



# Armenian women's embodiment in the phenomenon of war

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## Abstract

This project aims to highlight the construction of Armenian women's identities through their bodily expression, which involves the practice of dance, social phenomenology, and the representation of gender in the context of war. Using fieldwork examples, this essay seeks to report on the gestures of emancipation of women within patriarchal, neocolonial, and militarized systems, which frequently disrupt dominant thoughts and practices.

**Keywords:** embodied ethic, Armenian dance, phenomenon of war, emancipatory gesture

## Preface

With this research, I aspire to explore the identity of women in the context of war. More specifically, this work examines the construction of Armenian women's embodiments expressed through the practice of dance, social phenomenology and the representation of gender.

I am Armenian. For the past 12 years, I have spent around 4 months each year in Armenia, working and volunteering in the fields of dance and education. The rest of the year, my privileges allow me to work in other countries. Since 2020, as a student with French citizenship, I have been in a doctoral program in the Faculty of Art at the Université du Québec à Montréal. During my research on the aesthetics of Armenian

dances, my attention was drawn to the expressions of women during the reactivation of the war with Azerbaijan in 2020.

Grounded on a sincere desire for both intellectual and creative freedom, this essay documents and considers the emancipatory gestures of Armenian women within patriarchal, neocolonial, and militarized systems. During this journey, the term “emancipatory gestures” is used to encompass this situation at multiple levels: a context of creation and research (the thesis), the performer-participants (the women), and the performer-researcher (me). All this opens up central questions concerning how each level welcomes and supports the process of emancipation of Armenian women; how each body can act as a creative engine, as a cultural subject, and as the co-author of a work of feminist and decolonial thought.

## Introduction

Within Armenian societies, and alongside shootings and bombings, dance and music have always enlivened landscapes and relationships. In recent years, dance has punctuated various events, such as during the XVII<sup>e</sup> Sommet de la Francophonie when Armenia’s Prime Minister invited other political representatives to learn and perform a traditional dance; during the Trndez religious event, every February 14<sup>th</sup>; and even in different diasporic communities as part of the 2020



*May 9, 2019: Sushi Liberation Day. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s visit to Sushi, ©Press office of the Government of Armenia.*

anti-war demonstrations. Still today, dance is a practice present in the construction of identities for many Armenians, whether in the streets of Yerevan every summer or among soldiers on the very frontlines of war.

The local population of Armenia, who engaged in this research project is indigenous and in the midst of armed conflict. Its historical and contemporary disagreements are numerous. The majority of the institutional and conventional approaches are unsuitable for such terrain, and would create distrust, anxiety, and prejudice (Shesterinina, 2019). This was the case in September 2021, while a friend and I were exploring in preparation for an in-situ performance in Anipemza, a village on the border with Turkey. A young off-duty law enforcement officer, who had at first offered to guide us through the village, having become suspicious about our identities and ultimately called the military. In less than five minutes, his attitude went from one of hospitality to one of aggression and incomprehension at finding "two young girls," neither "tourists" nor "locals," alone at the border with a camera, speaking of academic research concerning a country of which neither had citizenship. We ended up being accused of spying since for him we spoke Armenian with "an accent" and he, a "dialect". This interaction underlined for me that the Caucasus region is home to more than 20 different ethnic groups, each with a language and a defined social structure, fighting against imperial hegemony for centuries. Our exploration stopped there.

On the other side, the subject is especially problematic within the Canadian academic ethics-review context, because logistically, universities are wary of the complications linked to militarized landscapes, and even more those of war. Beyond that, my various institutional interactions in the first years of this process have highlighted the antagonistic powers at play in this environment, and the risk of having my thesis be perceived as an "asset" over which each party tried (and is trying) to assert its authority on the subject; and by extension on war and conflict. Mostly, each opinion was based on political dominations of what is urgent enough or productive to be studied. It was suggested, for instance, that I change the community

under study and focus on Armenian diasporic women of Canada or change my methodological approach to avoid the troubles of the “terrain”, to be sure to finish the doctoral work following the university’s predefined system.

