

## APPROVALS

- ☐ Managing Editor
- ☐ Senior Editor
- ☐ [Subject Name]
- ☐ [Dept. Contact Name]
- ☐ Blurbs, Title Finalized
- ☐ Final Copyedit

Story Title 1: Confronting Privilege through  
Activism and Art with BFA Dance student Rahila  
Coats

Story Title 2: Dancing Abroad with BFA Senior  
Rahila Coats

Story Title 3: Capitalism, Dance, and Activism:  
Studying abroad as a student today

(by order of preference)

**TEASER TEXT** *Write this after you finish the story. All 3 must be different.*

<b>WEBSITE TEASER</b>  <i>This will appear in both the department newsletter and on their website.</i>	"I've never felt so welcomed into a community so quickly, and I didn't expect that."  BFA Dance senior Rahila Coats shares her insight into her study abroad experiences through UMN as well as how her experiences continue to shape her role as an activist in society.
<b>CLA FACEBOOK TEASER</b>	"I learned that's what I care about is community in dance spaces. And I really felt that..."  Rahila Coats, a senior in the BFA Dance program, speaks about her two unique study abroad experiences and offers insight into how her perspectives on activism and art have changed since returning to the states.

<b>CLA TWITTER TEASER</b>  <i>280 characters or fewer--URL and @/# count as characters</i>	#UMN BFA student Rahila Coats shares about her time abroad as a dancer, artist, and activist and how those experiences have shaped her perspectives on Western dance culture.
<b>DEPARTMENT FACEBOOK POST</b>  <i>This is not the same as the CLA teaser.</i>	<p>"I think that I just really found a lot more beauty and appreciation and the nuances of life."</p> <p>Senior BFA Dance student Rahila Coats shares her thoughts on her experiences abroad and how dance, activism, and travel have shaped her life.</p>
<b>DEPARTMENT TWITTER POST</b>  <i>280 characters or fewer--URL and @/# count as characters</i>	#UMN BFA student Rahila Coats shares about her time abroad as a dancer, artist, and activist and how those experiences have shaped her perspectives on Western dance culture.

By Amy Halbmaier

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Senior BFA Dance student, Rahila Coats, was influenced by the world of dance and performance at a very young age. Originally from South Minneapolis, she grew up watching her mom teach yoga and movement classes and eventually took advantage of the local theater scene in the Twin Cities by participating in summer intensives with Penumbra Theatre Company. She didn't expect dance to be her passion, but states "I kept on doing things that I love and it kept on being dance." Coats initially began her dancing career at Gustavus Adolphus College. However, it wasn't long before further fields called her name. During her first semester at Gustavus Adolphus, Coats was offered the opportunity to go on tour with a dance company to Atlanta. She accepted the offer and continued her courses online throughout the tour before eventually transferring to UMN for her sophomore year.

Maybe it was the initial taste of traveling the country at the age of eighteen, but Coats knew she was looking for creative experiences even further away than Atlanta and Minneapolis. "I knew from when I went into my sophomore year that I was going to go abroad" she remarks. Knowing that these opportunities were available at UMN, she auditioned for the BFA program and started her journey.

## Jerusalem

After briefly learning about the *Gaga* dance technique when she was in highschool, Coats became impassioned by the style, which differed greatly from the Westernized

styles taught in the U.S. However, the only way to continue the study of the *Gaga* technique is to travel to the instructors and creators in Jerusalem. After hearing that this specific program was available at UMN, her decision to participate in the BFA Dance program was solidified.

"We took class with the founder. We worked really closely and all the people that we took classes from in *Gaga* technique were people that were either in the company or had been in the company" Coats shares about her experience abroad. However, despite having the opportunity to study a technique that she was so passionate about, Coats began to feel the weight of her experience abroad in the Middle East. "I after I went there, I knew that trying to do art in this space that is supporting an apartheid, my involvement there was a huge privilege. And it wasn't furthering the benefit of a lot of people, specifically Palestinian people of color and Palestinian Muslim people in that space" she explains. For Coats, this was reason to find experiences elsewhere.

Not ready to go back to UMN so soon, Coats turned to the UMN Study Abroad website: "I looked at the University Minnesota programs, and then I looked under dance and they had Ghana there." So, Coats packed up and headed to Accra, Ghana for her spring semester.

## Ghana

Where dance in Jerusalem is fairly westernized, Coats found a completely different experience waiting for her in Accra. Despite having taken African Diaspora movement classes as part of her BFA curriculum, Coats states "it was very different being in the space, understanding the drummer, having seven hours a week of one particular dance from one tribe."

While in Ghana, Coats was the only student from America and one of only two students from abroad in her program. Where this could potentially be a scenario that students fear will set them up for isolation, Coats says "I've never felt so welcomed into a community so quickly, and I didn't expect that." It was that feeling of community that helped Coats learn what she appreciates most about dance. "I learned that's what I care about is community in dance spaces. And I really felt that, especially when I was in Ghana." Such a unique community in dance was not something Coats was used to feeling in the Twin Cities. Although she's supported by mentors, dancers, and artists alike, she maintains that dancing is appreciated differently there than it is in the U.S. due to the lack of capitalism.

## Activism and Dance

Coats explains that often in Westernized dance societies like the U.S., dance is practiced within a very capitalistic lens. “If I do one move right, if I’m the one that’s capable of doing that, then I can get this job and get this opportunity and then get paid and be able to buy things. It’s a part of this constant cycle that we have.” She adds that even the spaces where dance is practiced in Western culture are rooted in capitalism. The act of choosing who gets to appear on a stage based off of who has the money to pay for performances is a deeply capitalistic trend.

As she returned to UMN, Coats brought with her new ideas about what dance and activism mean to her moving forward. For Coats, dance can be an avenue for activism by just having bodies in a space. She elaborates “the power that dance specifically has is that certain bodies onstage hold different histories and when those bodies move in certain ways, that can strike a chord with us subconsciously or consciously and help us understand things in a different way.” Coats recognizes and has accepted her role as an activist in society since she believes that “in everything you do, you take a stance. Everything that you buy, the spaces that you enter, or even just when you choose to speak up, or when you choose not to, it’s a step.”

And as far as stepping across borders goes, Coats recognises and acknowledges the privilege she experienced as an American student abroad. Those feelings have further fueled her activism. “With an American passport,” she explains, “you can really go anywhere, you can be anywhere. And I think I want to continue to explore that and find ways to use my passport in a way that can benefit others instead of just benefiting myself.”

Coats reflects on her experiences abroad “If you can go abroad, I highly recommend it. I think also, understand why you’re doing it too and for whom. Don’t go just to go, know why you’re doing it.” She recommends the experience for the good, bad, or ugly that it may offer. She reflects “I think that I just really found a lot more beauty and appreciation and the nuances of life. And knowing that there are things that I will never fully understand, like I will never fully understand what it’s like to be a Palestinian or to be an Israeli in those areas.”

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*This story was written by an undergraduate student in CLAgency. [Meet the team.](#)*