

## True Selves: Emerging in Emergency through Clinical Dance Therapy

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**Abstract :** This paper presents research findings from 35 Clinical Dance Therapy sessions conducted with migrant women aged 24 to 55 from North and Sub-Saharan Africa residing in hosting facilities in Northern Italy. It explores trauma arising from forced displacement, dispossession, and perilous migration journeys undertaken as survival strategies. While the therapeutic discourse on refugee trauma typically centers on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), this study shifts focus to the transformative potential of embodied therapies in trauma recovery. Clinical Dance Therapy (CDT) offers an integrative, non-verbal modality that reconnects individuals to their physicality, fostering the emergence of the authentic self rather than perpetuating cycles of traumatic repetition. By integrating movement, rhythm, and bodily expression, CDT creates a somatic bridge to agency, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, even within emergency or resource-constrained settings. This paper critically examines the role of embodied therapies in addressing complex trauma, emphasizing their capacity to cultivate resilience and psychological reintegration. Additionally, it discusses the secondary effects on practitioners, highlighting the risks of vicarious traumatization, compassion fatigue, and the need for reflective practice in trauma work. The findings contribute to a holistic understanding of trauma management by demonstrating how dance therapy can support sustainable pathways from trauma victimization to empowered survivorship. The paper concludes by advocating for greater inclusion of embodied and creative approaches in trauma-informed care frameworks for displaced and marginalized populations.

**Keywords :** trauma, clinical dance therapy, refugee trauma, embodied therapies, migrant health

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