I see this advice as a repetition of the same safe and comfortable research topics, that anchors the visibility and the power of those who already possess it. I also would like to express a wariness that is particularly acute, given that I represent a faculty of art and the discipline of dance – fields that still suffer from the prejudice that they are incompetent and ignorant in matters of politics, naive and harmless practices, forcing me each time to recall the impact of political culture and the staging of art during Nazism, Stalinism, and even right now, when artists are invited to royal and political manifestations. Since being offered that advice, I have aspired to demonstrate that what seems “dangerous”, or even “impossible” for the institution is an “ordinary challenge” for the inhabitants of the Armenian territory. It is from this open-ended perspective of “challenge” that I envision, think through, and approach my research. With this in mind, I will elaborate here on some examples of paradigmatic local expressions as a social phenomenology and dance practices that disturb gender representation and its power.

## **Contexts and Concepts**

### ***Armenian Societies***

Today, Armenia is bordered by Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, Iran to the south, and Turkey to the west. Due to its geographical position, the country has always been at the intersection of empires and powers, which have forcibly made the heritage of its inhabitants one of numerous and incessant painful subjugations. The most notable of these just in the last century include: the genocide of 1914–24; earthquakes, including the one in 1988 (magnitude 6.9); a blockade from 1991 to 1996; as well as lingering wars with its neighbors and mass displacements, the most significant being those of 1991–94 and 2020–23. In this constant condition of political and economic instability, the nation-state seeks to unite itself around common pillars of identity

shared across different generations and the different places in which Armenians live. These Armenian communities are formed according to shared affinities based on objective factors or subjective feelings of belonging. There is the sense of belonging to the same civilization, most clearly marked by the language and alphabet (Armenian is a linguistic isolate of Indo-European, first written in the 4th century), and by having the same history, as expressed both in heroic figures and in the transmission of similar traditions through daily habits, art, and artisanal practices. As an example: the commemoration of the Armenian genocide every April 24; the Pan-Armenian Olympic Games, founded in 1999, celebrated every four years in Yerevan and since 2024 people also gather at the annual festival of Armenian performing arts "One Nation, One cultural foundation". Each of these are initiatives which aim to bring people together, to constitute an autonomous and distinct entity by providing everyone with common orientations. Behind their institutional involvement and promotion is the objective of defending this entity and of avoiding its total dissolution. From this perspective, Armenian dances act as pillars of identity, taught in schools, present in religious and political assemblies, but also manifested in the daily lives of Armenians, both in the diaspora and in Armenia (Pogossian, 2020). From a critical perspective, I hypothesize that these acts go beyond the aims of safeguarding and paying defensive attention (Der Merguerian, 2014). According to the anthropologist Abrahamian (2019), Armenian dance performances retain an archaic candor. In other words, I translate and foresee it as a practice which lies outside the reach of an archive that is subject to rationalistic development, quantitative reference, or comparative reporting. I perceive them to be more primitive and vital.

### ***The Phenomenon of War***

My study does not see war as occurring in an isolated context. Instead, I see it as a broad conflict with a distinct and global logic, linking the so-called "pre-war," "war" and "post-war" phases, as well as the relationships between people and their bodies (private and public, both inside and outside the event of war). I look at war the same way I look

at identity: as a process. It does not declare itself overnight, or without allies. I define the “war phenomenon” as a heteropatriarchal circuit that glorifies and reaffirms economic liberalism and extends the power of old-world colonialism. The aspects of this phenomenon should not be represented as decontextualized local issues and conflicts, but as the results of evolving and globally unhealthy relationships of commitment and of politico-economic ethics systems, a point vividly expressed in the declaration of political scientist Deniz Kandiyoti (2009):

What to Western eyes looks like “tradition” is, in many instances, the manifestation of new and more brutal forms of subjugation of the weak made possible by a commodified criminal economy, total lack of security and the erosion of bonds of trust and solidarity that were tested to the limit by war, social upheaval and poverty.

