

Degree Program in International Relations

Course of Diplomacy and Negotiation

# **Choreographing Diplomacy: Dance as a Container and Content of International Relations**

**Prof. Pasquale Ferrara**  
SUPERVISOR

**Prof. Anna Pirri Valentini**  
CO-SUPERVISOR

**Inés León Giménez**  
CANDIDATE

Academic Year 2023/2024

# **Choreographing Diplomacy: Dance as a Container and Content of International Relations.**

Inés LEON GIMENEZ, Master's Degree in International Relations at Sciences Po Bordeaux,  
Universität Stuttgart, and LUISS Guido Carli.

Dance is an understudied, marginal research object in the field of International Relations (IR) – however, its relevance has already been the object of gradual interest in academia.

This thesis has the objective to explore to what extent dance is both a container and a content of IR. Through the comparative documentary analysis of two disciplinary bodies of literature – dance on the one hand, IR on the other hand –, complemented by primary and media sources, and diving into case studies, this diptyque vision of studying dance as a container and as a content of international relations emerged.

Chapter I will delve into a meta-theoretical aspect, in which the potential of framing IR around the use of dance as a metaphor will be studied. Dance can indeed be a useful tool to give an alternative shape to the study of the IR discipline, marking a distance with the war-related metaphor centered around concepts of power, competition, and violence. It further fosters a collaborative approach in the understanding of IR and international negotiation theories. As a non-discursive, malleable element, dance can take stock of nuanced realities, inviting converging IR perspectives to coexist.

Chapter II will examine the concrete influence of dance in the sensible world of international relations. Dance is used as a soft power tool by Nation-States to promote their influence, harnessed by pioneer countries to correspond to a political agenda. It is also a crucial element to engender international collaboration through the dance field from the Westphalian age until nowadays, with the proposition of adopting a dancers-agents-network point of view. Additionally, dance is a field for resistance against oppression and advocacy on a global scale, as dance is connected to identity, as will demonstrate the case studies of Ukraine, Palestine, and Reunion Island. All in all, dance reveals to be an adaptable theoretical

framework for IR and negotiation theories as a metaphor, and a practical multi purpose tool used in the diplomatic field, highlighting the relevance of such a research field and its application in the sensible world.

Keywords: Dance; Dance Diplomacy; Dance metaphor; IR; Diplomacy; Ballet; Modern Dance; Narrative rationality; Paradigm; Nuance; Framework; Soft Power; Cultural Diplomacy; Collaboration; Resistance; Advocacy.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to begin these acknowledgements by sincerely thanking my supervisors from both Sciences Po Bordeaux and LUISS Guido Carli, respectively Prof. Grégory Champeaud, and Prof. Pasquale Ferrara and Prof. Anna Pirri Valentini, who have been so supportive and kind in their approach, encouraging me to explore this adventurous topic, and there to answer my doubts. Thank you for your constructive advice and thoughtful guidance.

To have the idea of such a topic, I had two great mentors in the field of dance whom I would like to thank: Mrs Virginie Garandau, who kindly and immensely helped me in my early stages of research, and Mrs Nadia Raud, who, beyond having been my dance teacher for nine years at the Conservatory, I am grateful to call a dear friend of mine.

I would not be where I am at if it would not be thanks to the support and love shown by my colleagues, by my classmates, by my friends, and by my family.

Thank you to my mom and dad, aunt and grandparents, and cat, who always always always had my back, made me grow feeling loved and cared for, and believed in me since day one.

Thank you to Inès, my heart sister, for being this incredible, warm friend to whom I could always turn to. I am so proud of the person you are and of your achievements.

Thank you to Victoria, my partner in everything, for making this year truly magic by your side. I am so happy to share amazing and deep moments with you.

Thank you to Marcus, my special person, for showing up for me and for being such a genuinely kind and affectionate human being. I am so grateful for you.

As a first-generation master's degree student, I feel very privileged and grateful to have the opportunity to present this thesis. I would like to dedicate it to my family's generations that enabled me to achieve this level of excellent higher education.

This is for you.

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# Introduction

*“La Danse, à mon sens, ne se borne pas à être un exercice, un divertissement, un art ornemental et un jeu de société quelquefois ; **elle est chose sérieuse** et, par certains aspects, chose très vénérable.”*<sup>1</sup> (Valéry 1936, p. 3)

Dance has been and is still existing in all societies at all times of humanity – practically all human communities and societies include their own dance styles and traditions (Lacroix 2024). It is a “fundamental art” including a component inherent to “universality” (Valéry 1936), to borrow the words of French philosopher Paul Valéry, who theorized this artistic discipline. But the author also indicates to us that dance is *a serious matter*, suggesting that there could be more to it than what can be perceived as mere entertainment – dance could be taken seriously, and this thesis would build up on this belief and put it to service for research.

Dance, although it may seem surprising as it can be perceived as a trivial activity, is defined under different considerations, leading analysts and choreographers to complement each other rather than to clearly disagree. One particularly interesting definition by Martha Graham states: “Dance is communication, and so the great challenge is to speak clearly, beautifully, and inevitably” – two aspects of this sentence can be emphasized to begin to enter the subject matter. The first one is that dance conveys difficult messages in a simpler, entertaining way that leaves room for interpretation and inspiration – so it is both a communication means to transmit ideas and feelings, aiming at creating a perception, and a subjective matter. The second element resides in the challenge part, where it can be observable that dance is a complex subject matter, combining three imperatives according to Martha Graham, enticing dancers to produce a clear, beautiful, and inevitable practice. This

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<sup>1</sup> “Dance, in my opinion, is more than just an exercise, an entertainment, an ornamental art and sometimes a parlor game; it is a serious and, in certain respects, a very venerable matter.” (Own culturally-informed translation). Emphasis by this author.



could be a first element of comparison with IR and negotiation processes: it ought to be clear, in order to produce the most productive outcomes and to avoid any misunderstanding mistakes; it is inevitable because at some point, negotiation is needed to make progress on the international stage; and finally, but not the least, it can be, and should strive to be a beautiful practice, full of learnings and surprises.

Diplomacy, on the other hand, is also defined in a plethora of ways. Some definitions that will be considered here are mainly the ones that echo the dialogue function of diplomacy, such as diplomacy as “the management of international relations by negotiations” (Nicholson) and as “the process of dialogue and negotiation by which States in a system conduct their relations and pursue their purposes by means short of war (Watson).

If music and international relations is a topic that, although remaining marginal, has engendered a prolific scientific literature combining both textual *corpi* and analytical lenses, dance and international relations does not follow the same development. Indeed, scholarship establishing the clear nexus between music and International Relations, be it as a container or as a content, is more popular and more developed in academia (Prévost-Thomas and Ramel 2018).

However, dance is both an interesting and important material for IR to focus on: can be seen both as a methodology, an analogy to better understand IR through the comparison of diplomatic and negotiation stages. Moving from a wargame-related lexicon of IR to a dance-articulated one could be a significant shift as it could appease the very studies of IR instead of employing usually a vindictive winner-loser perspective.

Furthermore, digging deep on dance as a substance of inter-States relations is also an under-studied field that has its non-neglectable importance. Discipline that can be used as a tool for soft power, for appeasement between nations, but also as a resistance and isolation

weapon. Including the dance-approach lens to IR, be it as a container or as a content, is helpful to understand international mechanisms between States in an enlightened, as well as original way on a positive note, could create a more consensual perspective to apply when making sense of phenomena on the international stage.

The goal of this thesis is to problematize dance as a subject matter for international relations, as an epistemological and scientific discipline in a first instance. Dance, in this context, would therefore become a lens, becoming fit to being applied in a cross-cutting fashion to a variety of contexts and ideas at a conceptual level. Nevertheless, the thesis aims at going beyond this aspect by inputting the possibility to see dance as a full component of international dynamics between powers competing, collaborating, and opposing each other. In such a way, dance would rather be considered as a tangible element included within the multitude of things comprized under the umbrella of international events and linkages between power entities, especially Nation-States. Therefore, the research question that this thesis would consider is to what extent is dance both a container and a content of International Relations. The hypotheses, in order to respond to this question, would argue that firstly, dance is an interesting and useful tool to shape the world of ideas of IR, as it revolves around marginal conceptions of IR that are collaboration-centric. Second and last hypothesis, dance is a relevant material element composing international relations, as albeit almost ignored, it does produce bonds at an international scale, fostering relationships across Nation-States or acting as a resistance mechanism.

The research that would be sketched throughout this study is thus composed of a diptyque that uncovered the potentiality of a choreography of diplomacy: on the one hand, dance can be used as a metaphor for framing international relations per se as well as the discipline of IR. This would be a part focusing on the world of ideas, according to Platonic philosophy. On the other hand, still borrowing from Plato's conception, the sensible world is

full of examples of the way dance has an influence over international dynamics, be it on a power politics perspective, including soft power plays, or on a more collaborative aspect, while also including perspectives on dance as a reaction mechanism to international developments. Another diptyque conception is to bear in mind, which is the distinction between ‘International Relations (IR)’ with upper-case I and R, referring to the discipline, and ‘international relations’ with lower-case i and r, that is used here almost interchangeably with ‘inter-State relations’.

## **Literature review: Combining Dance and IR**

The general idea of this study is to show to what extent dance is a relevant research object in IR academia at different levels, and the choice of the container/content analytical diptyque was a way to render that more concrete and give some avenues for further theoretical research on the subject. Furthermore, choosing this double perspective enables first to dive deep into the topic of dance and IR, and second to go wide, aiming at covering both the theoretical world and the material world to show, and even celebrate, the relevance of dance in the IR analytical field.

### *Expliciting the Theoretical Framework: A Merging of Dance and IR Scientific References*

In order to make sense of this vast and under-researched topic, the thesis would base itself onto two bodies of literature: the dance literature on the one hand, and the IR literature on the other hand. As this enterprise is not canonical, although the thesis relies on these two bodies of literature, an amount of imagination to connect both is still required and is sometimes hard to source.

