DEBATS · Annual Review,7 · 2022 — 103 / 117
DOI: doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-136-1.6
ISSN 0212-0585 (print)
ISSN 2530-3074 (digital)

Dancing in the street as feminist empowerment: the choreographic discourse of the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses collectives

Maria Patricio-Mulero
UNIVERSITÉ TOULOUSE 1 CAPITOLE
maria.patricio-mulero@ut-capitole.fr
ORCID: 0000-0001-5333-9727

Received: 18/05/2021
Accepted: 21/11/2021

ABSTRACT
The reaffirmation of female bodies in public spaces is a constant in feminist social movements. Indeed, the role of the female body in public spaces and conveying a social message is vindicated by artists from all disciplines, whether by occupying the streets in protest of unequal women's rights and equality or sexual harassment and rape, or in other social demonstrations. In the field of dance, some companies perform expressly in public spaces with the precise aim of conquering these arenas as a stage to make female bodies visible, highlighting their diversity and demanding more equality and freedom. In this article, we use collective interviews with two French companies committed to promoting feminism in the streets *BellyWarda* (FatChanceBellyDance©) and L'Armée des Roses (performing the cancan), to analyse the choreographic discourse related to this concept. The study examined the appropriation of public spaces, interactions with the public at large and their reception of these performances, social links between dancers, and the transmission of feminist values. Observation of these dances and the interview outcomes was addressed from the perspectives of the sociology of emotions, phenomenology of urban spaces, and women's studies. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented an analysis of the public reception of these street actions, but the ongoing situation in France in which dance was considered a 'non-essential cultural asset' during the second lockdown (when this research took place), was discussed.

Keywords: feminism, dance, public space, empowerment, sense of place, sisterhood

Acknowledgements: My sincere thanks to the dancers interviewed from the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses troupes for their generosity.

SUMMARY

Corresponding author: Maria Patricio-Mulero. Université Toulouse 1 Capitole. Department of Languages and Cultures, 2 Rue du Doyen Gabriel Marty, 31000, Toulouse, France.
Suggested citation: Patricio-Mulero, M. (2022). Dancing in the street as feminist empowerment: the choreographic discourse of the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses collectives *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society, 7*, 103-117. DOI: http://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-136-1.6

THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF MOVEMENT

The equation of women's right to be artistically present in public spaces, especially in cities, is an issue that has been defended by feminists for decades. The pairing of women and culture is also a key demand because of the discrimination and gender violence present in these fields. If we focus on the field of dance, putting the female body at its centre, and we place it in an urban public space, we can observe the presence of different powerful challenges that, in some cases, can result in the development of a militant and committed following. These disciples aim to simultaneously make visible and disseminate female choreographic art with all its technical demands and aesthetic requirements, alongside the recognition of women's bodies in public spaces—a concept that is still foreign to them even today and which they can appropriate during choreographic performances.[1]

Henri Lefebvre pointed out that, for women throughout history, cities have been both a place of struggle and the stakes of the struggle itself (Lefebvre, 1968). They are not only the stage for feminist positions, but also the purpose of these demands: in other words, the tenant that urban spaces belong to half the population—which itself has the same right to live in safety, work, represent themselves, exist, and show their art. Leslie Kern claims that her everyday urban experiences are gendered, with her gender identity determining how she moves through the city. "My gender is broader than my body, but my body is the place of my lived experience, it is where my identity, my history and the spaces I have inhabited intersect, where everything mixes and stays written on my skin" (Kern, 2021). Among many others, the #MeToo movement stresses that rape culture reminds women of what is expected of them: that they must limit their freedom to walk, work, have fun, and occupy spaces in cities. In other words, "the message is clear: the city, in reality, is not for you" (Kern, 2021).

1 As in the case of the 'The rapist is you' protests that sprang from public demonstrations in Chile.

Since its creation in the 1980s in San Francisco, FatChanceBellydance (FCBD© Style) has claimed to be a feminist dance, evolving from the fusion of belly dance with influences from flamenco and traditional Indian dances, and reconstructing an orientalist imaginary in which tribes[2] of women act both outdoors and on stage, claiming the sorority and visibility of all their bodies. In France, several tribes practice this discipline, which is based on partial improvisation through a shared language between the dancers. The BellyWarda tribe in Toulouse has made its willingness to act—especially in public spaces in order to claim the place of women—particularly explicit.

Another French dance group in the public space with a clearly feminist will is L'Armée des Roses, which recreates the original cancan, which is, in particular, linked to the context of the Paris Commune (Lissagaray, 2021). In this case, the dancers have decided to take the dance from the Pigaille cabarets to interpret the cancan in the streets of Montmartre, with an aesthetic and a message as it had been understood at its beginning, to promote the original feminist, subversive, and revolutionary values: women, unaccompanied, at popular dances, attracting attention with their acrobatics and displaying their bodies, despite the fact that all three of these acts were prohibited.

For this study, qualitative and semi-structured collective interviews were conducted with the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses collectives with the aim of understanding the staging of the feminist claim of female bodies in the public space through dance and to understand the distinctive characteristics of social interaction with the public and among the dancers in this type of semi-improvised artistic performance.