War is not a singular circumscribed event, but a state, a condition. It is impossible to enter and leave a war without impacting those around you; it is a phenomenon in which each experience is a concrete modulation of our political relationships by other means (von Clausewitz, 1943, p. 280). War is a business and a “generic acquaintance” that reveals our socio-economic and ethico-communal postures, one of the too often forgotten realities of societies with a colonial core (Sontag, 2003).

### ***Woman and Identity***

The figure of “the woman” rests at the core of the national construction of Armenia, as well as for the majority of societies and cultures that have suffered colonial domination and massacres because of their genetic or symbolic identity, and are still fighting for individual and/or collective self-determination. In the Armenian context, the woman is synonymous with motherhood, culture, heritage, and an authentic national and familial “We” (Beukian, 2014). Beyond the central place of the Virgin Mary in the churches, the Armenian language profoundly underlines this representation in notions such as “mother” – մայր (mayr), which figures in multiple national touchstones including: the

capital – “մայրաքաղաք” (mayrakakhak), meaning the “mother city”; the homeland – “մայրենիկ” (mayrenik); or, to underline a typically Armenian feminine expression applied only to women, “հայուհի” (hayui), which can be translated as “Armenian-ness,” implicating women specifically as the “maintainers of Armenian identity.” The image of the *hayui* is anchored in the role of the mother, prudish and docile.

One of the fundamental connotations at play here is tearfulness and affectivity, due to the popular sense that women possess “a truly feminine sensitivity”. However, recent research carried out at McGill University and the University of Toronto shows that the neural circuits of pain are not the same in women and men<sup>1</sup>: men remember past experiences of pain much more than women, and as a result, the experiences stay more fresh within them; men may be much more vividly sensitive than women, and seen by extension as hypersensitive – what is popularly expected of women. Jeffrey Mogil, lead author of the research, speculates that it is because “women have greater pain experience [...] that they are less stressed by pain.”<sup>2</sup> Further on, and in line with common thinking, it is attributed, without scientific proof, to the capacity to give birth. Linking this recent discovery to the Armenian context allows us to better examine women's relationship to pain and, as its consequence, their capacity for powers of resistance that go beyond biology. Indeed, in the phenomenon of war, death is the most visible result; other consequences are rarely, if at all, documented, such as endemic poverty, disability, socio-economic decline, among many others (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). Because men are the first on the battle lines, they are also mostly killed, while women and children are subjected to other forms of violent domination such as sexual violence and kept alive to bear children for the needs of the state (Kasparian, Chabot & Doucet, 2016). By remaining alive, they can still bear witness to violence. Their testimonies remain testing acts, which depend “as much on the conditions of their enunciation as

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1. Jeffrey S. Mogil, Loren J. Martin, Erinn L. Acland, Petra Schweinhardt and al. (2019), «Male-Specific Conditioned Pain Hypersensitivity in Mice and Humans» *Current Biology* : [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(18\)31496-9](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(18)31496-9).

2. <https://www.lapresse.ca/vivre/sante/201901/10/01-5210597-les-hommes-et-femmes-ne-se-rappellent-pas-de-la-douleur-de-la-meme-maniere.php>. Consulted on 12.01.2024.

on those of their reception [...], disorganizing the psychological and symbolic universe of the victims, while affecting the social coherence of the community in its main foundations: its identity and its survival.”<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, these stories have demonstrated over time that listening to women has been and still is discomforting. Thus, even if recent studies show that women are less sensible, it becomes preferable to consider them as being more “sensitive” or “resilient,” to give to them the role of silent absorption instead of the more “demonstrative” and “resistant” positions occupied by men.

### Un/make the Contact



Screenshot from a PASTINFO television report, October 2020.