Albeit at the margins, merging dance and IR scientific references is a process that some scholars have already experimented with, as proven by Young and Schlie 2011, which constitutes a major foundation of this work, especially for the first part about dance as a metaphorical frame for IR and negotiation studies. Some other scholars have also drawn the direct parallelism between dance and IR, such as Cohen 2003, or even IR and negotiation scholars such as Saner 1997.

Moreover, as dance and IR constitute new – or at least a niche – research field, and since the goal was to enable a wide perspective, literature stemming from different schools of thought in IR were used. Furthermore, literature relating to the case studies, as well as to functions of dance, was chosen.

## **Methods: The Study of Dance and International Relations through Document Analysis and Case Studies**

Underlying the challenges posed by such a subject and such a research question and project are multiple methodological challenges, but also resources to overcome them. AS this was an exploratory research, the combination of various methods was needed.

### *Document Analysis*

Given the originality of the topic, choosing the document analysis as a method is what was both the most relevant and feasible in the context of a master's thesis. Literature across

both IR and dance studies were carefully selected and analyzed into different categories, the main ones being “dance as a container of IR” and “dance as a content of international relations”. The literature was then addressed systematically, combining interdisciplinary texts in the same chapter, section, subsection, and/or argument when supporting each other and complementing each other’s points, in order to engage in a dialogue with the literature.

### *Case studies*

The elaboration of the nexus between dance and IR at both a theoretical level and an empirical level required to focus on peculiar cases, entailing the methodology to analyze case studies. It was particularly relevant for the second part as it is more empirical-focused, and could thus be constructed thanks to case studies, enabling to approach the study object in a more concrete way, bringing the research object closer and more tangible, as it was the point of the second part. What this thesis will not do is cover a peculiar case study throughout the whole analysis, but rather combine multiple case studies to prove point by point how relevant dance in the study of IR is. The case studies were chosen in terms of relevance, practicality, previous knowledge or personal engagement with the material or initiative, and originality, aiming at highlighting less-known elements.

## **I) Dance as a container of International Relations:** **the framing of the world of ideas.**

Dance, beyond constituting an artistic and sportive discipline, can be understood as a philosophy, as a frame for analytical thought. Indeed, dance can be used as a method for

thinking international relations – as well as the IR discipline as a whole. Here, the proposition would be to explore the linkage between dance and IR residing in the idea that dance could be a container of international relations – thus not constituting a content *per se*, but rather helping shaping IR with a new understanding and framing.

Choosing dance as a container of international relations has various implications and assets. Dance as a normative narrative enables to operate a shift from the wargame analogy to the dance metaphor (Young and Schlie 2011). It enables the study of the discipline to borrow new, non-hegemonic analytical lenses that can provide another understanding of IR. Within this section, the metaphorical power of dance as a scientific analysis framework will thus be addressed, covering its epistemological and cognitive value for the study of IR. Then, the idea of using dance as a method to focus on collaboration rather than on antagonism will be harnessed. This will lead the argumentation to advocate for a paradigm shift integrating dance as a core metaphor, as this perspective change could benefit the field of IR in the sense that it would sketch new avenues for alternative canonical references and metaphors, ultimately shaping the framing of the discipline. The last point of this part will concentrate on the validity of this normative metaphor attached to its echo in the post-positivist and Constructivist theoretical bodies of IR literature. This part will therefore demonstrate the potential as well as the strength of the dance metaphor in the realm of IR, supported by various *corpi* of literature.

This potential will then unfold in the next part's argument: dance can be understood as an aesthetics of dialogue in international negotiation. This means that the dance metaphor in the international relations' context includes creativity, bearing within itself core elements related to exchange and trust, essential for dialogue-building between agents on the international stage. Continuous to this perspective on creativity, the dance analogy represents a field of opportunities for agreement-striking. Indeed, dance enables a metaphorical

embodiment of the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA), adding up to the argument of dance as an esthetics of international dialogue. On top of that, another concept could be explained through the dance lens: the Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA), as increasing the States' BATNA in an international negotiation setting is primordial, and could be illustrated and facilitated through the use of dance as a theoretical frame. One last element that will be studied under this umbrella will be emphasizing on dance as a space for a nuanced concretization of the concept of power. Dance being a malleable concept, as well as a discipline where power dynamics are also at play but in a different setting nevertheless, it would enable open avenues for reformulations of the concept of power in the context of international relations.

The last point that this section will cover is dance as an open field for nuance, including a place for value-claiming metaphorical representation and for gray areas. Indeed, if dance would have been argued as being an adequate illustration of collaborative work and exchange at the international level, it can also depict value-claiming strategies as well as positional bargaining. Therefore, dance can also reveal to be an appropriate analogy within the frame of Realist theories. As an adaptive framework, dance can be used to elaborate upon State-centric behaviors and mechanisms. Dance thus represents an open door to contain a plethora of international relations perspectives and theoretical approaches, as it can hold both post-positivist and Constructivist theories, and Realist theories altogether. The last argument that this point will examine is that dance as an IR frame is fit for nuanced analyses and gray areas. In fact, dance as a container of IR opens the possibility to combine various horizons: both the collaboration and the competition aspects of international relations, both the post-positivist and Constructivist and the Realist theories, both the softness and the strength.

Throughout this part, the suggestion is to get an overview of how dance can constitute a container of IR. Dance can be regarded as a moving method: malleable, thus applicable to a

variety of situations to analyze through a normative and nuanced lens. Dance as a container of IR ultimately accounts for a change in the thinking of international negotiation processes, making place for both collaborative and confrontational logics (Young and Schlie 2011).

## **1. Dance as a normative narrative: a shift from the wargame analogy to the dance metaphor.**

Dance, in the realm of IR, can be used as a thought frame, as a narrative to frame their study, which would be by definition normative, according to Fischer's conception of narrative frames for science being always normative (Fisher 1994). The meta-theoretical aspect of dance as a metaphor framing the study of IR will be demonstrated through the epistemological and cognitive value of the power of the dance metaphor as a scientific analysis framework. In that scope, dance as a metaphor for IR answers the storytelling need from the 'homo narrans' (Fisher 1994). Additionally, highlighting this marginal perspective of dance as a container of IR is a feminist enterprise, as it both challenges mainstream theories and proposes an understanding of IR that is not power-centric or violent-centric, with a binary vision of 'winners' and 'losers' of the international politics game. Another sub-section will underline the use of dance as a method, focusing on collaboration rather than on antagonism. The dance metaphor helps to frame IR and the international negotiation process as a dance of partners. On top of that, a comparison can be drawn between the negotiation process and the dancing process, with a focus on the development of these activities rather than on a tangible result. A last tenet of this point will list a few reasons and justifications to advocate for a paradigm shift in IR, where the dance metaphor would achieve a less marginal stage. Last subsection but not the least, the relevance of the dance metaphor



as a normative narrative can be corroborated by its similitudes to IR theories, namely Post-Positivism and Constructivism. A comparison across Critical Theory and Post-Structuralism on the one hand, both part of Post-Positivism, and Constructivism on the other hand, would help understand the dance metaphor applied to IR theories, its relevance, and its validity for the IR scientific process.

*a. Epistemological and cognitive value: the metaphorical power of dance as a scientific analysis framework.*

*Narratives in scientific discourses: ‘homo narrans’<sup>2</sup> and narrative rationality*

Before moving to exploring the substantial material of dance as a container of international relations analyses, proceeding to an overview on narratives in scientific discourses and frames is in order. Indeed, if this thesis is to study how dance can be an alternative narrative for IR, some background including epistemological and cognitive elements will lead to further clarity when applied to dance as a thought framework for IR.

This work is indeed entrenched in the idea that scientific discourses are, as all domains of society, socially constructed (Latour and Woolgar 1986). A tool to construct these frames for scientific analysis is rhetoric: sciences build themselves up from rhetorical structures and segments (Fisher 1994). In other words, sciences, especially social sciences such as IR, rhetoric and science are essentially intertwined, since the practices of scientific discourse are shaped by the principles of rhetorical logic (Fisher 1994). Hence, as a continuity of that literature body and school of thought, this thesis follows the idea that scientific frameworks emerge out of “narrative rationality” (Fisher 1994, p. 23), entailing the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Fisher’s concept (Fisher 1994).

ability of society agents to reformulate reality through new lenses, thus shaping new analytical approaches. The posture taken here will then be to position ourselves as ‘*homo narrans*’ (Fisher 1994, p. 23), that is to say, as the ability for human beings to create sense for their experienced reality through stories, frames, and metaphors. This is where the core of this work comes into play: dance, in this first part, will be examined as a metaphor to frame thought on international relations – therefore as a metaphor, as a narrative to explain these mechanisms in the light of a new approach. Dance can here be seen as a storytelling tool, as humans are ‘*storytelling creatures*’ (Young and Schlie 2011, p. 194), for analysts to make sense of international relations, delving into different aspects of the subject matter that this peculiar lens brings to light.

A form of this storytelling exercise to reframe thought and analytical production is concretized through the use of metaphors. Indeed, metaphors enable to establish connections between different yet complementary concepts and to bring closer various elements that seem otherwise detached, if not antagonists (Valéry 1936). The power of metaphors also resides in the fact that utilizing unfamiliar uses of language allows a certain detachment from the sensible world to communicate with the world of ideas, a peculiar universe where an intellectual dance can take place (Valéry 1936). Moreover, dance comes as an answer to the storytelling need to develop frames in science, including IR (Fisher 1994): it enables the development of an alternative frame, narrating an alternative story and therefore widening the understanding of the discipline.

*Alternative perspectives with dance as a container of IR: confronting the mainstream theory thanks to the feminist lens*

On top of that, the metaphorical power of dance can be understood as an alternative way of considering IR from a more inclusive, less masculine-centric point of view. Indeed, wargames and sports being the main dominant metaphors in the international relations realm, and these very practices being largely coded as masculine, it is possible to define these IR metaphors as masculine-centric, lacking the integration of marginal voices such as women and other minorities. Moreover, IR is historically shaped by a violent interpretation of events, placing war and conflict at the center of the analysis. Feminist IR scholars also challenge the vision of international politics as being competitive and aiming at domination, just as dance as a metaphor does. By promoting a more collaborative approach, seeing the Others as partners rather than enemies (Cohen 2003), the dance metaphor is associated with the feminist post-positivist approaches of IR.