The BellyWarda[3] company, led by its artistic director, Caroline Achouri, has existed in Toulouse since 2009. In turn, FatChanceBellyDance©, created by Caroleena Nericcio,[4] elaborates a semi-improvisational choreographic language that allows dancers to communicate movements among themselves through subtle gestures and in non-hierarchical formations in which each member leads the tribe in turns. Nericcio evolved the belly dance associated with cabarets and the male gaze towards feminism in the 1980s in her San Francisco studio, and with it sought to achieve the goal of dancing among women.

The BellyWarda are one of the French tribes that perform the most shows on the street and, beyond performing on festive or sporadic one-off occasions—such as in flash mobs—they have created a joint project with the Afro-Brazilian batucada company Sardinhas da Mata, for the feminist appropriation of urban spaces. The collaboration materialised in the *Place aux femmes* show in the Arnaud Bernard square in Toulouse in September 2019.

The L'Armée des Roses[5] collective was born from the meeting of Andrée Gine and Antoinette Marchal, who left a semi-professional French cancan company to dance in the street, particularly in the Parisian neighbourhood of Montmartre. They do not claim to be a show production company, but rather, to have the artistic and educational vocation of making the historical context of the origins of the dance known.

> Women must reappropriate their history. When they tell me that the cancan is the Moulin Rouge and that the dancers are flirtatious, I'm outraged. We know the names of the dancers from the second half of the 19th century and know what they did, but after La Goulue or Jane Avril, we no longer know them. I think it's essential to put them in the centre, alongside the histori-

2 Currently, belly dance and its fusion evolutions are the matter of full debate in cultural studies. Among other things, the word tribe and the very name of the discipline are being questioned. In the case of FCBD©, the style was previously referred to as American tribal style.

3 http://www.carolineachouri.com/tbelly/bellywarda.html

4 https://fcbd.com/

5 https://www.larmeedesroses.com/

> cal dimension, which involves activities such as recreating the costumes. We don't want to go on stage, there are already great professionals doing that: we want to broaden the public [mind], make them discover history and, if they like it, invite them to go to cabarets (Andrée Gine, Paris, 2021).

With the turn of the 20th century, the cancan left the popular dances from which it was created to go on stage, became completely choreographed, and was renamed the French cancan. This was when the subversive message of the dancers was lost; their individuality also dissolved into a professional collective of uniform bodies in terms of their morphology and costumes (Maruta, 2014). L'Armée des Roses, which is committed to spreading original values through conferences and street art activities, have recently started a collaboration with the burlesque artist Mamzelle Viviane.

> What I really like about L'Armée des Roses is that its cancan is committed and full of values. It seems fantastic to me that the history of the cancan is being talked about again, [as well as] how the dance was polished and the soul that they are now claiming had been lost. When the cancan was born during the Paris Commune, women played a crucial role in society, but then [after] they [society] wanted them to go back into the home, which represented a regression. Later, the Moulin Rouge changed the image of the cancan to make it something acceptable and commercial. They simplified it, turned it into a luxury, and gave it an aesthetic that the laundresses and prostitutes who danced it at the beginning did not have (Mamzelle Viviane, Paris, 2021).

From the street dances of these groups, we will analyse the conjunction of demands for the prominence of women in dance and in public spaces. We start from the hypothesis that a relevant combination of emotions is mobilised through the performances of the companies, and that these act in multiple ways. Firstly, the emotions of the dancers when dancing in the street, in an environment where there is no 'spectator pact' like that in theatres and where their experience as women reappears because of the daily situations of violence, harassment, insecurity, and discomfort that they face. The dancers have expectations of the improvised public, the appropriated space, and each other as a community.

Secondly, the public perceives public spaces differently because their function is varying from being that of a pedestrian passageway to one of an artistic stage; they can become infused with the emotion of the dancers in an unprecedented context and can perceive the transmission of the feminist values the dancers intend to communicate. Thirdly, even though France prohibited any kind of street performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, the aspirations of the dancers, who recognise the importance of culture, particularly that of outdoor dance, as promoting social ties, remained intact.[6]

THE EMOTIONS OF DANCE IN PUBLIC SPACES

The social construction of emotions is still an important debate, especially regarding the universality of the so-called primary emotions (anger, fear, sadness, and happiness), although its link with the body is evident (Scribano, 2013). Turner affirmed that the activation, experience, and expression of emotions are connected to the human body, although it is also true that emotions are channelled by culture and structural contexts. The so-called secondary emotions, which are combinations of the primary ones, would show the complexity of the construction, which vary from one person to another, and include shame, guilt, or fear—experienced by these

6 The government of Emmanuel Macron decided to ban cultural events during the entire first and second confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cultural sector demanded the application of social distancing measures in exchange for maintaining activities and a debate swept through the sector that questioned the categorisation of live culture as a 'non-essential service' and as a necessity and right of citizens (Bernard, 2021).

women when performing in the street—as well as wonder and respect—experienced by the audiences at the shows. Turner also stated that, like language, the way emotions are expressed is also dictated by culture; even though there are only a hundred or so human emotions, their manifestation through facial expressions, body gestures, or speech is culturally diverse (Turner, 2009).

In symbolic interactionism, emotional dynamics are at the centre of the interaction process, whereby individuals seek to confirm themselves, particularly in conflict situations (Turner and Stets, 2005). Cooley determined that individuals experience positive emotions, such as pride, when their identity is accepted, and negative emotions, such as shame, anguish, anger, or guilt, when it is not. In this line, Scheff (1988) recognised that pride and shame were the gyroscopes of human action. When someone is treated with deference, the individual evaluates themselves positively, experiences pride, and mutual respect is created with the person who honoured them, thereby resulting in a social bond and solidarity. Shame, which arises when a negative assessment is received, is a painful emotion because it attacks one's integrity and value, which is why individuals use defence mechanisms. Pride and shame are two powerful emotions that artists frequently feel when in front of their audiences while, all too often, fear is another emotion experienced by women in public spaces.