The image above is a screenshot from an October 2020 PASTINFO television report which captures a dance chain forming on the border of Armenia and Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>4</sup>. It is made up of soldiers and volunteers who dance different variations of *kochari*: a traditional, pagan circular dance. Among Armenian communities, it is the most

3. Chabot Joceline, Marie-Michèle Doucet et Sylvia Kasparian, (2016) «Témoigner malgré tout – Les récits des victimes du génocide des Arméniens face aux violences sexuées», *Études arméniennes contemporaines*. Online since May 05, 2017. <http://journals.openedition.org/eac/987>.

4. As its naming is contested, I will call this region “Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh.” Artsakh is the historical name by which this independent and self-proclaimed republic is described by its government and by that of Armenia; Nagorno-Karabakh is the Russian-Turkish name given to the region by the USSR during the founding of the Azerbaijani state in 1923, while Karabakh is the name used by the Azerbaijani state.



renowned dance. In 2010, the Armenian government recognized it as intangible heritage and since 2017, the dance has been part of UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Throughout time, the *kochari* symbolizes union, courage, gathering. The most basic form of *kochari* involves eight slow beats: a pair of springing movements (4 beats) and four walking steps to the side (4 beats) while always holding hands or shoulders. Using the Observation-Analysis of Movement technique,<sup>5</sup> it is possible to propose a construction of critical meaning concerning the representation of women. In this dance, both men and women, soldiers and civilians, experience a common space and unity visible through synchronized movements to the right, aligned body orientations, a shared medium-sized and stable kinesphere, controlled external force, and a rhythmic pattern that everyone follows. A first glance at this activity occurring within the backdrop of war, may lead to two assumptions concerning the involvement of women: (1) they are less active, since out of 37 dancers, only 9 are women; and (2) they have the same function as men in the activity. Nevertheless, a careful and thorough examination allows us to observe specific additional subtleties: (1) women take up less space by taking small steps and using limited arm movements that stay in front of their bodies, in contrast to males who have larger, more diagonal gestures; and (2) women often emphasize vertical movements in their gestures rather than horizontal ones, sometimes even pushing downwards and rising onto the balls of their feet.

This first analysis leads me to critically address the question of visible interpretive space. The position taken by these women suggests an elevation in this world, despite the smaller space taken up, and their gestures being less feverish than those of the men. They are erected in

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5. Observation-Analysis of Movement (OAM) draws on two qualitative approaches to movement, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Functional Analysis of the Body in Dance Movement (AFCMD) in order to offer an integrated perspective of the dimensions functional and expressive of movement, understood as being completely interdependent on each other. OAM is designed by Nicole Harbonnier-Topin, Geneviève Dussault, and Catherine Ferri. <https://oamdance.uqam.ca/>.

this space in order to exist: “I am a body which rises towards the world.”<sup>6</sup> The embodied commentary they offer speaks to an affirmation that remains rare in a conservative and militarized culture. Not challenging it as a fundamental observation means we can refer to it as an “it goes without saying” invitation to stand up, of confronting and of having a place in the circle alongside brothers and fathers. However, there are societies – as in Armenia – where the strategies of women’s and feminist activism are not manifested in the figure of the “dissident” as put forth by Sarah Ahmed (2012). Though the paradigm expressed by the famous slogan “the personal is political” may remain true, its application and expression differ depending on the landscape. The relationship of bodies between women and men, that is to say, body-to-body, face-to-face or lined up next to one another, is an attempt to develop a new way, a new form of relation between them: one based on trust and the sharing of power. They remind us that in order to have “a room of one’s own” (Virginia Woolf, 1929), we must first and foremost be part of the Polis (according to Aristotle, who was inspired by the Babylonian “puliṭê” system) - that is to say, occupy a place in the community of free and autonomous citizens; be part of the collective consciousness.<sup>7</sup> In these danced conversations, there is always a point of contact that must not be lost and that must be shared. Movements are invented, proposed, received, and given with the reciprocated support of the gravitational weight of the body of the other, without which the chain could not move. Let’s remember that cercle dances are popular in many cultures. They symbolize equality and take on temporal and cosmic metaphors. Even if the orientation remains the same, the dancers have the freedom to add nuance to the gestures – for example, in the previous video, some strike the ground more strongly than others, some make their shoulders shake or add

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6. Quote from Merleau-Ponty, in Camille Froidevaux-Metterie (2023), *Un corps à soi*, p. 67.