It is a conscious choice to engage in the feminist enterprise to create space for these marginal propositions, including more feminine- and feminist-centric ones, that imply a less aggressive outlook on international relations. Questioning scientific rationality in the metaphors used for IR also implies questioning the masculine-neutral component historically and culturally attached to it.

*b. Using dance as a method: from a focus on antagonism to a focus on collaboration*

The interest in using the metaphor of dance to be applied to the study of international relations resides in an additional element: while dominant metaphors would focus on antagonism, dance would shift the focus towards a collaboration-centric perspective (Cohen 2003). Indeed, the canonic metaphors in the realm of international relations often relate to

games, sports, and war, emphasizing on competition (Cohen 2003). This corpus of a new metaphor could thus open new avenues for the conception of international relations and diplomatic negotiation.

### *Stages of negotiation: the dance of partners*

The first one of them is that, after the stage of pre-negotiations and positional bargaining comes the stage of dialogue, of empathy, and can be compared to a smooth dance between the partners, as a waltz or like ballet (Young and Schlie 2011). After presenting who the partners were and the values for which they stand, this negotiating stage enables them to compose with harmony, exchanging on their interests and motivations. In order to engage at a deeper level in a diplomatic negotiation setting, partners have to tell their story and show more vulnerability, exchange pieces of information with a higher degree of sensitivity if the other is to trust them to make a step towards them and, ultimately, achieve an acceptable goal for both (Young and Schlie 2011). This is comparable to a dance where expressivity is key and interpersonal relationships built on trust, as it would be the case for ballet (Young and Schlie 2011). Furthermore, this negotiation stage demands a greater adaptability in coordination, as it would be for a duo in a ballet, entailing *portés* and other complex figures that can only be achieved through collective effort, and where it is crucial that both partners follow the same streams, for neither of them to get hurt (Young and Schlie 2011).

*The parallelism between the negotiation process and the dancing process: enjoying the journey rather than the result*

These new perspectives would also include the aestheticization of international relations in an Dada-artistic way: what matters, where the enjoyment is found, is in the process itself rather than in the result (Young and Schlie 2011). What is meant by this is that, in the way that dance focuses intensely on the development of processes, entailed by its very activity of moving, of producing movements, international relations could take inspiration as the very activity of negotiating has its inherent beauty and contribution. In such an approach, it could be argued that there would be no ‘failed negotiations’, since it is the fact of engaging in negotiations that is the most important (Faure 2012). Since ‘unfinished businesses’ are an important part, if not the vast majority of international negotiations (Faure 2012), instead of approaching it in a fatalist way as it could be tempting when adopting a wargame metaphor, it appears less dramatic when using the dance-metaphor lenses.

*Call to Action: The suggestion of a paradigm shift*

In the light of dance’s contribution to IR thinking, it could be argued that considering a paradigm shift integrating this dance metaphor as a reference would be of interest. As dance has been and will continue to be demonstrated as being a flexible tool for analysis, it is then adapted to respond to complex, interconnected issues and ideas. Dance as a theoretical tool for analysis can be channeled to fuel the fundamental shift advocated by some scholars to consider global issues and perspectives in a wider lens, embracing complexity and interconnectedness (Alvarez-Pereira 2022) interbridging different sources and methods, in order to challenge a black-and-white type of analysis. Dance has indeed been recognized as a more adequate lens when looking at complexity (Meadows 2001) due to its elasticity and adaptability to a wide number of ideas and issues. One element that would come into play is the fact that the dance metaphor would bear within itself an energy-creating dynamic,

framing ideas in a more positive manner, which can be helpful to acknowledge less mainstream analyses or viewpoints (Alvarez-Pereira 2022). The disruptive aspect of the dance metaphor applied to IR relies on the fact that it forms new scientific pathways for critical and experimental thinking, enabling a new shaping of the world of IR (Alvarez-Pereira 2022). Adopting dance as a key metaphor of the IR discipline would entail a change in the cultural shaping of the scientific reflection, and would create a new pathway, alternative to the war-related metaphors (Alvarez-Pereira 2022). Such a process could align with the concept of “pluriversal world” (Alvarez-Pereira 2022, p. 120), argued to be associated with values such as trust, learning, and continuous improvement, rather than fear-related values, more representative of the war metaphor (Alvarez-Pereira 2022). As Alvarez-Pereira puts it in a philosophical consideration: *“The seeds of this world already exist, they play a silent melody that we do not hear, busy as we are in making a lot of noise to ignore our fears”* (Alvarez-Pereira 2022, p. 120). Under the scope of such a cultural shift proposed by the institutionalization of the dance metaphor in IR, dance would entail the reconsideration of the common understanding of the nature of diplomatic relations, on top of providing a metaphor for the diplomatic activity (Welch 2017).

On top of that, dance can reach to shape the world of ideas in the IR discipline in a way that classic wargame metaphors cannot cover (Young and Schlie 2011). Dance as a metaphor in the realm of IR, highlighting the relevance of trust, empathy, active listening, and respect, fosters an understanding of IR where States engaging in negotiations can find win-win outcomes, hence deriving from a traditional-competitive perspective (Young and Schlie 2011). Moreover, dance can be used as a method for IR as dance research leverages a potential to “foster peace and trigger change in conflict modes” (Ditzel-Facci 2020, p. 2). This means that dance as a theoretical framework could be used to “elicit conflict transformation (Ditzel-Facci 2020, p. 2): so, dance as a metaphor and research framework

would promote a peace-prone environment, including intrapersonal and interpersonal relations soothing. This peace-oriented argument is an additional justification of the potential and added-value of dance as a candidate to enter the canonical IR research framework.

Last but not least, the dance metaphor “offers an insight that is lacking under the war and game metaphor: we need each other if we are each to succeed” (Young and Schlie 2011, p. 202). Following up on that idea, a new stream of IR could emerge, incorporating the dance metaphor – or, at least, its epistemology – within past analyses, or deciding to test it for events to come to potentially ensure less biases. The question of what the study of IR and its practice thereof would look like if the dance metaphor was displaced from the margins to the center of IR analyses and practices remains open (Young and Schlie 2011). Considering the shift from war-related metaphors to dance-related metaphors in the framing of the world of ideas in the IR discipline could lead to new insights and to uncover understudied aspects of international relations (Young and Schlie 2011), as well as advocate for the advent of another shaping of the world of ideas, leading to concrete influences in the sensible world (Alvarez-Pereira 2022).

### *c. Dance, a normative metaphor supported by Post-Positivism and Constructivism*

This section, focusing on the normative narrative brought up by dance’s metaphor in the arena of IR, leads to establishing a linkage with the theory of IR, especially with the post-positivist and Constructivist corpus of literature. Indeed, it could be argued that the normative metaphor’s validity is supported by its similarities to the post-positivism approaches and the Constructivist theory as dance as an IR metaphor draws partly on such

theoretical canvases. The reason to argue such an idea is the fact that similarities between these IR theories and the dance metaphor applied to IR relate to ontology.

As “a theory is always for someone and for something” (Cox 1981), it reveals the normative frame of positivist, canonical approaches of IR, what both post-positivism and the dance metaphor contest. The linkages between Constructivism and the dance metaphor are, if similar to the previous comparison, of a different order since Constructivism does not share the post-positivist rejection of positivism (Battistella et al. 2019).

### *Dance as a container of Post-Positivist theories of IR*

What enables a first linkage of this dance metaphor to the post-positivist approaches of IR is the challenge of scientific objectivity. Indeed, both dance as a container of IR and post-positivist approaches emerge as alternatives to the limitations of canonical positivist paradigms (Battistella et al. 2019). Positivist paradigms, such as Realism, Liberalism, or Neorealism, lay out a foundational assumption of objectivity through their lenses, operating a clear distinction between observable facts taking place on the international stage and values and ideologies (Battistella et al. 2019). This is the core element that post-positivist approaches aim at challenging: they argue that knowledge and science is always socially situated in a political, economic, social, and ideological frame (Cox 1981). This argument is also core to the skeleton argument of the present study: even if dance as a container of IR is more an analogy rather than a comprehensive theory, it still carries with it the same epistemological considerations. Indeed, underlying to the project of defining dance as a framework of thought of IR was the idea of science and knowledge as being non-objective, context-generated, socially situated subjects, especially in the realm of social sciences which IR are included in (Young and Schlie 2011). Moreover, post-positivism as an IR stream



subverted the very discipline of IR, operating a shift. On top of these arguments, both post-positivism and dance as a IR metaphor do not rely on a single corpus of theoretical references – that is to say that neither of them has a strictly defined theoretical framework. Indeed, post-positivism, building up onto diverse yet coherent and complementary bodies of ideas, is not stemming out of one single set of scientific tenets (Battistella et al. 2019). This is exactly the case of dance as a container of IR as it can be established that as dance represents a rather elastic tool, able to make various and very opposed interpretations coexist – as would be also further demonstrated below, namely with the adaptation of the dance though framework to Realist approaches<sup>3</sup> – it is not and cannot be built upon one single set of academic values, epistemology, and ontology. As observable throughout this thesis, and constituting a major challenge in the research process, dance as a frame for the shaping of the world of ideas in IR, as being an under-research area of study in IR, it builds up on both dance and IR bodies of literature, as well as is able to be supported as a valid thinking method by contrasting IR theories streams.

### *Dance as a container of Critical Theory of IR*

Let's compare the dance metaphor applied to IR through the lens of the Critical Theory, also called the Frankfurt school, constituting a stream within the post-positivist approaches (Battistella et al. 2019). This school of thought has been influenced by the input of Robert Cox and Jürgen Habermas (Battistella et al. 2019). A key feature is that Critical Theory is mainly preoccupied by the meta-theoretical questions, such as:

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the third section of this first part, to the second argument.