Turner (2005) developed a theory that described the existence of mechanisms by which emotions would arise under two basic conditions: firstly, when positive or negative sanctions are received, and secondly, when expectations are responded to positively or negatively. When positive approval is received or expectations are met, the individual feels satisfied or happy. If the individual had doubts about the result of their actions, they would experience pride. Expectations are part of every artistic achievement, and in the particular case of street dance, uncertainty increases due to a lack of knowledge regarding the space and potentially sporadic public.

For Turner, as in psychoanalytic theories, negative emotions alter emotional dynamics. Shame would comprise the primary emotions of sadness, anger towards oneself, and fear of negative consequences or failure to meet expectations. Guilt would be similar, but with an important difference: although it is also part of sadness, individuals feel more fear of the consequences of violating the 'moral order' and rage against themselves for having done so. Moral order is a concept widely applied to the place of women in society: what spaces in the city are suitable for them, how they should appear in public, and what interactions are acceptable. Kern (2021) exposed the limits women apply, due to patriarchal dynamics, when circulating through urban spaces. These designate a precise place for them and "finally make them understand that the city is not for them."

In dramaturgical theories about emotions, this is based on the fact that society works like a play on a stage. Thus, Goffman (1959) explained that, in their dramatic presentation to the public, individuals use a cultural script of ideologies, values, and norms, supported by staging elements such as costumes, space, or objects. Presenting oneself is one more way to strategically manipulate situations, with the goal of avoiding embarrassment. In the case of street dance companies, we will see that the staging based on the choreographies and costumes responded to the objective of showing choreographic expertise but, in the cases studied, they also showed their identity as women, a female collective and feminist discourse claiming the city through positive emotions.

Regarding the emotions of the dancers, Collins speaks of the rituals of interaction when individuals were there, co-present and engaging in common activities. Co-presence implies a focus of attention and synchronisation of body language that increases the level of collective effervescence and positive emotional energy. At the same time, when positive emotional energy increases, effervescence and attention also increase. These processes, which

feed back into themselves, cause the level of collective solidarity to increase. The interplay of co-present dancers occurs during an interaction as strong and essential as that of choreographed movements, which have a direct appeal to the female body, particularly those body parts that have been censored by the patriarchy (the belly, legs, and torso, etc.). Based on rehearsing, each person in the group of dancers ends up appropriating certain movements, signatures that become symbols of their individuality within the group, and which refer to previous personal experiences or their personality and that reinforce the links between them. The communication between dancers during the choreographic execution is also a reason strong social bonds are built (Muntanyola Saura, 2016).

The experience of dancing in public results in a very meaningful collective emotional charge. It is both a challenge in a space that women still have to appropriate and in which they must overcome fear, and a moment that transmits a certain pride in the female body to the public; these are all socially constructed emotions that are easily intelligible through choreographic discourse.

THE CHALLENGES OF DANCING IN THE STREET

Although the objective of this article was not to explore how the sense of a place is built through dance, it is important to point out some phenomenological theories that can help us understand how seeing dance in a public space provides viewers with a new framework with which to relate to space.

Atkinson and Duffy (2019) studied how dance generates the sensuality of a place: by observing bodies in motion in space, we can become aware of a certain corporeality in a grey, functional, inert space, and a kind of sense of place is created. Without neglecting other senses, the sight of bodies dancing awakens the viewer's emotions. When we respond positively to the movements of others it is because of the way their bodies occupy a particular space. For this reason, the choice of places in which to dance is so important and the attitude of the dancers generates emotions in the spectators: while the show lasts, pavements become an artistic place where a corporeal embodiment of meaning takes place.

Not only do spectators perceive the public space differently when they happen to attend a dance performance, but it is also relevant to ask oneself about the appropriation of the space by the dancers during the performance. Casey (1993) talked about the 'sentient body' and the way our own bodies, when they are in or move about in a place, are related to the way we experience space and make sense of it. Throughout the history of dance, choreography has communicated the way the body moves in space and the way the body makes space visible. The public's response is also affective: depending on their own experience, they could empathise with the movements, find them simply pleasant, think about applying them themselves or, well, simply admire their virtuosity.

Atkinson and Duffy recall that dance and music have the ability to 'speak' to us more directly than words and that observing a body in a specific space makes us aware of all the lived relationships that belong to that place. Likewise, seeing the effort of a human body provokes affection in the spectator, whether they perceive the effort of the body or, in a graceful performance, they see the control the dancers have over their bodies; this affection towards the body is distributed in space. The viewer perceives the intention of the body and the degree of effort involved that emerges in the visual environment and is therefore able to introduce a corporeality and affection towards the space.

When executing their performances in the street, the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses affirm that the main challenge is how they are received. Although the dancers work on their technique for weeks, study the costumes and anticipate the route, the surprise factor of pedestrians is the greatest difficulty and, at the same time, often provides them with the

most recurring sense of satisfaction when dancing in the street.

