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More and more it seems to me ... that when I write, what I am really trying to do is dance, and because it is impossible, because dancing is free of language, I am never satisfied with writing ... to dance is to make oneself available (for pleasure, for an explosion, for stillness) ... The abstract connections it provokes in its audience, of emotion with form, and the excitement from one's world of feelings and imagination – all of this derives from its vanishing ... But writing, whose goal is to achieve a timeless meaning, has to tell itself a lie about time; in essence, it has to believe in some form of immutability.

Nicole Krauss, *Forest Dark* (2017)

Because dance is nuanced, diverse and complex, we would like to acknowledge that the format of this book – which relies on the written word – limits our ability to fully document or understand the various ways dance can inform or facilitate peacebuilding. After all, writing about dance poses inherent challenges because it offers only one way among many of understanding and analysing dance.

We recognise that writing about dance is challenging because ‘the very act of dancing always seems to evade attempts to set it down on paper’.¹ Yet we persevere in our intention to expand the dialogue around peacebuilding.

While recognising the challenges, we continue to find meaning in attempting to write about dance, or perhaps – in rare moments of inspiration – to dance writing. We hope you will follow along with us and maybe even shift perspectives and directions as we try

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to work out the steps, improvise and ultimately convey meaning through the admittedly limited medium of words.

Lesley

In researching my first book, *Youth Peacebuilding: Music, Gender, and Change*, I explored the use of music as a tool to engage youth in reducing and preventing violence.² More specifically, the research for that book included participant observation and semi-structured interviews with young people involved in musical peacebuilding programmes in Australia and Northern Ireland. Studying these programmes provided a uniquely deep look at young people's experiences of everyday violence and how they approached peacebuilding in their local cultural contexts. That project contributed to theoretical and practical debates and discussions around youth political participation, the gendered landscape of conflict environments and creative approaches to pursuing peace. In particular, I explored how music could foster peacebuilding by offering an alternative means for dialogue,³ helping people create and recreate identities for themselves and others,⁴ and offering a tool that could help create safe spaces for such dialogue and identity work, often in challenging circumstances.

While my research has taken me in many directions in the decade since I completed the fieldwork that underpinned that first book, I always feel drawn to return to reflections on creative approaches to peace, especially the ways they can engage youth. At the best of times, this has taken the form of working to further analyse and share the findings from my research on dance and peacebuilding. While my earlier work dealt with dance as part of a broader range of musical practices for peacebuilding,⁵ since then I have explored dance more specifically, and this book is the culmination of that work to date. As a lifelong lover of dance, it is a joy to be able to consider the subject in a book-length format. Moreover, having the chance to do that work in collaboration with Erica Rose, a

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professional dance practitioner, offers a wonderful opportunity to challenge my own thoughts, hone my insights and, hopefully, share them with our audience in an accessible way. I thank you in advance for your patience with any missteps.

Erica Rose

As a self-proclaimed dance activist, I have an ongoing curiosity about the ways in which dance functions in our lives and societies balanced with the enquiry and reflection of academic research. Throughout my professional dance career, I have had the opportunity to glimpse many facets and varied elements of dance practice and performance. Combined with my ongoing interest and work in peacebuilding, my curiosity extends to the ways in which dance and peacebuilding interact. I also see my work as a cultural translator, between the cognitive and the embodied, striving to find the ways in which written language can convey movement. Through my doctoral research, I investigated the ways in which creative dance interacts with peacebuilding in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on the Philippines and Fiji, working directly with local peacebuilders. My research also engaged in ongoing reflective practice regarding my role as an artist practitioner. It provided the platform to interrogate the places where my own boundaries overlap or bump into each other. My work in peacebuilding now takes me to Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, where dance continues to play a role in the interactions of local and regional peacebuilding.

I initially connected with Lesley through research during my master's degree, and immediately felt the joy of meeting a kindred spirit interested in arts and peacebuilding, as well as having great respect for her ongoing body of work. It is a privilege to work with her and to continue to expand and deepen my own thinking around the complexities of peacebuilding and its interaction with dance. In many ways, with dance, the ideas expressed in a series of movements or gestures hold a more complex meaning than is easily

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translatable to the written word. The physicality and multidimensionality of dance represent strengths, yet they also render the page an incomplete representation. I seek to continue to develop the ways in which I translate between forms, disciplines and practices, creating access without losing the essence of movement. Writing this book with Lesley continually pushed me to think beyond my established frames of reference.

Through this effort to distil the elements of dance at work in peacebuilding, rather than a dissection, I strive to gain and share a deepening understanding of dance and peacebuilding and, ultimately, to contribute to the fine-tuning or perhaps disruption of practice and ongoing inclusion of diverse worldviews in peacebuilding. This book is both a gathering and sharing of knowledge as well as an invitation to join the dance. Like any new dance, there are chances of bumping into others, yet it is from within these places of connection or possible missteps where the choreography is refined or new directions emerge. It is my hope that through this book, you will encounter new ideas and perspectives, and I thank you in advance for moving through them with us.

Shall we dance?

Notes

- 1 D. P. McCormack, 'Geographies for moving bodies: thinking, dancing, spaces', *Geography Compass*, 2 (2008), p. 1825.
- 2 L. J. Pruitt, *Youth Peacebuilding: Music, Gender, and Change* (Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2013).
- 3 L. J. Pruitt, 'Creating a musical dialogue for peace', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 16 (2011), pp. 81–103.
- 4 L. J. Pruitt, 'Music, youth and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland', *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 23 (2011), pp. 207–22.
- 5 L. J. Pruitt, 'They drop beats, not bombs: a brief discussion of issues surrounding the potential of music and dance in youth peace-building', *Australian Journal of Peace Studies*, 3 (2008), pp. 10–28.