spoke. Yet, bodily knowledge was created in the moment, which is often not reducible to words. The body stores new memories even if they are not consciously processed. Our bodyminds are ever changing, whether we are aware of it or not. Furthermore, the fact that some children kept silent does not mean they did not reflect on their bodily experience. For those who did not speak up, the experience still happened, and they took their own space in movement.

Movement changes a person, even if it can be difficult to measure how and how much, especially if the capoeira programme runs only for a limited period. Sara, one of the facilitators, told me that she believes that capoeira changes the entire body. It is not just a physical change, but a change in emotions as a result of moving together. Sara told me, ‘I enjoy when Lauren says, “Let’s do a roda”, and we hold hands. I truly see joy in the eyes of the girls. Like “yeeeh”, and then we stamp our feet. Honestly, I swear to God, I wished the class would not end’ (Personal communication, 15 January 2018). In my interviews with facilitators (Personal communications, 11–22 January 2018), and in the interviews conducted by Capoeira al-Shababi (2018), male and female participants reported positive changes in their bodies and increased focus and self/emotional control due to capoeira. Two such changes were not getting irritated and provoked as easily as before, and the capacity to calm oneself in a stressful interaction.

Through a pedagogy designed for and with a vulnerable community, capoeira is turned into embodied knowledge which actively connects the bodyself and emotions into a non-fragmented whole. From the perspective of trauma, getting in touch with the mindful body enhances a sense of safety, agency and solace. Movement is the language in which the participants can ‘talk’ about difficult issues in movement, including losses, insecurities and pains, but also share the joy of playing, learning and sharing.

Figure 3.1 Body as a self, as an inter-subjective self and as a self in time.

Conclusion

Through our presence as bodies in movement, we can make participatory research embodied. Movement work is not automatically ethical, but we can think about the ethics of research with movement. Movement is work through the senses, and an embodied methodology challenges, at least, the mistaken view that the body does not matter. What I want to say through my research, to girls and women in particular, is that your bodies do matter, your body is you, and what you feel in your bodyself is important. By asking questions about embodiment, I am making bodies matter in the moment. To develop a sensitivity toward others' knowledge is, for me, a corporeal practice. The fact that the young women and girls in the room wanted to do these movements together with me, and share their experiences, taught me the importance of listening even more carefully and not underestimating or neglecting the insight and understanding that is nurtured within a community, and amongst children.

This research is not grand theory, nor does it fit into a standardised academic narrative. Perhaps it can, however, help us appreciate and nurture the insights of an undermined and overlooked margins. I believe the corporeal participatory approach to research can be also reparative (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003). It is reparative as a result of the refusal to reproduce only pain stories, and it is reparative as a transformation of research practice. I cannot get the people I met out of that camp, but choosing to work through participation and movement, I can evoke questions that are relevant for decolonising research. In the marionette exercise, for example, controlling the movement of another body, following movement or resisting it, are tactile routes into feeling one's boundaries and their violations. Body work can also promote conceptual thinking: what a particular body can do is always cultural, social and political. Body work is theoretical work, building insight in the moment of movement.

The capoeira classes with different attunement and awareness exercises developed the participants' sense of their bodies—brought the body to mind, and mind to body as a conscious practice. The exercises I conducted opened up the possibilities to consciously think about, discuss and name sensations and emotions right after the exercise.

Capoeira might seem like a rather insignificant recreational activity at a refugee camp, but the work of Capoeira al-Shababi took refugees' lives, women's lives and children's lives seriously. The small organisation was ambitious in transferring capoeira body knowledge to the camp's inhabitants rather than imposing structures which would make people even more dependent, helpless and hopeless. This was done by helping the young Syrians get in touch with their inner worlds, and the world they are invaluable parts of. The capoeira trainers of Capoeira al-Shababi were creating a body-based model for participatory engagement, which can be of great value for anyone who works with marginalised communities.

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