The BellyWarda FCBD style is a semi-improvisation discipline in which the 'leader' transmits the movements to be followed through gestural codes to the rest of the dancers—who are strategically placed—with a very precise language that often seems like a prepared choreography. The leader then changes position, at which point another dancer begins to direct the movements of the company. Given the constant improvisation and subtlety of the key movements, the dancers must constantly concentrate. The BellyWarda affirm that they prefer to dance in the street rather than in theatres because of the contact it allows them to have with the public, whom they cannot see when they perform in the dark of an auditorium.

> The interaction with the public in the street is real. When we dance spontaneously and without charging, the public did not come for us. They were passing by, and the challenge is that the passers-by who see us dance [decide to] stay. It is a public that does not lie. If they are not interested, they leave, and if there is something that really excites them in what we do, they stay. Sometimes they even wait for us to ask questions (Caroline Achouri, 2021).

According to Casey (2020), emotion can be peripheral, in a sense that within the limits of individual feeling, far from being strictly subjective and fleeting, [emotions] can be overcome to communicate with others and operate as a type of diffusion of one's own experience towards the rest of society. The BellyWarda experience the emotion of the dance, geared towards female pride and sorority, on different levels. First, it passes from the individual emotion, materialised in the chain of the leader's semi-improvised movements and signals to the other dancers, who, by decoding them, can experience the same emotion as the leader. The dancers dance, first of all, among themselves, and additionally, they dance for an audience, even though that is not their main motivation—as established by the discipline itself, and interaction with the spectators, which is practically non-existent. The emotion is transmitted to the public simply in the act of observing.

Paradoxically, because of the fact they are dancing in the street, the direct reaction of the public—through their facial expressions—is one of the main stimuli, without this interfering with the execution of the choreography or the satisfaction of expectations. If the reaction is negative, with grimaces, for example, "we don't care, we continue dancing," explained Saliah Dahrmani. "It is not only the public who don't lie," explains Caroline Massieux, "we dancers don't either. We have fun with each other. It's what makes the public be with us in an authentic way. Street dance is the best school [of dance]."

If, in the FCBD format, semi-improvisation is the usual procedure, when dancing in the street, this methodology is reinforced in an unrepeatable performance while listening to the external environment. The BellyWarda emphasise that a lot of prior work goes into preparing the technique and the movement strategies of the tribe, and that the performance in the street allows them to "let go of all that. We can get into the spirit of dance with less calculation and more spontaneity, and that allows us to enjoy it more," said Fréderique Joucla.

> There is something very immediate in the street that we don't find on stage. We directly see the reaction of the public and we can readjust ourselves based on this as well. If, for example, we dance in the street for people who look the other way, nothing happens, we change direction to find another, more receptive public. Thanks to the FCBD format, we can readjust everything: the directions, the itinerary. There is an improvisation in the improvisation, not only in the choreographic style, but in the contact with the public. We never know who we will have as an audience. They might be drug pushers from Arnaud Bernard square, for example. As a director, I was worried about the

> performance in this square and the surprise is that they loved it and very respectfully asked us for autographs and selfies. I was afraid of aggressive or insulting reactions, but that didn't happen. And it's an audience that we would never find in a theatre (Achouri, 2021).

According to Achouri, the discipline itself was created to dance in the street. This is not the case with the performances of L'Armée des Roses, given that the cancan was never danced in the street and, from among the popular dances, it entered directly into cabarets. Therefore, their performative improvisation is done in a less codified way. As Andrée Gine explained, each one simply decides what step comes next and they adapt according to the characteristics of the space: monitoring the dirtiness of the floor, presence of glass or dangerous objects, and orography and paving, which is particularly complicated when wearing vintage boots.

> What I like about improvisation is that in a choreography we are thinking about what step is next, and you can read it on the face of the dancer, it generates pressure. Freedom is greater in improvisation and allows us, above all, to interact. Sometimes we have a 'soft' audience, and we don't know whether to take a slightly daring step or play a joke. Other times, on the other hand, you think if you can play even more with the public, because they are receptive. I have more interaction with the public the way we dance now (Andrée Gine, 2021).

The general reception of the public, despite the surprise factor and the occupation of public space, is generally incredibly positive and, therefore, meets the expectations of the dancers. The massive effect of the tribe of women dancing in coordination causes a 'hypnotic' effect (Massieux, 2021) and produces "a lot of joy, the sensation of traveling through music and dance" in the viewer (Dahrmani, 2021). The exotic aesthetics of FCBD dance emphasises this imaginary, constructed from Asian, Andalusian, and Hindu folklore. The performance of the of charge, is rewarded on some occasions with voluntary economic contributions by the public. The dancers are proud of the success of the reception and explain the satisfaction when positive evaluations come, especially ones from other women:

> Women of a certain age have told us that they wanted to learn to dance. It is particularly important that they project themselves, that they feel capable, despite what they may think about their body or their age. I was very moved (Dahrmani, 2021).

L'Armée des Roses also takes advantage of the good reception from the public to introduce its educational mission. Dressed as the cancan dancers of the 19th century, Andrée Gine and Antoinette Marchal invite the public to go to cabarets to "reverse prejudices." "People think that burlesque style is just a striptease. Literally, yes, it is, but not only that. We always have some contact with the public who then discover the story, which is much more revolutionary than it seems," explained Andrée Gine.

Mamzelle Viviane explained that, even in French cancan cabaret formats, it is a dance that particularly needs the audience's interaction, which is why she challenges them by making a shouting entrance. "The public can't be just a spectator; they're an actor whether they like it or not, and they must clap and stamp their feet. It's practiced in an exchange, the public is part of the game and, naturally, they like it, because it touches something intrinsic, a soul, a body, a story. There's a recognisable rhythm and it's pure joy."