7. Thibaud Nicolas (2023) «Les mots *polis* (πόλις) et *politès* (πολίτης), des mots intraduisibles depuis les scribes babyloniens jusqu’aux savants européens?», *Anabases*. Online, <http://journals.openedition.org/anabases/16551>.

vocal expression, such as singing or onomatopoeia. There is always freedom of dynamic engagement and joint coordination. During a conference in 2022 where I invited the public to learn and dance *kochari*, a dancer friend told me, "How hard it is to form a community together"<sup>8</sup>; thereby sharing the difficulty of going together in the same direction, of aligning while maintaining the individuality of his dance and without disturbing the dance of the other.

## En/gage the contact

Geopolitical instability of the territory makes it impossible to define, in advance, the locations of the dances or their interactions. It is similarly difficult to name the collaborators. They can be my friends, my family, members of associations with which I work or volunteer, passers-by with whom I chat or even friends of people with whom I am in contact. They can agree to participate one day, then refuse or disappear the next. This was the case during a work project with the CoCoLab which I co-directed<sup>9</sup> (not related to my doctoral work, but it's a good example). Following the bombings of the night of September 12–13, 2022, one of the performers left the working group without offering any explanation. On the day of her return, the entire group met to plan the three upcoming performances. The group proposed a range of changes to the shows: including political manifestos, switching to an intimate performance accessible only by invitation, or a podcast, and even putting the shows on indefinite standby. The latter was selected, and performances have still not taken place. It is important to note that during major bombings, the Armenian government regularly recommends closing artistic and cultural places all over Armenia. Some say that this is to best prevent a retaliation, others, that it is out of respect and solidarity for the soldiers, their families, and the dead.

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8. Forum «Dances de Résistances», organized by the curatorial collective Davida/Sabbah, in Montréal, 22.10.2022.

9 Contemporary Choreography Lab Armenia, founded by Hasmik Tangyan and Harutyun Alpetyan in 2018.

The fieldwork area is characterized by susceptibility, composed of unpredictable incidents on a daily basis, where every encounter can pose a risk or be inappropriate. Challenges, tiredness, and anxiety may arise and vanish at any given moment due to different factors such as personal issues or work-related concerns (Brun, 2013; Kreuse, 2021). On such a terrain, where populations live highly unstable lives, masculine ethnographic ethics, traditionally based on the normative presumption of credibility, do not suffice (Kreuse, 2021). "Being there" is surprising and unexpected, especially when I represent or am perceived as a young woman and my interactive practice is of the order of physical expression as seen during my encounters with the soldiers in Anipemza or when I explored the Armenian- Azerbaijani border between Nerkin and Khnzoreshk in August 2022. Upon my approach to her deserted house, with an abandoned aesthetic, an elderly lady started hurling stones at me. Her strong reaction can be referred to a traumatic event, a past violence experienced, and her bodily memory gives her the capacity of a rapid agency. Her behavior demonstrates a nervous system that has a strong ability to resist rather than a sensitive passivity, which is typically expected of an older person.

