

PREFACE

Introduction

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This special edition of the Istanbul University Journal of Women's Studies (İstanbul Üniversitesi Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi) focusses on women, dance and music from a wide range of geographical locations (Austria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA) and through a selection of theoretical/practical lens that include ethnography, historiography, dance analysis, practice-as-research, dance activism, and intersectionality. It transverses the fields of transnational feminism, examining how new mediums of dance, movement and music might lead to fresh understandings of women's activism and facilitate resistance to socio-cultural normative gendered patterns. We are thrilled to work with the ten international authors in articles that present innovative research and suggest new ways of looking and understanding these significant and pressing issues. Their work foregrounds questions that seek to unpick the inequalities and disjunctures endured by women both historically and in the present time in performance, in choreography, in social and community dance and in song.

The publication follows on from extensive academic work in this field, beginning in the 1980s when both scholars and practitioners brought the existing multiple feminist critiques into dance performance spaces and into published writing on dance/body (see selected examples from Albright 1997, Allegranti 2011, Brown 2006, Daly 1991, Desmond 1999, Purkayastha 2014, Salami 2020 and Thomas 1993). As Jane C. Desmond noted, "Gender systems are always political in the most fundamental sense of articulating a division of power. They operate in complex and often contradictory ways and intersect with other categories of social differentiation such as race, class, ethnicity, age, national origin, and so on" (1999:309). Such issues of power, politics and protest relating to women's performance are addressed in this special journal edition where the articles continue the extensive research focussed on the use of dance as a protest against such controlling systems (see for example Chatterjea 2004; Prickett 2013, 2016, and Mills 2017, 2021) and the work published on dance ethnography, embodied practice and politics (see Buckland 1999, 2006, David 2013, 2015, 2021, and Grau 2011, 2016).

The authors draw from diverse disciplinary foundations in topics that interrogate historical and contemporary dance practices. In centring women's experience and representation within the lens, they also bring to the fore hidden histories, in some

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cases offering empowerment on individual and community levels. Political structures and social dynamics are revealed, alongside detailed movement analysis which illuminates the power of the body. Intersectional relationships emerge, highlighting class, economics, race and social justice themes embedded in creative practices and show how dominant social constructs can be resisted. Similar concerns emerge across dance styles and geographical regions, as authors engage with seminal writings as well as scholarship at the cutting edge of the field.

Three authors (Bejarano, Herrera and López-Yáñez) especially focus on issues in the Global South, where as Boaventura de Sousa Santos' work (2018) on deep sensing and the essential nature of knowledge and corporeality proposes, the body speaks, knows and understands – a way of approaching knowledge that is in direct opposition to the body's absent presence in Western epistemology. De Sousa Santos argues how, “the epistemologies of the South concern the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy’ (2018: 1). In relation to deep sensing, he discusses the indigenous Andean concept of *corazonar*; sometimes translated as feeling/thinking, signifying “the fusion of reasons and emotions...giving rise to empowering motivations and anticipations” (ibid: 100), or as he likes to call it, “the warming up of reason” (ibid: 99). *Corazonar* not only expresses emotions and reason, it encourages resistance, challenges oppression and “increases reciprocity and communion” (ibid: 101).

All the articles take up themes of resistance and of challenging oppression in differing ways. In *Altering positions through an artistic enquiry of Japanese dance*, Ami Skånberg's practice-led research analysis crosses continents to investigate *suriashi*, a method of walking from traditional Japanese performance that takes on activist potential when removed from its originating context. Reflecting on the construction of gender and its representation on Japanese stages and in society, Skånberg's historical analysis is situated in contrast to a performance in Kyoto where she was joined by the drag artist Bruno the Bad Boy. In shifting between the past and the present, themes of gender difference and social value, performativity and feminist power emerge.

Anna Leon's micro-historical interrogation of ballet in the Romantic era forms the framework through which she analyses the work of an Austrian choreographer. *Reverse-engineering the Sylph: reclaiming female ballet bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, offers insight into a provocative production through which dominant aesthetics of

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the dancing body are subverted. Theoretically grounded in feminist and sociological scholarship, the perspective of the all-female performers adds valuable ethnographic detail. Leon argues how Holzinger “points to under-acknowledged aspects of ballet history that subvert its own norms, revealing its practitioners as active agents in relations of uneven power distribution, rather than as figures defined by victimhood.”