Andrée Gine and Antoinette Marchal explained that they have never experienced a single attack on the street and that, on the other hand, they had had bad experiences when they performed with a dance company at private and company parties. Mamzelle Viviane explained that this happens less in burlesque in the theatre because of the incarnation of a character that "is not submissive, but [is] untouchable, unlike revue dancers, whom a part of the public does consider an object." L'Armée des Roses affirmed that attacks never take place in the

street, because it is an open space where the public itself is subjected to the gaze of the other passers-by. Mamzelle Viviane affirmed that "when we are artists in the street it's different from when we are women in the street. When we are women in the street, we demand to be able to exist without [experiencing] aggression. When we are street artists, they leave us alone because we have the strength to value art." Historically, a woman alone in the street has been questioned, she has not been able to afford the luxury of being invisible—unlike flâneurs (Elkin, 2016)—nor of attracting attention and dominating the space, given that this has been considered a transgression of the respectable feminine role. Therein lies the irony and, at the same time, the proud triumph of the dancers who do achieve visibility and respect.

The pedagogical mission of L'Armée des Roses, who are fascinated by the Paris Commune, is reinforced by their period costumes, something that distinguishes them from the famous image of the French cancan of the Moulin Rouge. Putting on skirts, boots, and bows is part of an artistic ritual that emotionally links them with the values they attribute to this revolutionary historical period.

> Personally, it's like I feel the story when we put on the suit. And most of the comments that they make to us are usually from older people to tell us 'thank you, because you transmit the cancan as it was born, as we want to see it.' These are often grandmothers, and I find it very nice, it is a small victory. After dancing, we talk a lot with people, we like to explain the history and there is an educational part. They don't come because we are pretty dancers, because, after the cancan, we are often all red! Above all, we show that, after all, we are human, and we sweat, and we just want to go for a drink (Antoinette Marchal, 2021).

For the BellyWarda, the transmission of the history of the dance is not part of their goals, but even so, viewers often ask them about the origins of this style:

> They see belly dance in the technique, but they see the costumes, which could be Hindu or Romani. And we explain to them that they are a bit of all these cultures at the same time, and that it is, rather, a representation of femininity, in a more universal way. As a director, I am also interested in not only showing different cultures, but also, different women. We are not photocopies, we are not the same age, nor the same morphology. And, regarding the costumes, on the street we each adopt the colours we want, while on stage we look for more harmony. This freedom shows the different faces of women (Achouri, 2021).

DANCERS IN PUBLIC SQUARES

The feeling of appropriation of the city was common between the two dance groups: being able to occupy the space, being visible, and sharing the street in a playful and respectful way. The dancers explained that, by dancing, they can show themselves without being disturbed, claiming the presence of their bodies, enhanced with attractive costumes. The fact that the performance is collective is what allows them to appropriate the space and attract the attention of pedestrians, with respect, in a show of community pride. The BellyWarda explain that the time when the show starts is when they most experience a collective force, especially at their entrance and the beginning of the choreography, while for L'Armée des Roses, who are a duo, it is a challenge to achieve the same goal. Both in the cancan and in FCBD, the dancers arrive with screams and to the noise of zills (finger cymbals).

The BellyWarda speak of a feeling of "adrenaline" and "joy," and Massieux explained how collective action generates emotions of self-improvement and empowerment: "You trust the dance, and the adrenaline forces you to improve yourself and give your best and enjoy the moment. As a woman, being able to be all together gives you a lot of strength. There is a feminine unit, there are a lot of us, and we all ac-

cept each other." Sorority, empathy and respect for all bodies is an aspect that materialises in the fact of dancing collectively in public spaces. "We form a pineapple; we make a single body. This happens more on the street than in theatres. The collective energy is felt in a more powerful way because we are not alone," said Joucla. "And our defects don't matter to us. What matters is that I'm dancing, and I accept my body as it is. The wardrobe does a lot, but it is above all due to the fact that we are all together, the public perceives it," added Dahrmani. Achouri explained that the troupe unit allows an empowerment that transcends the moment of the performance, to provide self-confidence:

> The fact of being together gives us a feeling of strength that we don't have when we're alone. We keep this collective feeling in ourselves. We won't let them touch us or interrupt us, we've imposed respect, and this helps us in our daily lives. The public also feels this feeling, they often tell us that we look like an army. When we arrive showing our bellies, they could insult us, but no one has ever dared to attack or disqualify us. The tribe of women commands respect (Achouri, 2021).

The BellyWarda explained that the specific FCBD wardrobe is of great help. Defined in every detail, it mixes aesthetics from India, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Maghreb, but the only thing it has in common with belly dance is that it leaves the belly exposed and that matte cotton fabrics and aged silver jewellery are preferred. The dancers wear wide sirwals with very wide superimposed skirts and this creates a visual effect of increasing the volume of the lower part of the body. The torso is covered with an Indian choli and a hand-decorated top, revealing the belly and part of the back. The use of turbans and flowers on the head also increases the volume of the upper part. The fact of wearing many artisan jewels intensifies the sound of the movements. The ensemble aims to attract attention, evoke a certain exoticism, and amplify the volume of moving body parts: the hips, waist, and torso, historically associated with the female body (Lhortolat, 2014).