*“la connaissance scientifique de la réalité sociale est-elle possible? consiste-t-elle à comprendre ou à expliquer? Quelles relations cette connaissance entretient-elle avec la pratique? avec l'idéologie? avec les valeurs? La connaissance scientifique est-elle un vecteur de domination? Quels intérêts guident la recherche scientifique? Existe-t-il une vérité scientifique? Les concepts scientifiques sont-ils universellement valables ou n'ont-ils de sens que dans des contextes discursifs et géoculturels bien délimités?”*<sup>4</sup>

(Battistella et al. 2019, p. 276)

Another key feature of Critical Theory is that one of its main assumptions is that theory is inherently political and cannot be separated from the interests it serves (Cox 1981). Dance, just like Critical Theory, aims at challenging the socially-constructed scientific neutrality.

If post-positivism, including Critical Theory, was chosen to demonstrate how dance constitutes a frame for IR analysis through main theories, it is because of its disruptive potential and possibility to frame alternative discourses, to propose another studied reality of IR that would in turn influence diplomatic practices.

However, that is not all the dance metaphor applied to IR can do: it can also be examined under the scope of Constructivism, operating a synthesis between positivism and post-positivism (Battistella et al. 2019). The nature and aim of this nexus would entail a different answer: dance would not be the container of an alternative discourse about the world of ideas anymore, proposing a new way to build the IR discipline discourse, but would rather involve a further emphasis on discourse analysis of current social realities. The dance metaphor as a container for IR theories would rather highlight the similarities of both IR

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<sup>4</sup> Own translation facilitated by DeepL: is scientific knowledge of social reality possible? Does it consist in understanding or explaining? What relationship does this knowledge have with practice? with ideology? with values? Is scientific knowledge a vector of domination? What interests guide scientific research? Is there such a thing as scientific truth? Are scientific concepts universally valid, or do they only make sense in well-defined discursive and geocultural contexts?

theories, but the next argument will enable a nuance, taking into account the different methodology applied by the Constructivist approach.

### *Dance as a container of Constructivist theories of IR*

After having studied to what extent dance could be a container of IR through post-positivist streams, encompassing Critical Theory as well as Post-Structuralism, the filiation between dance as a thought framework of IR and Constructivism will be explored. A first tenet of Constructivism is the combination of a positivist methodology with a post-positivist ontology, that is to say to assume that a social reality exists and can be studied, while recognizing that this studied social reality would be eminently intersubjective, produced by a succession of interactions and reconstructions between different actors (Battistella et al. 2019). Dance as an IR metaphor can be affiliated with the Constructivist project inasmuch as it also takes the social reality as an object of study, while applying interpretative frames that can evolve from interaction to interaction, including in the academic world.

Since dance can easily be incorporated into IR theories, such as the post-positivist and the Constructivist streams, the robustness of dance as an analytical frame for IR is confirmed. Since both theoretical frames are constructed on the challenge of the so-called scientific neutrality and objectivity, dance appears as a logical next step in the metaphorical uses of the IR discipline.

## **2. Dance as an aesthetics of dialogue in international negotiation: between creativity, consensus, and nuance**

As dance as a metaphor for international relations revolves more around collaboration, it can be argued that dance does represent a field of opportunities for togetherness between States or other actors on the international stage. Indeed, dance represents an accurate metaphor for the aesthetics of improvisation taking place in diplomatic negotiations. Improvisation in negotiation being a core component of the negotiation process, and consisting in a potential element for further closeness between agents, it would be relevant to analyze this aspect in the light of this metaphorical approach. Another argument of this section would be that dance can open a field of opportunities when it comes to concessions concluding in agreement-striking. Within this part would be tackled how dance as a metaphorical frame can help re-shape the concept of Zone Of Possible Agreement (ZOPA). Dance is a concept and a practice that is always in movement, requiring flexibility and adaptability, just as negotiation in a diplomatic setting. Last point but not the least, dance enables the discipline of IR to add some nuance in the concept of power: if the metaphor of dance still leaves room for power dynamics, they are not comparable to the traditional conception that the discipline has endorsed so far.

### *a. Dance as an aesthetic of creativity in international negotiations*

Dance as a metaphor for IR enables to encapsulate core elements of the negotiation activity between diplomats: it puts creativity and improvisation in the spotlight to understand negotiation processes. Creativity constitutes a significant cornerstone of the diplomatic

processes and of negotiation stages. As dance is a flexible framework, it enables to make sense of nuanced and various realities in the realm of international relations.

Creativity here will be tackled in a multifaceted way: if creativity can stem from individuals, the focus here will rather be on collaborative creativity. Collaborative creativity, used in the dance context, can also be easily applied to the negotiation processes in a metaphorical way, confirming dance's contribution to the study of IR through conceptual metaphors. Another component of the creativity concept in this context is improvisation, which is also to be found in both dance and diplomatic negotiation settings.

#### *Collaborative creativity in the context of international negotiation*

Creativity is a core feature of dance – but also of diplomatic negotiations (Saner 1997). Indeed, if “to commit [is] an invitation to dance together (Saner 1997, p. 185), creativity and imagination occupy a core place in the diplomatic world, what's more in a collaborative way as diplomats, when agreeing to commit, will design together their way forward and next steps (Saner 1997). Here, creativity is harnessed in a context where partners work together to find common ground, rather than focusing solely on winning or dominating the negotiation (Satama et al. 2022). Collaborative creativity is, furthermore, more than the mere aggregation of different individual creative ideas – it is the result of a thought process profoundly affected by the social dimension of the exercise, entailing the presence and contribution from two or more people (Leach and Stevens 2020). In a dance context, collaborative creativity entails the creation of a choreography that is co-constructed among the different people composing the group (Leach and Stevens 2020), in the same way that diplomats would co-construct their roadmap after they had agreed to collaborate (Saner 1997). While the composition stems from all members of the group, it does not erase the

leadership dynamics that can be observable during field research in a dance context (Lead and Stevens 2020), as it tends to be observable even in a harmonious work situation among diplomat colleagues (Saner 1997). Collaborative creativity also entails a deeply personal and interpersonal dimension, that would be spotlighted throughout the collaborative work (Littleton and Miell 2004) and that is also a significant part of the diplomatic work, engendering a handful of informal negotiations and further interpersonal practices to get to an agreement (Pouliot 2023). All in all, the social context fosters collaborative creativity, in that that creativity also emerges from the social interactions and processes (Littleton et al. 2012).

On top of that, collaborative creativity suggests two different paths: a “serious work” and a “playful work” (Satama et al. 2022, p. 179). The “serious work” implies a deep concentration and focus on the activity at hand – in the text, it refers to the dance activity, but could be also compared to the negotiation activity – and an equally deep understanding of the partners’ emotions and sensibilities throughout the process (Satama et al. 2022). “Playful work” would, by contrast, encompass notions such as fun, exploration, surprise, discovery, innovation, and shared enjoyment across the parties stemming from the satisfactory component of this process (Leach and Stevens 2020). Successful collaborative creativity then happens when combining and altering the two types of work, leaving room for both seriousness and childlike exploration (Satama et al. 2022). The combination of both would thus enable an analysis process on the one hand, and exploratory and experimental processes on the other hand, and can be called “serious play” (Satama et al. 2022, p. ). This processes and steps can be tied to the different stages of diplomatic negotiation: at first, when the pre-negotiations begin, each negotiator would engage in a more serious discussion, displaying their positionalities and putting forward a more value-claiming aspect – this would be the “serious work” in the first stages of negotiation, as unclarity is too prevailing and neither negotiator can expect what are their colleagues’ interests, demands, and fears. Then,

with the establishment of trust in the relationship, diplomats can evolve towards a more integrative aspect of their work together, engaging in a more playful and creative work. The summary of both aspects would then be intertwined throughout all negotiation stages. Thus, dance can be an appropriate model for theoretical and conceptual approaches, making it an efficient container of IR and negotiation theories. The benefits of collaborative creativity, and its significance in the diplomatic world, thus advocate for negotiators to make a further use of creativity when engaging in negotiations, in order to produce more value-creating outcomes (Young and Schlie 2011). Since the metaphor of dance can foster a deeper understanding of collaborative creativity, it can help negotiators to cultivate further trust towards one another (Young and Schlie 2011).

#### *Creativity and the domain of improvisation: a negotiation dance*

Collaborative creativity, common to both the dance and the diplomatic negotiation practice, is one of the main similarities between dance and international negotiation, thus enabling the validity of the dance metaphor in the field of diplomatic negotiation. Another tenet of the comparative parallel between dance and international negotiation on a metaphorical level is improvisation, as it is both a creative tool crucial to the dance field and a major skill diplomats must have (Thompson 2001).

This improvisational creativity can also be referred to as “creative chaos” (Young and Schlie 2011, p. 200) as it represents an opportunity to continuously learn and improve from the iterations in the interaction with the other partners(s) (Young and Schlie 2011). As movements, from dancers or from States, cannot be predicted with certainty, the ability to respond quickly and appropriately, thanks to good improvisational skills, is key to the success of the international negotiation dance (Saner 1997). Indeed, when both negotiating parties,

after having successfully completed the stage of pre-negotiations, are both moving to a dynamic exchange, where reactivity and adaptability are required to conclude on a satisfactory agreement (McGinn and Keros 2000). Rather than sticking to a predetermined choreography, skilled diplomats should be able to be agile and adapt their strategies to the changing situation they have to deal with (McGinn and Keros 2000). Through the adoption of improvisation as a key component of the international diplomatic negotiations, it suggests to apprehend each negotiation as a learning moment, as a reflexive moment where negotiators learn from one another and learn from the iterative, interpersonal, and uncertain dynamics composing the negotiation (McGinn and Keros 2000). This perspective, rather than focusing on a value-claiming view of international negotiations, enables negotiators to place themselves into a critical self-assessment thinking of their practices, and are then able to identify key points of further development, opening the door to continuous improvement<sup>5</sup> (McGinn and Keros 2000). It is thus key for negotiators to harness the power of improvisational creativity as “harmonious resolution(s)” can emerge from such processes (Young and Schlie 2011, p. 199): the negotiation dance reveals then to be “highly improvisational” (Young and Schlie 2011, p. 199) while resulting in interesting and beneficial outcomes, as proven by the learning perspective that negotiators can gain when adopting this approach, stemming from the core principles of the dance practice and associated metaphorical view applied to international negotiation settings.