These examples remind us that in a world where everything is quickly forgotten and replaced, being present becomes crucial. In a society in ongoing armed conflict, being present is decisive. Presence, beyond reflexive and sensorial contact, is a contact that generates action (Royona Mitra, 2022). Like art historian and archaeologist Luis Monreal, I believe that scientific and artistic communities must play a role beyond the political crisis and be present with isolated civil societies.<sup>10</sup> This involves taking responsibility for knowledge and actions based on the local partition of the subject. This position reflects both my wish for freedom and the desire to respect the possibilities of the complex, autonomous, and voluntary terrain-subject: "complex" because we

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10. Conference "Arts and heritage of Afghanistan, One hundred years of archaeological research 1922-2022", November 18 – 19, 2022, INALCO, online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMOOHLHiFAo>.

are in a militarized situation; "autonomous" because it is governed by forces outside of myself and the university; "voluntary" because self-determination and the risk of the act of being present walk hand in hand and must be respected above all else. This is why concepts must be thought about (explored) and constructed (understood) from situations and not from decontextualized representations or ideologies. It is about making a connection, addressing all the ways of being present afforded through kinesthetic contact; in other words, borrowing the Armenian expression "կապի մեջ լինել" (*kapi metch linel*), meaning literally "to be in the knot," or "to be in contact/connection." "Contact" in Armenian is "kap" (կապ), meaning "link", "knot" and refers to the verb "to tie".

I propose to think about connection/contact based on Christine Leroy's work (2021). She defines this kinesthetic link as a proprioceptive and muscular experience allowing "intentional engagement [...] without confusion of identity, but a common experience". Her work emphasizes, therefore, the idea that ethics is the response of a kinesthetic emotion of solidarity, seated in the neurocognitive system, itself responding to the sensorimotor states of the body. Each movement is a neurocognitive release enabled by sensitivity, namely, the capacity of the body's nervous system (i.e., the senses) for work and feeling. I find in this an echo of my own hypothesis regarding the presence of women in a vulnerable and dangerous space: our moral sense attuned to our sensoriality. Thinking with and working through emancipatory gestures in the phenomenon of war replaces "I think" with "I can." This motor skill arouses, in my view, the feeling of liberation from the uncomfortable weight of politics and the historical genes, showing that vulnerability can become affective and tangible virtuosity. I encountered a young woman in September 2023 who embodies this perspective of liberation. She resides in the border village of Tech, located in the Syunik region. While walking together through the landscape of Lachine, a territory experiencing frequent bombing, looting, kidnapping and other war atrocities since 1988; she shared that she would ease her fears by envisioning and resolving

intense scenarios. In light of this illustration and in relation to Leroy's phenomenological perspective, it appears to me that the ethics surrounding the phenomenon of war speak of a nervous endurance in response to horror and inhumanity. I suggest that ethics in war are primarily based on visceral sensations (nervous system) rather than morality.

## **Conclusion**

This short discussion of the embodiments of Armenian women and the phenomenon of war reveals a complex and self-represented notion of woman identity: ՀայրնԼի / Armenian-ness. The circumstances surrounding Armenian women's fight for independence prevent them from fully enjoying the freedom of their own body and identity, making them twice as marginalized. They become doubly stateless. It is a double marginalization of the expressive body and their power. They remind us of the dominant current affairs affecting our dear Earth: that before being a mother, before being a woman and even before being an individual, they are a collective thing: a "Hayui" which places a particular value on and has a particular value for life. In this context, the search for a "nature" or a "naturalization" of the figure of woman and/or of Armenian culture as an original form of expression only makes sense in the "areas of the in-between" (Laplantine, 1996). In this liminal space, the relationship that unites these multiple forms of existence to concrete struggles becomes clear, and here, for a brief moment hegemony becomes humanized and disturbed.