The attraction of the clothing, together with the fact that the choreography is executed collectively based on the movements set by a changing leader, provokes an emotion in the dancers that transcends them: "I remember the Toulouse Carnival of 2019, which impressed me a lot. We arrived at the Rue de Metz, and it was as if we had taken possession of it. We wore luminous garlands and made slow movements. It was a very powerful feeling, much more physical than in the theatre" (Massieux, 2021).

This feeling of appropriation of the space was one shared with L'Armée des Roses, who, despite executing their movements in a duet or solo, explained that beyond provoking the surprise of the public, the change of scenery from the cabaret to the street enabled the pedagogical possibility of the values of the cancan and could even bring about a change in the spectators:

> As a woman, it's as if you've reappropriated the space, you've dominated the street. In the exchange with the public, when I explain what I'm doing there, the history of the cancan, if I'm in the street instead of a cabaret, it's, on the one hand, the creation of a new public, but also to say that I have the right to be there. If you're a man in the audience and you've been looking at me, you haven't whistled at me or put your hand on my ass; I might have moved it to dance, but you understood perfectly that it wasn't an invitation. If it's not so complicated to do it with me, do it with other women, let them take their place. There is a very powerful feeling of dominating the street. We don't necessarily want to dominate men, we just want to claim our place and our space (Andrée Gine, 2021).

Antoinette Marchal extended this right to all women artists to claim their presence on the street, but particularly those who work directly using their bodies, such as dancers or musicians unlike, for example, graffiti artists, who—because they work in the dark and clandestinely—occupy the space without conflict but also without providing the body in movement. The fact that dancers are exposed to daylight com-

plicates the situation, because the occupation of female bodies in the street is still not normal and the public does not decode the artistic pact: "When I danced alone in the street, in Strasbourg, people thought I was selling beer for Oktoberfest," she said.

CONVEYING FEMINIST VALUES

Kern (2021) talked about the 'city of friendship' between women as a revolutionary option: friendship relationships from the perspective of care relationships, without associated productivity and different from the heteropatriarchal family. In its origins, the FCBD had already moved away from interaction with the male audience of belly dance to concentrate on the 'tribe of women' who dance among themselves and for themselves. The cancan, for its part, was born from the desire to scandalise and protest against the control [the patriarchy] wanted to submit the bodies of women to in public dances.

Indeed, the creator of FCBD, Caroleena Nericcio, even included in their name the objective that this evolution of belly dance was not intended to be danced to please the public. "Fat chance you'll get anything but a belly dance show from me" is the expression that aims to educate the public that belly dances are to be appreciated artistically, without any connotation of erotic satisfaction. Nericcio barred men from entering her San Francisco studio and the tribes of women who formed as dancers learned to adopt a collective posture and attitude, capable of communicating within the group through gestures or glances. The interpretation with respect to the public is self-sufficient, proud, and coordinated, given that, in addition, there are no solos.

The BellyWarda fully agree with this idea: "Personally, I gave up belly dance because of its 'Barbie' look. I didn't feel comfortable. The FCBD broke away from this aspect and reinforced the feminine part, but with strength, and for me this was fundamental. The idea of seduction, of having to like it, is vacated" (Joucla, 2021). Achouri added that a feeling of sorority is created by suggesting that women dance together and for themselves: "In FCBD, the male gaze is something that they keep [to themselves], their gaze is ignored. In fact, we feel prouder when women compliment us after dancing. According to the BellyWarda, the diversity of their bodies also transmits a feeling of closeness and pride to the public with respect to the soloist dancers of belly dance.

However, proximity to the public is an aspect that can lead to complications, which the dancers overcome by developing their own techniques so that interruptions do not affect the semi-improvisation show. "In the Carnival,[7] Karima was the immune system of the group. When a drunk wanted to join the group, she had the ability to quickly kick them out. It's at times like these we feel like we're a living organism" (Joucla).

Achouri highlighted the feminist origins of the dance through the feminism assumed by Caroleena Nericcio. The codes to which it appeals are still present: the FCBD continues to be a meeting space for every type of woman, which fosters complicity and sisterhood among them. "There are not so many spaces in society in which we can be among ourselves, in a safe place. For this reason, I don't admit men to the company," she said. The dancers explained that they knew men who practiced FCBD, but that they preferred that only women dance in their group. "It is our moment, our way of dancing, our unity, and our cohesion." The translation of this unity is shown choreographically in how the company enters public squares or the street and in the synchronisation of their movements. "We don't arrive discreetly, we make noise, and we are a crowd. We say to the spectator: 'Look at us, but we

7 The BellyWarda made it clear that the 2019 Toulouse Carnival was the only event with interruptions by the public, unlike the spontaneous shows they had previously put on in the streets. The festive and nocturnal atmosphere of popular culture (Gisbert and Rius-Ulldemolins, 2019) is still an area of gender violence which, on the other hand, did not occur in the sporadic daytime performances.

don't dance for you. We dance for ourselves,' and this is our strength," emphasised Achouri, who also detailed that she wants to transmit the diversity of bodies and cultures present in their group.

> Personally, as a woman of a certain age, it's a space for affirmation and the possibility of expressing myself, of expressing my femininity, which I can't find anywhere else, it's one of the few dances that allows it in this way. The spirit of FCBD allows all women, regardless of their age or [body] morphology, to appear triumphantly in public. Without an explicit hierarchy, without submitting to patriarchal codes. Whether we are experts or beginners, old, ugly, thin, or fat, all femininities can express themselves equally (Erwane Morette, 2021).