*b. Dance as a field of opportunities to make sense of international negotiation concepts*

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<sup>5</sup> Which is, moreover, a core United Nations value highlighted in job offers.



Dance as an aesthetic of collaboration and consensus can also be used as a metaphor for international negotiation concepts, which feeds into the shaping of the theory and the discipline of IR. The concepts of Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) and of Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) can both be associated with the dance metaphor as they both highlight the collaboration-oriented element that dance inherently proposes as a framework for IR. These models also propose a symbolism of movement and flexibility, a “ballet of negotiation” (Saner 1997, p. 181), exemplified through the dance metaphor – this malleable, flexible, adaptable framework for a variety of concepts, as well as physically: dance does demand flexibility and is composed of movements. While ZOPA would emphasize on the potentiality to get to an agreement, entailing a goal-oriented vision of negotiation, BATNA would rather emphasize on back-off plans, echoing the process of negotiation rather than its result. Dance as a metaphor of IR theoretical concepts of negotiation would offer a frame to think both.

*Dance as a field of opportunities for agreement-striking: the metaphorical representation of the Zone Of Possible Agreement (ZOPA)*

Dance as a container for IR, integrating notions such as collaborative creativity and improvisation, revealing to be useful to think international negotiation processes in an unconventional way, is also a field of opportunities when tackling agreement-striking situations. Indeed, as dance focuses on a more collaborative approach through this normative narrative, it is a metaphor that highlights the aesthetics of agreement and consensus-reaching. As a matter of fact, the dance metaphor can also be integrated into the model of the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA), aiming at sketching the encounter between agents in the perspective of an agreement to be reached. ZOPA is a “range in a negotiation in which two or more parties can find common ground” (Merino 2020, N.d.). Generally, it is associated with

an integrative approach of negotiation, where both parties would build up on both *corpi* of ideas and construct together where they can agree at (Merino 2020, N.d). ZOPA, thus, is an identified area for collaboration, where all parties of a negotiation have agreed they would consider offers standing within that area. On top of the collaboration-oriented nature of this model, which enables a first parallel with dance, it seems like the parties are dancing around to be able to identify this space in order to then dance in partnership within that identified zone, improvising until finding the right spot (Saner 1997).

*Dance as a field of opportunities for alternative solutions: the metaphorical representation of the Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA)*

As a logical continuum of the metaphorical representation of ZOPA through dance, it is possible to draw the same comparison between dance and the Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). BATNA is “the course of action a party will take if no agreement can be reached during a negotiation” (Merino 2020, N.d.), that is to say the back-on plan if there is no possibility of aiming at reaching an agreement, highlighting the different pathways a relationship between two or more negotiating parties can take if the option of a written agreement is no longer one. While ZOPA aims at striking an agreement, and is defined and refined during all stages of negotiation, especially the formula (Berridge 2022), BATNA aims at being thought about before engaging in the negotiation process, at the pre-negotiation stage (Merino 2020). BATNA can be compared to dance in two instances: first, dance, like negotiation, is a process more than a result – so, what matters most is the learning process rather than the outcome or result of it. In the second instance, BATNA can be compared to a warm-up before engaging in the concrete activity: if BATNA takes place at the pre-negotiation stage, dance needs a warm-up and stretching phase, *à la barre*, before

engaging in expressive and more technical dance *au milieu*. After this BATNA-warm-up stage can the ZOPA-*au milieu* stage happen, BATNA building up the necessary preparatory confidence for negotiators to sit at the table of negotiations and engage in the construction of a formula (Berridge 2022), entailing a more open dialogue in a approximately trusted environment (Young and Schlie 2011). Increasing one's BATNA previous to a negotiation is crucial for success (Ferrara 2023), in the same way that an efficient warm-up will ensure the success of dancers, that will be less likely to be imprecise in their movements or even injured. If negotiating diplomats prepare a solid BATNA, they are indeed also less likely to strategize poorly and to get a harmful result that could hurt one or all parts (Dupont 1994). So, dance can also be a container for international negotiation concepts such as ZOPA and BATNA, as dance provides both the positive-collaborative aspect, and the nuanced-preparatory element, both key to ensure a constructive shaping of international negotiations.

### **3. Dance as an open field for nuance: a place for value-claiming and gray areas.**

After having explored dance as a container of IR in a post-positivist, Constructivist-inspired analytical frame focusing on collaboration, it is in order to continue the exploration of this metaphor towards a more nuanced aspect. Indeed, as dance is an adaptive and flexible framework, it enables to make space for perspectives putting forward value-claiming and positional bargaining considerations, as well as allowing gray analytical areas.

### *a. Dance as a value-claiming aesthetics*

Dance has been demonstrated to be fit for analyses putting forward the role of collaboration in international relations negotiation processes, but its contribution as a container of IR is not limited to a one-sided perspective. Indeed, dance can also take stock of value-claiming strategies, that is to say of more confrontational postures involving positional bargaining. If the previous section about dance as an aesthetics of dialogue and collaboration is more straight-forward, this subsection focusing on value-claiming aesthetics of dance would be more of an intellectual exercise of exploratory research.

### *Dance as a metaphor for confrontation*

Dance can, simultaneously as standing for collaboration, also represent confrontation in a metaphorical way (Young and Schlie 2011). Indeed, when the dance that is taken as a metaphorical reference is traditional flamenco, aiming at being performed in a soloist yet expressive way, it brings a more confrontational stance, putting less emphasis on harmony and measure (Young and Schlie 2011). The individual component of it, added to its strong expressivity, lead to a dance that exposes how the performing subject feels and perceives the world (Young and Schlie 2011 – that would be associated to the first stages of negotiation, when the parties engage in positional bargaining, exposing what their interests are, their demands, and their fears (Ferrara 2023). This is an initial stage of presentation, where the dancers/diplomats are also expressing their interest for the dancing/negotiating activity (Young and Schlie 2011).

The metaphorical dance reference of the hip hop dance family could add up to this, including Krump dance. To provide some background information, Krump dance is a street dance stemming from hip hop and other urban dance styles, born in the United States in the early 2000s, often taking place in the format of battles (DeFrantz and Gonzalez 2014). Krump is characterized by energetic movements, entailing the quick but strong contraction of muscles, and is also an essentially expressive dance, where dancers interpret a series of impressive movements by its perceived physical strength and intensity (DeFrantz and Gonzalez 2014). This argument could be extended to a variety of street dance styles, such as breakdance, popping, locking, house, waacking, voguing, where core features combine expressivity, impressive technique, and use of bodily strength to perform and outperform the other dancer or team when battling.

Dance as an expression of positional bargaining in a metaphorical way has nothing new: it was already the purpose of some *ballets des nations* or allegorical ballets in the early Modern era (Welch 2017). Indeed, as it would be further studied in the second chapter, these ballet productions would engage in the representation of several kingdoms and depict them through stereotyped national characters, and the aim would be to consciously construct national rivalries, entailing clear positionalities and the will to clearly and publicly demonstrate it (Welch 2017). This positionality would be particularly salient in terms of conflict or war, where the otherness would be ridiculed and portrayed in a cliched way through the dance representations (Welch 2017). So, it is possible to see this performative depiction of confrontation in the dance arena even in the XVIIth century's court entertainments, making, by the same token, the idea of dance as a metaphor for confrontation in an IR discipline point of view worth considering.

### *Dance as an adaptive frame for Realist theories*

If it makes sense that the dance metaphor is backed by the post-positivist and Constructivist theories of IR, it can also be adapted to the Realist theories in an intellectual and explorative perspective. Thus, dance happens to be a more complex, multi-faceted metaphor, leaving room to encapsulate contrasting positions, such as one tending to be associated with the Realist framework. The dance metaphor can also do justice to State-centric approaches and more down-to-earth Realist analyses.

#### *b. Dance as an IR frame for nuances*

*The dance framework: providing alternatives and nuances to the understanding of the concept of power*

Dance as a container of IR enables the creation of an alternative conceptual space for the understanding of the concept of ‘power’, adding more nuance to it. Indeed, if power is largely emphasized in value-claiming strategies, namely in the context of the defense of national interest, following the IR Realist tradition (Battistella et al. 2019), dance enables to re-frame it into a more influence-directed understanding rather than a proper domination. Through dance field observations in groups, if power dynamics were palpable among the dancers, it is more accurate to talk about influence than power (Satama et al. 2022). It also has to be precised that this influence that dancers had over others took place during a moment of collaborative creativity, thus already engaging in a co-constructed integrative process,

rather than a distributive one, although the most experienced dancers, or the ones with the most soloist experience, had a more salient leadership over the group (Satama et al. 2022). While some retired soloist dancers had the habit to be in the spotlight and to be the main character, they tempered this leadership role both verbally and physically in the dance creation (Satama et al. 2022). In the context of collective creativity, as this is an environment that fosters trust and innovation (Sun et al. 2023), if influence and leadership role were embodied by some actors, the creative process remained grounded into a respectful exchange, where all dancers could contribute and propose movements (Satama et al. 2022). So, instead of representing a vertical authority, the most experienced dancers rather operated by small changes of movements, manifesting their power, but in a subtle way that makes it distinct from a frontal value-claiming and distributive approach (Satama et al. 2022). The reason why these manifestations of experience and influence are not the instauration of a strong power dynamic between the dancers is that trust is the main feature of this dance experimentation; trust in their own abilities to make interesting propositions combined with the trust that their counterparts will be able to do the same, which is the basis of a genuine collaborative work (Satama et al. 2022). On top of that, results show that in a space of collaborative creativity, power and decision-making was shared not only among the dancers, but also between the dancers and the choreographer: this lack of competition for the profit of collaboration could emerge thanks to the instauration of mutual trust and respect (Satama et al. 2022). This element of trust is particularly relevant in the scope of this analysis since trust is the fundamental item to build a successful diplomatic negotiation (Ferrara 2023). Indeed, trust is the cornerstone for establishing the frame of pre-negotiations and negotiation stages to further develop a relationship among diplomats and a mutual trust, enabling the creation of common goals and projects (Saner 1997). For such a dynamic to be fostered, power has to be shared, distributed, dispersed among all members taking part of the collaborative effort, from the

most to least prominent ones – this finds its equivalence in the dance world through the concept of “embodied agency” (Satama 2017), where power-sharing operates at a bodily level throughout the dance. When leadership and influence is shared and made more even between parties, through micro-behaviors, all actions then blend it and it can become hard to tell who installed the dynamic as a leader and who engaged in following that dynamic (Satama et al. 2022) – it goes gradually from value-claiming to value claiming. This way of working, both at a dance level as at a diplomatic level, could leverage further openness in debates, and enable to touch upon more controversial issues in order to find a solution to them (Satama et al. 2022). So, dance is here a framework enabling the re-formulation of the concept of power, acting as a container of international negotiation theories, leading to an understanding where inter-agents dominance is not a lever for successful negotiations anymore.