Andi Johnson’s *Black women of the Cakewalk: reclaiming the performance through corporeal orature* investigates issues of race, class and representation. Two case studies span a century, drawing on archival research, dance and performance studies and Black history. Johnson reinserts Aida Overton Walker into the narrative history of the Cakewalk, while investigating how Heather Agyepong’s contemporary representations of the dance in postcards, lectures and her writing offer an empowering expression of resistance to racial oppression. Johnson’s use of the conceptual frame of corporeal orature, borrowed from Thomas de Frantz’s writings (2004), reveals how bodily expression transmits beyond the physical to create a political, activist expression through words, thought and cultural signification.

Issues of touch and consent in dance are the subject of two articles that bring into focus case studies from South America and Europe. María Gabriela López-Yáñez and Beatriz Herrera Corado’s ethnographic and practice-led research interrogates pedagogic practices in dance in higher education. In *How do you desire to dance? A methodological assemblage to foster consent in dance higher education in Ecuador*, the authors challenge Western-centric practices and assumptions about touch. Analysis of the teaching of contact improvisation classes explores the pedagogic strategies they utilise as they work to enhance students’ agency as part of their decolonising objectives. Their article offers a new approach to the practice of consent in the dance classroom where both students and teachers work towards developing a toolkit that “envisage(s) in a dance class the training of a professional that approaches with a critical lens intercultural exchange and the prevention of violence”. In *Transgressive gestures in the couple dance in a Central- Transylvanian local community*, Dóra Pál-Kovács focuses in on touch that occurs during Hungarian partnered folk dances. Ethnographic accounts reveal diverse perspectives between generations and amongst rural and urban practitioners, while the author also explores the wider socio-cultural environment and gendered relationships within the communities. Differences between revival and local village dancers exposed disparities in understandings of boundaries and transgressive touching that led to certain misinterpretations.

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Rosemary Cisneros' analysis of the Roma roots of flamenco investigates how Francisco Franco used the form as propaganda during his dictatorship and how female stereotypes remain strong. *Moving past Franco's art and censorship: the case of the female Flamenco dancer* centres on visual culture and media representations in advertisements and souvenirs, and the documentary framing of the television series *Rito y Geografía* (Rite and Geography) (1971-1974) produced under Franco's authority and still widely available. Challenging the negative representations, Cisneros works to unpack issues of authenticity and discrimination among a marginalised community, noting that "performances can be a threshold between two worlds where the acts of the past, in the form of the present can stand in place of historical references".

Aims of empowerment are the guiding impetus behind the workshops led by María José Bejarano Salazar in rural Costa Rica. The processes are explored in *Community dance and the micropolitics of gender: contributions to the concept of dance activism from embodied life stories with rural women in Costa Rica*. Integrating dance movement therapy methods alongside contemporary choreographic practices, the creative component and community engagement expands the process beyond the individual. Participants reflect on how they developed a sense of agency and expressivity that was unknown to them, serving as well to challenge patriarchal power in the traditional relationships. In moving beyond therapeutic objectives, a screendance and photographic exhibition serve to document and communicate the power of their experiences.

Issues of gender representation and oppression emerge in Sonia Koziou's article, *From the living tradition to presenting the tradition: performing music, performing gender. A Greek case*. Ethnographic research spanning two decades is woven into discussion of the place of female dancers and singers in Greek villages and cities. Koziou strives to reveal the hidden voices of the women, analysing how norms in the social construction of gender remain or have shifted among folk dance audiences and performers, creating a certain tension between those accepted as professional women singers and the more archaic view of women's traditional roles. She notes how the old, "coy bride of the past who wails her separation from the home of her childhood with the marriage dirge has been replaced by a pregnant bride who chooses to present herself to her guests with a *zeibekiko* dance".

Female choreographers and women in folk-tales link two of the articles. Deborah Norris' *Women-made – the future women choreographers are here!* situates the experience of female choreographers working in balletic languages today in

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relation to the historical under-representation of women in such positions of power in the professional ballet field. The article summarises how British ballet became institutionalised through the efforts of women-led companies and schools in the 20th century; however, the number of female choreographers is disproportionate to their male contemporaries. To challenge this imbalance, Norris analyses workshops that strive to enhance female students' confidence and skills as they develop as emerging choreographers, utilising ballet as an expressive movement vocabulary. In *Snow White in early 21st c. dance performances: subverting fairy-tale female models*, Charitini Tsikoura offers movement analysis and feminist readings of different versions of the famous story by the Brothers Grimm. The productions encompass diverse approaches to the task, including French contemporary dance creators Angelin Preljocaj and Laura Scozzi, British choreographer Liv Lorent, and the hip-hop crew Addict Initiative's version for the television talent show, *Britain's Got Talent*. Rich detail of the costumes, set and movement reveal ways in which the creators subvert dominant power structures and social mores reinforced by the cautionary tale.

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