Thus, despite the fact that the FCBD also occurs on stage, for Achouri, "the demand to be able to be free in public spaces passes directly through the dance." The relevance of this protest as an essential part of this collective dance between women has a complementary impact in the form of the strong social bonds between the participants. "I've been dancing for 50 years, but it hasn't been that long since I've been doing FCBD. I could leave the other dances, but not this one. The sorority, the strength of the group, the assertion of women, I've only [ever] found it in FCBD," affirmed Morette. Sonia Bennour added: "I've done many styles of dance, but I've only seen this transfer of positive energy in this style. It's not easy to find this cohesion and it's a dance with many challenges, especially when you have to be a leader." Massieux emphasises that it is a dance that teaches you to connect with others and that you have to be present for them, it is a moment of friendship. Marie Castellano, a circus artist, explained that what attracted her to FCBD was seeing the connection between women when they dance in a circle, communicating with gestures unknown to the public: "It shows great strength, the girls work together, and it seems that we share a secret."

On the contrary, the cancan of L'Armée des Roses has a different dynamic. If the FCBD leaves behind the solos of belly dance to show a feminine unit, the cancan, in its origins, was a purely individual, improvisational dance, which gradually became iconic steps and which, when it jumped to cabarets, became collective. For Andrée Gine, "the cancan is a strong dance for women. It refers to Louise Michel, who revolutionised the world and to whom I pay tribute. For me, the cancan was feminist, because the dancers went against what was prohibited. They could not dance alone, in 1831 it was formally prohibited, and they were arrested because it was considered a provocation." The Parisians of the time decided to raise their skirts above the ankle to shock the mentality of the time, a gesture that was later accepted and integrated.

> We don't know if the women who danced were politicised, but when Rigolboche created a step to mock the army, a military step that raises the leg, it was in the context of revolution. She also invented the guitar step, which mimics masturbation. The public came with a mixture of fascination and disgust, and this motivated the creation of the Moulin Rouge. They recovered a women's dance [that had been created] for men to control [women]. It's visible in the aesthetic, which has been completely reappropriated (Andrée Gine, 2021).

If, in its origins, the cancan was scandalous and rebellious, after only a few decades it became part of the imaginary of the cabarets of the *belle époque*, deprived of its revolutionary discourse. Mamzelle Viviane explained that "we dancers at the Moulin Rouge don't learn all that. We work like little soldiers; we are executors who know the names of all the steps [but] without any sense."

L'Armée des Roses also recounted the anecdote that La Goulue once arrived at a dance, unauthorised, and with a small billy goat to show that a male had accompanied her. With the advent of socialist theories in the middle of the 19th century, the steps of the cancan made fun of the church (the 'cathedral' move), the army (the smack on the ass or mimicking carrying a weapon), and the law that prohibited women from drinking alcohol (the 'corkscrew' move). "We often wonder what fight the cancan would have chosen

if it had been created today," commented Andrée Gine, who, with Antoinette Marchal, created the 'grandstand' and the 'victory' steps.[8]

Andrée Gine explained that she came to the cancan looking for a feminist dance and that when she danced in a company, the feminist message was completely diluted. The meeting with Antoinette Marchal, who claims that L'Armée des Roses allows individuality within a group, dates back to this period. Mamzelle Viviane also spread feminist values in her cabaret shows and began to collaborate with L'Armée des Roses to reclaim the original message of the cancan, forgotten in many Parisian establishments. "The cancan in cabaret is not a dance that is highly appreciated by dancers, because it is rough on the body. But when you take it from the feminist angle, things change. Perhaps I'm not the dancer with the best technique, but I know that I am good at what I do, because I embody a character, I carry the Paris of an era, the *gouaille* [insolent and mocking attitude], the connection between joy and partying, and that's what they like, and that generosity is what's also found in L'Armée des Roses." As dance teachers, L'Armée des Roses set out to democratise the cancan for all women and all bodies. They claim that technique is not as important as being able to enjoy yourself with one's own body, supported by a dance historically dedicated to the objective of transmitting a form of freedom.

DANCE AS A 'NON-ESSENTIAL' ASSET DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in France, and from the time of the second lockdown in autumn 2020, dance as a show and as a means of learning was prohibited by ministerial measures. Just as bookshops or record shops obtained the status of 'essential services,' dance and the other performing arts, at the time of writing, were banned. The interviews with the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses showed their indignation, while asserting the need for dance as a vehicle for positive emotions.[9] "Dance is essential because it does us all good. We need to evacuate all that [emotion], dance, improve our technique, and share it," explained Massieux. "The public needs it. Especially in this sad period, we have to be able to give a little joy. It allows you to escape and even to travel. If I had to dance with a mask, I would do it," added Dahrmani. "There's a lot of talk about health and no one is saying it's not important, but mental health is often left aside. Dance and culture in general are greatly beneficial. You miss meeting, dancing, and feeling emotional together, the emotions are still there," concluded Morette. L'Armée des Roses also exposed the difficulty for all dancers to keep their bodies in shape with gymnasiums closed and the curfew at 6:00 p.m.:

> This confinement puts the question of the body, which has been lacking training, on the table. In the first confinement, with teleworking, I could train via Zoom; now, working away from home, but with gyms [closed] and a six o'clock curfew, it's hard to train. And, symbolically, in the cancan, if we have to dance masked, it doesn't work. It's paradoxical, because it would seem that the public space is the best place in which we could dance, but we don't see how to do it if we can't have contact with the public (Andrée Gine, 2021).