### *Collaboration or confrontation? Dance as the metaphor of the in-between*

Dance is a complex and malleable subject of analysis at a theoretical level for the IR discipline – after having demonstrated its ability to provide a lens for a more collaboration-oriented paradigm, other developments have shown that the dance framework can also be fit to showcase confrontational situations and strategies. A particularly striking example developed by Young and Schlie (2011) is the metaphor of capoeira to illustrate dance’s ambiguity as a lens for analysis, combining both collaboration-oriented elements as well as value-claiming ones (Young and Schlie 2011). As capoeira is both a dance and a martial art, it combines two visual frames on an aesthetics level: grace and confrontation, invitation to beauty and bodily defense mechanisms. Building up on Young and Schlie foundational work, as well as on own research highlighted above, capoeira, as a



choreographed fight, displays both previously analyzed elements – collaboration and confrontation. It showcases collaboration on the one hand, as the dance without active listening from the other partner can only result in mess, or even hurt, and confrontation on the other hand, as the spectacular show of skills can be associated with a value-claiming aesthetics. If capoeira does not aim at self-defense, like a traditional martial art would, it aims at showing the level of expertise and of technique of the dancers, enacting then as a value-claiming signal, with another understanding of power nevertheless: the goal is not to defeat the other, but to show off the improved skill set that one has (Young and Schlie 2011). While purely distributive approaches will consider to a lesser extent the learning objective of the negotiation process, capoeira teaches us to blend both, giving the priority to the latter: capoeira dancers engage with a learning and growth spirit, while maintaining their positions and avoiding making concessions (Young and Schlie 2011). This could be regarded as a practice of radical empathy, stemming from an ethic of love (hooks 2000), where the emphasis is drawn on understanding what the counterpart is meaning – this seems to be one of the learning of the capoeira dance for the negotiation process. Integrating this perspective of intuitive and empathetic thinking, while defending interests, could be a useful tool to shape international negotiation's theoretical approaches (Young and Schlie 2011) – the relevance of dance in the framing of the idea of diplomatic negotiation lies in its ability to aggregate different yet complementary approaches in an integrative way, making space for nuanced considerations.

Capoeira comes as a metaphorical summary of the above-mentioned analysis: not only does it combine both value-claiming and value-creating settings, but it also integrates the aspect of improvisation as a key asset to master, as diplomats would do. Diplomats, in international negotiations settings, would strive to find the middle ground between collaboration and positional bargaining, as well as between choreographed moves and

improvised and bluff moments (McCarthy et al. 2011). On top of these elements appears the growth mindset brought by the dance perspective: continuous learning while advocating for oneself. Capoeira shows that dance as a metaphorical tool for theoretical IR lenses is appropriate and relevant as it offers more than a binary outlook: IR, such as dance, are not solely focused on harmony or on confrontation – dance can make space for both perspectives as it is a wide and elastic concept for the study of IR, enabling the formation of gray areas.

The same metaphor could be developed with a peculiar style of flamenco dance: the *sevillanas*. If Young and Schlie compare flamenco to the dance of confrontation, as mentioned above, another element could be brought up as flamenco is subdivided into a large variety of very different styles: the *sevillanas*, if bearing within themselves some confrontation-related elements, do combine them with collaboration-oriented elements. The *sevillanas* are meant to be danced two by two, as there is a traditionally ‘male’ role and a ‘female’ role. If physical contact is limited, contrasting with Argentinian tango, connection between the partners is essential to convey the dance’s emotions. So, dance is fit to analyze gray areas where ambiguity and complexity can co-exist, as dance is a “space and tool for compromise” (Welch 2017, p. ).

Dance, much more than a mere artistic and sports practice, constitutes a little-explored research field for an alternative IR paradigm on a methodological and epistemological level. The philosophy of this moving state can indeed be taken to and integrated in the international relations and politics literature, thus culminating in the emanation of a new path to think international relations and to perceive the very discipline of it. This potential new paradigm, proposing both a more nuanced and a more positive perspective when applied to international relations and politics, could lead to a fresher understanding of IR. While an application of this

theoretical frame would not per se happen in this second part, a concrete perspective and demonstration of the use of dance in the sensitive world will be displayed.

To finish on this last point on dance as a container of international relations, shaping the framing of the IR discipline, it can be argued that dance is a thought frame that is fit for nuanced analyses and gray areas. As dance is a malleable concept and a moving method, it can allow space for both collaborative and confrontational perspective, doing justice to more subtlety in the analysis.

## **II) Dance as a content of international relations: the shaping of the sensible world.**

Dance as an *in concreto* material helping building – or opposing – relations between States and other entities.

First, dance shapes the sensible world in the sense that dance can lead to the further establishment of power dynamics through soft power. Indeed, dance can be a source of soft power, as it can be demonstrated by the case study of France, birthplace of ballet, and of the United States, pioneer country for Modern dance<sup>6</sup> – also known as ‘contemporary dance’. Both France and the United States employed dance as a soft power tool in the context of public diplomacy. The cases study only differ in type of dance used as a means for soft power as well as time frame: while France used ballet as a medium to convey its power and values, the United States operated with Modern dance during the contemporary era.

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Modern dance’ – with a capital M for Modern – is the scientific term relating to ‘contemporary dance’ in dance history. It refers to the dance style originally created by Ruth Saint-Denis and Ted Shawn, creating the Denishawn dance school to teach this new technique.

These case studies were chosen on account of various criteria and settings for the sake of relevance and acknowledging limitations. The birth and use of ballet in France is one of the main cultural milestones of France and Europe, whose relevance is explicit throughout the reign of king of France Louis XIV. The use of ballet in Louis XIV's courts, and then in European courts, is an unprecedented display of performance in the diplomatic context, putting forward in an obvious way the power of dance on the international stage. The case study on Modern dance use as a door for public diplomacy for the United States was also chosen regarding its obvious relevance on the international stage and in the study of dance history. Modern dance was indeed clearly used as a soft power diplomatic tool, especially during the Cold War period, namely through Martha Graham's involvement. Both case studies thus reveal to be cornerstones in dance history, and their link to international relations, if already elaborated, will aim at being strengthened throughout this section. Both case studies are among the core content explored in the dance history discipline, although not framed around IR – but studying *belle danse* and its evolution towards ballet at Louis XIV's period and its French codification, as well as studying how Modern dance emerged in the United States as a new form of dance expression are for sure canonical references among dance history syllabi, as confirmed by the masterclasses given by historian Virginie Garandeau. An additional point of convergence of both case studies is that they are based in the global North, where styles of hegemony, power, and value-claiming strategies for influence – including through seduction, as demonstrated by the use of soft power – are more similar and thus had a more straight-forward potential for comparison.

The point of these two case studies is to dig deeper in the concrete application of soft power dynamics through the use of dance to achieve such goals and ambitions of hegemony or influence. With that, dance does shape the sensible world of international relations as it

enables a State to show its power through a seductive, persuasive, subtle method – which is made even more subtle by the fact that dance is a non-discursive practice.

After explaining how dance can shape inter-State relations through its effect on soft power and public diplomacy, the study will move on to showing that dance as a content of international relations can take the shape of international collaboration. Indeed, dance can serve as an international collaboration tool to soothe diplomatic negotiations, and has been used as such since the ...th century. Thus, if the IR discipline has paid little attention to this aspect, it is far from being a new phenomenon – it is rather a historical tradition. Examples of the ballets de cour in France stemming from the Modern era will begin to structure this argument, strengthened by the use of dance during the Congress of Westphalia. This would be further detailed with the dance performance at the Concert of Nations, and will conclude with a case study on the French-Russian negotiation during the XIXth century.

These examples were chosen in order to build up on the previous and the following case studies present throughout this part, namely on France and Russia, as well as emphasizing the role of dance at global events and international diplomatic negotiation processes. The second point that will be explored within this section is that dance can constitute a playground for new international synergies, and is not only an old practice, but also a current one building up on the tradition as well as generating unprecedented collaboration propositions. If this argument emphasizes a temporal segment, it would also privilege a grassroot-level perspective putting forward the role of dance companies' collaborations around the world. The perspective is that international relations are also built through a web of actors that are not official representatives of their States, nor are from the professional sector of politics or diplomacy, but will still have intended or collateral effects in the building of sustainable relations with international counterparts. Here, as this study

focuses on dance, these actors would be the dancers and the dance companies, actively engaging in international collaborations with each other on a world scale. This section converges therefore to demonstrating how dance as a representation or as a creative process, rather than only mobilizing power dynamics through soft power and public diplomacy, can generate value-creating frames and encourage collaboration between States, thus finding itself to constitute a material of international relations shaping the sensible world.