Traditionally, the kinesthetic aspect of Armenian women in most Armenian dances is often expressed by a controlled external force coupled with a low internal force and a stable and medium kinesphere, which transmit a stable state with a bewitching impulse, accentuated by long aerial gestures, and providing a sensation of sliding of Beings – highly visible in Armenian state dance companies – the ideal representation of the "motherland". Today, in parallel with women taking places next to and in the men's chain, another

and distinct form of expressiveness is appearing in embodied representations of the feminine: figures that emit bursts of passion, as is visible in the dance commonly called "helicopter" (image below) A solo dance popularized in balls during the last years of Soviet domination, it uses different variations of *shalakho*, a traditional free-style Armenian dance, performed by men in solos, duets, or larger groups, to win the favor of a woman. The dance is dynamic, with fast music that is reflected in the expansive and energetic movements of men. Traditionally, women accompany men with a soft and delicate manner of using their hands, and with shorter steps. But, as can be seen in the image, women engage in an expressive extension: they embrace a highly mobile state and develop an unhindered external force with medium intensity and multidirectional dynamics. The dancing women call for the collapse of "the mother's" pedestal and the liberation of bodies. Like the emblematic image of Mother Armenia, a large statue which overlooks the capital, Yerevan, portraying a virile woman holding a sword, they transform and disarm in an "orgasmic tempo without shame", according to the artist Lusine Talalyan (2019). Ultimately, having both a physical and vertical presence signifies the potential of being completely engaged and visible in this and other realms, while actively participating in conscious actions towards one's life.



*Velvet Revolution, March-May 2018, Republic Square of Yerevan.*

In *Where Does Dance Begin?*, Romain Bigé concludes: "Dance is an opportunity." (2019, p.29) This is also what I believe: dancing when everything else is undermined is perhaps a way of transgressing normative spaces, times, and identities, which are "naturalized" by official heritage and facts. In fact, I suppose that the act of dancing, as well as being present or making one's presence felt in a militarized landscape where women are not expected to be seen with a capacity of agency, conveys a skillful body statement. My argument is that the dance gesture represents an emancipatory word that is embodied even before it can be voiced verbally or written. Here, dance, war, and woman are all allegories and metaphors of an intentional and relational matter to and towards the world. In conclusion, I observe and consider the embodiment of Armenian women as response and performative site "of a labile and polymorphous ethics, adapted to individuals rather than norming them; an ethic of free play which lightens the weight of a morality that has become superfluous." (Leroy, 2021, p.162)

Geographic regions that frequently experience militarized violence as a consequence of imperial war cause a considerable double disturbance in the expressiveness of women. In such contexts, being a feminist "à la Woolf," telling the truth about one's life and/or having a feminist consciousness "à la Ahmed," or refusing to look away from misfortune, seem to me to be the luxuries of a person living in a protected and "democratic" society. As far as Armenian women are concerned, it seems that they often (if not always) weave their identities and by extension, their expressiveness from upheavals caused by loss: the disappearance of men, the loss of a lasting motherland. In the same way that the antagonist muscle creates the link and binds the movement, it is above all from the "absence" that the representations of women – and perhaps the dance events – are constructed. It is within this internal and intimate space that I conceive and question the emancipation of my subject-object: a sticky material between the skin and the muscle, where paradoxically our cells never touch each other, but are arranged in relation to each other. This organicity appears simple at first glance, but as the phenomenological approach to art proposed by Henri



Maldiney (2012) underlines, existence and its power are not measured only by their possibilities but by their constraints and impossibilities. N. told me in July 2022 that, despite being displaced by war three times and losing two children and her husband, she still sometimes marvels at the beauty of bombs exploding until she remembers how dangerous they are. In the end, connecting my methodology and creation to the locale is a second chance. It is another chance to present myself to the world and engage in a space that seems impossible from the outside. To stay connected with the boundaries of significance, possibilities and changes. Finally, to dance in a hypermilitarized landscape, a multiple space of life, conflict, and death, is delving deep into the heart of the rhizome of affect and of what the nervous system is capable of enduring in terms of spasms and tensions. In this area and with these women, we explore the political endurance of our muscles.

## Author Biography

My work involves being a dance performer, a social worker, a university researcher, and a teacher. Currently, I am a Ph.D candidate in studies and practices of Art at University of Quebec in Montreal. My research-creation explores the embodiments of women in the phenomenon of war, particularly on Armenian territory.

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