Antoinette Marchal, confined to Strasbourg, explained her feeling of anger regarding a situation that was particularly detrimental to live culture: "We have to win back the space and, [even] if we only have the street, we will fight. We will have demonstrations, we will act while protesting, I will go out with the skirts, and I will dance the cancan."

8 These steps in the cancan are described on the L'Armée des Roses website: https://www.larmeedesroses.com/post/les-dessous-du-cancan https://en.larmeedesroses.com/blank

9 The #cultureessentiel movement organised flash mobs with the song Danser encore by HK et les Saltimbanquis and theatre occupations in France (https://www.youtube .com/watch?v=Gq9qFvoMKaYandab_channel=PiafEdit).

CONCLUSIONS

The shows in the street by the BellyWarda and L'Armée des Roses have an important social dimension that complements that of pure artistic performance. The external context of a cultural site, in which the viewer assumes a codified receptive behaviour, is an essential challenge for these dancers, who also perform semi-improvised dances. Uncertainty about the reception and occupation of public spaces reinforces the links between them.

The choreographic practice of the FCBD and the cancan as groups of women reinforce their self-confidence, feeling of sisterhood, pride of their feminine identities, and visibility of the diversity of their body types. The technical demand, choreographies impregnated with historical values, and need for non-verbal communication, together with the fact that they share the experience of dancing with other women in the street, reaffirms the social bond of the group and creates a safe place of tolerance and mutual help among them.

The appropriation of public spaces through feminist dances also generates pride in the dancers, who are aware that they are challenging an anomalous situation in cities where the presence of female bodies has not yet been normalised. Meeting with the public in a differential geographical framework—because of the exceptionality of the artistic use of these spaces—supposes an increase in the artists' expectations, who normally have a positive reception. The dancers take advantage of this context to convey the feminist messages typical of their dance styles: sisterhood, the unity of a group of women, and the diversity of bodies in the FCBD and the right to freedom, party, and to one's own body in the case of the cancan.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Atkinson, P., and Duffy, D. M. (2019). Seeing movement: Dancing bodies and the sensuality of place. *Emotion, Space and Society, 30*(noviembre 2017), pp. 20–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.12.002

Bernard, C. (2021). Il y a longtemps que l'administration de la culture a emprunté en France les chemins du dédain et de la méconnaissance. *Le Monde*. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/01/12/il-y-a-longtemps-que-l-administration-de-la-culture-a-emprunte-en-france-les-chemins-du-dedain-et-de-la-meconnaissance_6065944_3232.html

Casey, E. S. (1993). *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Indiana.

Casey, E. S. (2020). Emotion at the edge. *Research in Phenomenology, 50*(3), pp. 291–299. https://doi.org/10.1163/15691640-12341452

Elkin, L. (2016). *Flâneuse. Una paseante en París, Nueva York, Tokio, Venecia y Londres*. Barcelona: Malpaso.

Gisbert, V., and Rius-Ulldemolins, J. (2019). Women's bodies in festivity spaces: feminist resistance to gender violence at traditional celebrations. *Social Identities, 25*(6), pp. 775–792. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2019.1610376

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City: Double Day.

Kern, L. (2021). *Ciudad feminista*. Barcelona: Bellaterra Edicions.

Lefebvre, H. (1968). *El derecho a la ciudad*. Madrid: Capitán Swing.

Lhortolat, E. (2014). L'American Tribal Style (ATS) : le contre-pied à l'image fantasmée de la danseuse orientale de 1970 à aujourd'hui. *Loxias Colloques: Images de l'Oriental dans l'art et la littérature*. Niza. Retrieved from http://revel.unice.fr/symposia/actel/index.html?id=877

Lissagaray, P.-O. (2021). Las parisinas. En *Historia de la comuna de París de 1871*. Madrid: Capitán Swing.

Maruta, N. (2014). *L'incroyable histoire du cancan*. París: Parigramme.

Muntanyola Saura, D. (2016). La force des liens en danse : une étude du regard dansé. *Sociologie de l'Art, 25–26*, pp. 83–103. https://doi.org/10.3917/soart.025.0083

Scheff, T. J. (1988). Shame and Conformity: The Deference-Emotion System. *American Sociological Review, 53*(3), pp. 395–406.

Scribano, A. (2013). Sociología de los cuerpos/emociones. *Revista Latinoamerica de Estudios Sobre Cuerpos, Emociones y Sociedad, 10*(year 4, December 2012–March 2013), pp. 93–113.

Turner, J. H. (2009). The sociology of emotions: Basic theoretical arguments. *Emotion Review, 1*(4), pp. 340–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073909338305

Turner, J. H., and Stets, J. E. (2005). *The Sociology of Emotions*. Nueva York: Cambridge University Press.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Maria Patricio-Mulero has a PhD in sociology and cultural management from the University of Barcelona and the Université Paris 8. She researches the sociology of literature, the interaction of writers and artists with cities, cultural politics, and dance and feminism. She is also a member of the CECPI laboratories (Universitat de València), LLA Creatis (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès), LCEIE (Universitat de Barcelona), and CRESPPA (Université Paris 8). She currently teaches in the Department of Languages and Cultures at the Université Toulouse 1 Capitole.