The last section of this part, going beyond the study of dance as a soft power tool, as well as as an international collaboration potential, will elaborate on dance as a subversive potential on the international stage. So, dance as a content of international relations can also result in generating rebellious content, resisting against unfair situations on a global scale due to international politics and advocating for change and for the cessation of such events. Dance as a universal language has a peculiar strength to complete this role that is observable in several instances.

Dance as a resistance tool in a situation of war is an efficient way to make a statement at an international level: this is going to be exemplified by the case study of the Russian aggression on Ukraine and its consequences on the ballet stage. The Russian ballet companies, after a tradition of excellence and acknowledgment, have known a significant backlash and a ban on Russian canonical artworks, while Ukrainian ballet companies' and dancers' talent got gradual recognition internationally. Additionally, dance companies and ballet dancers actively shew resistance against Russian aggressive-imperialistic politics, be it from within Russia, from Ukraine, or from other places in the world.

Moving on from the Russia-Ukraine example, dance is used as a resistance tool for advocacy purposes in the international arena in the Palestinian case, where *dabke* dance is instrumental in displaying and even promoting Palestinian culture and its inherent right to

exist – suggesting the legitimacy of such a people to live organized as a sovereign Nation-State. Dance can indeed result useful when fighting a colonial rule as it is the case in Palestine, and can be further extended to other examples in History and different localities, as dance as a resistance practice is a fundamental part of the decolonial thought.

A last case study will here be a more historical one, and taking place in a different setting: *maloya* dance in Reunion Island, France, will serve as an illustration of resistance against colonialism in another spatio-temporal frame, as it developed during the XVIIIth century on this Indianoceanic island.

## **1. Dance as a source of soft power.**

After having understood dance as a thought frame for the discipline of IR, pertaining to the world of ideas according to Platonic philosophy, dance is going to be examined as a concrete material to build international relations. One first aspect to take stock on is the place of dance in the frame of soft power. Soft power is defined as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye 2008, p. 1). It includes positive attraction and persuasion (Nye 2021), which entails pleasant, enjoyable, or even beautiful means to convey values in order to gain influence and ultimately reach to have an upper-hand in international relations dynamics, aiming at getting the national interests satisfied. Soft power aims at shaping positive attitudes and preferences towards a State in an indirect, dissimulated way, often utilizing culture as an appealing tool to form favorable opinions abroad about its own State. The beauty and appeal of the sportive-artistic discipline of dance are elements that can qualify it as an adequate tool for spreading values, ideas, ideologies, and systems through its non-discursive practice.

Instead of ‘soft power’, the term ‘cultural diplomacy’ could also be used, especially in the subsection about the use of Modern dance by the United States. Let’s precise first that these concepts are distinct, as cultural diplomacy stems from soft power as a tool: while soft power is an overarching, broader term, encompassing different types of non-coercive forms of diplomacy, such as scientific diplomacy, cultural diplomacy solely focuses on promoting a State’s culture and values. Cultural diplomacy can be defined as being “an instrument of state policy” [including a] “tension between propaganda and diplomacy” (Gienow-Hecht 2010, p. ). Alternatively, it can be summarized as an “instrument of work at the exclusion of politics” enabling the establishment of relations “with countries that were politically unpalatable” (Gienow-Hecht 2010), or as existing “beyond the realm of the State” (Gienow-Hecht 2010). However, in the scope of this chapter, focusing on dance in the shaping of international relations, the association between soft power and cultural diplomacy makes sense, as dance would be an instrument from cultural diplomacy employed by States, which would in turn reinforce these States’ soft power. Other considerations on cultural diplomacy estimate that cultural diplomacy constitutes a “diplomatic exchange by non-State actors who, in the name of a nation, people, or larger ethical question, attempt to accomplish a change in foreign relations (Annika Freiberg, in Nelson 2022). Lastly, another definition that can complement the previous ones and enter in the coherence of this thesis is the one given by Yuzo Ota: cultural diplomacy would be “any undertaking to promote the culture of a country by people who identify themselves with that country” (Yuzo Ota, in Nelson 2022). This definition could also be associated with the concept of ‘public diplomacy’.

*a. Dance as a tool for soft power: France, a pioneer country.*



Even before the concept of soft power was formally articulated, dance has been employed as a tool for soft power. This discussion will particularly focus on French soft power through dance, especially through ballet. This part will take the process of dance as a tool for soft power back to the XVth century to explore the socio-historical development of such a practice. It will therefore demonstrate that this process is duly embedded in international relations practices, making dance as a content for international relations an old tradition rather than a contemporary discovery.

*Dance as a court entertainment – diplomatic culture and Modern manifestation of soft power*

Dance, especially ballet, stemming from court entertainments, used to be a tool to impress foreign powers when meeting each other (Welch 2017). It is clear that such cultural entertainments were fully part of the diplomatic protocol and process, expliciting the internal power of the receiving government (Welch 2017). The ability to organize and to produce aesthetically pleasing spectacles for the enjoyment of foreign representatives reveals the power and respect of the ruling authority, and in this regard, makes dance a ‘central instrument of government’ (Strong 1984). Court entertainments, including dance, were thus an integrated part of the strategy of XVth/XVIth century governments to show their power to their counterparts (Welch 2017): this constitutes a convincing proto-materialization of soft power.

France constitutes a textbook example of such a strategy, using dance as a tool of soft power since the Modern era. Ballet being a key cultural feature of Louis XIV’s reign, dance was a preferred artistic manifestation chosen by the king himself and applied by the court, and served a political agenda (Welch 2017). Aiming at achieving the most spectacular

displays, such spectacles would “make foreigners see what a king of France can do to his own kingdom” (Welch 2017). This would constitute a Modern equivalent to the reality of soft power, as what is at stake in such situations is the attractiveness of France’s culture and values from an outsider point of view (Welch 2017). Using dance in the frame of court entertainment would then go beyond the mere will to distract diplomatic audiences in a pleasant way: it would constitute a concrete vector of relations between states as it would appear to be a material realization of a territory’s (soft) power. If this is a matter of soft power in the sense that dance aims at seducing, persuading the diplomatic audience of France’s power, it could also illustrate a Realist rationale in the sense that such an utilization of dance aims at conveying a value-claiming aesthetics, where the promotion of national interests are central.

A relevant example can be observed in France at the court of Louis XIII: the ‘*Ballet des nations*’. Instead of being a single representation or a formalized piece, the *Ballet des nations* is a dance style; it consists of a stylized dancing parade, popular in the 1620s-1630s in France, aiming at depicting several kingdoms at play in the at-the-time current international relations (Canova-Green 1995). If the aim of such *Ballet des nations* was first purely entertainment, entailing the representation of the foreign nations in a grotesque manner, it still had a political function through “allegorical iconography” (Canova-Green 1995). Indeed, this type of dance was especially used to express tensions in conflict or war situations, namely in the Thirty Years’ War period (1618-1648), and during the Franco-Spanish War (1635-1659), where France would clearly display its position and relations with Spain, but also Italy and Germany (Canova-Green 1995). Allegorical iconography in the ballet des nations, popularized by the French, was then an instrument of power aiming at showing superiority and influence (Welch 2017).

The non-discursive element of dance can represent an opportunity for the use of dance as a soft power tool. If this element was useful in the previous section about dance as a container of IR, it can also be concretely applied in the sensible world and has different consequences. Indeed, in dance sections during court entertainments in the Modern era, diplomats as a public could implicitly guess the messages conveyed by the receiving country – here, in our example, by France – and would have their own subjective interpretation (Welch 2017). These messages generally wanted to suggest France’s cultural hegemony and overall influence over European politics – and such messages are able to be delivered in such a way since it would take place in a spectacular display of artistic talent, which seduces the audience (Welch 2017). Indeed, non-discursive images produced by the dance act are effective precisely because of their vagueness and interpretation openness (Rubidge 1989). Dance, in its subtle way, accelerates the integration of complex ideas on the political stage among different States or kingdoms (Welch 2017), thus resulting to be an asset to communicate ideas about hegemony and cultural superiority, as the French aimed at doing. So, it can be said that the wordless component of dance makes it fit for a use in the international stage aiming at hinting a territory’s superiority or position in a subtle way, thus making dance an even more credible soft power instrument. This is what France did in the Modern era, thus creating a narrative where it had a comparative advantage with the other powers, which is proving to be successful. Through the *ballet des nations* and other forms of dance entertainment, King Louis XIV exploited the flexibility of court etiquette, where each ballet could be tailored to the specific political needs in context (Canova-Green 1995). For the French king, the moment of dance was part of the continuity of diplomatic work and negotiation between ambassadors, and the non-discursive element of dance could subtly grasp and take stock of the state of international relations (Canova-Green 1995) – the power

of imagery and allegory was then weaponized in a way as it was a moment to show superiority or convey threats through the beauty of the dance art.

### *Ballet as an essentially French art*

Ballet was an undebatable element for France's rise and hegemony at a cultural level in Europe during the Modern era (Welch 2017). Other European courts were indeed influenced by French techniques and aesthetics for *ballets de cour* (Welch 2017). Moreover, a parallel taking stock of French significant influence in the Modern era can be drawn between dance and diplomacy: as ballet was conceived and codified in France, so was diplomacy (Welch 2017). During this era, both ballet and diplomacy were conceived and codified in French, therefore making French the *lingua franca* of both disciplines. If these are two largely different fields, there is still a link between both rather than just two parallel phenomenon with no inference: if diplomacy turned out to be shaped by French influence in this time period, it was partly due to France's cultural hegemony, including the spectacular court entertainments emphasizing dance and ballet as preferred art forms (Welch 2017). It can be further demonstrated as "the French forged a style of court ballet that proved especially compelling for diplomatic uses" (Welch 2017, p. 15). The use of performances for diplomatic purposes was indeed a French proposition and technique forged in part by the Medici family, especially Catherine (Welch 2017).

The founding figure of ballet as we know it nowadays is none other than the French King Louis XIV (Bourcier 1978; Christout 2005; Asaro 2013). Its nickname "*Roi Soleil*", "Sun King", actually stems out of his prominent role on the dancing stage: in the Ballet de la nuit (1653), he performed as the Sun (Asaro 2013). Worthy to note is that dance, more than merely being a tool to expand power and influence, was a habit and a passion of Louis XIV

(Le Moal 2011). It was part of his education, beginning at age seven, and was only thirteen when he first performed on the Ballet de Cassandre (1651) (Le Moal 2011). Following Louis XIV's leadership, and integrating the key component of the French language within it, the Royal Academy of Dance is a cornerstone erecting ballet as an essentially French art. Its foundation in March 1661 is commented as being "a major act in the history of Western choreographic art" (Le Moal 2011).

One key distinctive element for ballet to constitute an essentially French art is language (Pacheco Ramos 2017). Indeed, the French language largely dominates this art since its creation of the first ballet school founded by King Louis XIV in 1661 (Pacheco Ramos 2017). Since foundational movements remain the same, as well as their denomination, fixed in French in the middle-til-end of the XVIIth century, the names to refer to these movements are still in French nowadays (Pacheco Ramos 2017). The fact that the French language was maintained as the lingua franca of ballet is not a coincidence: it was an integral part of Louis XIV's strategy of cultural influence for international purposes (Pacheco Ramos 2017).

*b. Dance as a tool for soft power: the United States of America and Cultural Diplomacy.*

If the French have ballet as a national jewel, the United States of America possesses Modern Dance. This argument, following the study of dance as a soft power tool from the French perspective through ballet, will concentrate on the use of Modern Dance by the United States of America as a part of its Cultural Diplomacy strategy.

### *Modern dance as an essentially American art*

Modern dance is an essentially American art as it was born and developed first in the United States. This dance movement is often referred to as the “American filiation of Modern dance” (Roux 2022, N.d.). It emerged thanks to the technique pioneered by Ruth Saint-Denis and Ted Shawn, who founded the Denishawn dance school, aiming at teaching this new technique. The next generation of influential dancers and choreographers were trained at the Denishawn, such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman (Roux 2022). While Martha Graham developed the method of ‘*contraction and release*’, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman created the ‘*fall and recovery*’ style (Roux 2022, N.d.): both techniques are worth mentioning as they set the tone for a new canon for contemporary dance, taught worldwide then and still nowadays – and they are both emerging from American choreographers, which is to be noted. In this sense, it can be said that Modern dance American dancers and choreographers deeply marked the development of contemporary dance, confirming the dominant place of the United States in the field of Modern and/or contemporary dance. What’s more, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman aimed at making a new dance emerge, a dance that would represent the realities and challenges of their time and space, deeply connected to their American context (Roux 2022), thus attaching to Modern dance this Americanness component. They wanted to represent “American women and men [with] the emotions of their time” (Roux 2022, N.d.). Furthermore, Modern dance is supported by American authorities after the Great Depression in 1929 thanks to the New Deal launched by Roosevelt. Indeed, some Modern dance companies benefited from the Federal One Project: it is the case of Doris Humphrey’s dance company that engaged in a collaboration with Charles Weidman to produce ‘With my red fires’ in 1936 (Roux 2022).

The American administration and authorities were conscious of the potential of Modern dance: that is why they invested – both financially and ideologically – on it, seizing the importance of establishing it as an American product (Roux 2022).

### *American Modern dance – a dance for export?*

If “Modern dance is a distinctly American form of dance” (Nelson 2022, p. 1), already constituting a form of soft power given that this dance style is automatically associated with the United States, a second stage in the elaboration of Modern dance as an American tool for soft power takes place: export (Prevots 1999). Indeed, the United States administration, conscious of the potential of Modern dance as an element of soft power, decided to further engage in the use of it as a cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy asset: two laws established America's cultural diplomacy in 1946 and 1948 (Roux 2022).

The first one was the Fulbright Act of 1946, granting scholarships for international exchanges not only to students and scholars, but also to dancers and choreographers. What the United States had to win in promoting this initiative was that these dancers sent abroad could spread American techniques of Modern dance, or even what is categorized as American values such as freedom and democracy. Martha Graham’s participation in the United States’ cultural diplomacy took place in the frame of these Fulbright exchanges, as it will be more thoroughly explained below. The second law aiming at establishing the United States’ cultural diplomacy post-World War Two is the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, also known as the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act. This Act continues the tradition established by the Fulbright exchanges, further targeting the arts and culture as a vector of American values. What distinguishes the Smith-Mundt Act from the Fulbright Act is the straightforwardness of the process: the Smith-Mundt Act puts more explicit emphasis on the

dissemination of American values through culture, formalizing the efforts of the United States to engage in international politics through cultural diplomacy, acting also as a means for public diplomacy. This Act entailed the creation of the Dance Panel of the United States State Department in 1954, which sent American Modern dance companies abroad, such as Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, and José Limon, to showcase the expressivity and freedom in creativity which the American dance companies benefited, in contrast with the Soviet creation standards, more controlled by the State. These three Modern dance companies helped reach all continents, especially through the Cold War period, having in mind the geopolitics of the communist containment strategy operated by the United States. Furthermore, the aim of the United States was to display a variety of stories, including productions from marginalized African-American and Latinx-American<sup>7</sup> communities with Alvin Ailey and José Limon – but their creations could sometimes more clash with this American-dream discourse rather than corroborate it. Nevertheless, both laws contributed to establishing Modern dance as a key soft power tool for the United States, acting on cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy, especially throughout the Cold War period, putting forward American values, creativity, and techniques.

It is in this context that this argument of American Modern dance as an element for export takes place. ‘Export’ here will be considered under two aspects: tours in the first place, and teaching in the second place. The ‘tours’ part will adopt a focus on the Cold War period, as an eminently political element was attached to dance at that time (Prevots 1999). If the United States invested Modern dance particularly during the Cold War period, openly aiming at promoting their power, values, and political rationales, such as democracy (Geduld 2010), this effort is not constrained at that historical period – while it is more fragile before, as

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<sup>7</sup> The gender-neutral nominal form ‘Latinx’, instead of ‘Latino’, was chosen for inclusivity purposes.



Modern dance was still emerging, it comes back without any doubt after the collapse of the USSR, as it can be shown around the 2003 period (Croft 2013). However, it is to be noted that diverse voices will be amplified on the American dance stage to perform in the Soviet Union, sometimes contrasting with the ideal image of the United States abroad, when addressing racism and segregation for instance (Nelson 2022). The ‘teaching’ part will further elaborate on how American dance companies extended their legacy through dance schools, aimed at training their future company dancers, or aimed at spreading their technical knowledge to a wider public. This materializes also the American soft power as these Modern and postmodern dance techniques are still being taught, being part of a long-term logic, confirming the strong American influence on the field of contemporary dance as a whole, constituting a new canon – or even a new cultural niche-hegemony.

As Modern dance was consciously aimed at being an object for export for American authorities, especially during the Cold War period, as demonstrated with the Martha Graham example, this logic also extended to other choreographers and dance companies, such as Alvin Ailey. This example adds another layer to the American wish to spread and promote its liberal values: the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AADT) was the first predominantly Black dance company to perform outside of the United States during the Cold War thanks to the State Department’s full financial support, and the first ever American dance company to perform in the Soviet Union (Nelson 2022).

However, if the United States’ aim was to cool down the global criticism regarding segregation policies and racism, the AADT did not comply with this exercise to showcase African American as being equal citizens in the American democratic political regime (Nelson 2022). While the AADT was showcased in a tokenistic way in the representation of American cultural diplomacy abroad, Alvin Ailey’s creations do shed a critical light on

America's democracy, showing the struggles of African Americans through pieces like *Blues Suite* (1958) and *Revelations* (1960) (Nelson 2022). Indeed, while Martha Graham showcased a more romanticized vision of America, Alvin Ailey provided an "alternative narrative of democracy" (Nelson 2022, p. 7), integrating the African American experience in the context of a segregated United States.

Nevertheless, despite this critical take on America's political regime and consequences, Alvin Ailey's productions received a positive response from the Soviet public (Nelson 2022). The AADT, alongside depiction of the African American inequalitarian experience, integrated elements conveying joy and pride (Nelson 2022). *Revelations* (1960) is particularly significant in that matter as it celebrates wins of the African American community, such as the liberation from slavery and the sense of community (DeFrantz 2004). The enjoyable elements, such as the evocations of a triumphant Sunday morning, gratefulness, pride, victory, confidence, happiness, helps the public to receive the piece in a positive way (Nelson 2022). So, although Alvin Ailey brings a nuanced version of American dance diplomacy, he was nonetheless one of its most eminent ambassadors in that he proposed works representing America that aroused, among other things, positive emotions and perceptions in audiences, particularly in the Soviet Union (Nelson 2022). A last example is to be mentioned to have a complete picture of the United States State Department-funded dance tours: José Limon's dance company's tour, especially in Latin America during the Cold War. Indeed, José Limon's work, himself being Mexican-American, helped bridge the United States and Latin American States, namely on a cultural level – aiming at triggering an adhesion to similar political views in a containment-strategy perspective.

Thus, dance is truly a tangible element of international relations as it plays a crucial role in soft power and cultural diplomacy strategies.

## **2. Dance as an international collaboration playground.**

In the sensible world, dance shapes international relations as it constitutes a driving force for soft power demonstration. Nevertheless, dance uncovers more as a content of international relations: indeed, it can also enable to build bridges between Nation-States. Dance will thus be investigated as an international collaboration playground, where collaborations between dance companies around the world have their impact on the development of inter-State relations. The word ‘collaboration’ has been carefully chosen as the content of this part would go beyond ‘cooperation’, as will be demonstrated through the dancers-agents-network perspective in the second subsection. Additionally, a temporal aspect will be duly considered: dance as an international collaboration apparatus happens to be an old historical tradition that continued throughout the centuries until today. This historical use of dance as an international collaboration instrument would usually refer to representations at global summits or other high-level diplomatic negotiation between two or more State representatives. The second subsection of this section will dig into the dancers-agents-network perspective, where the concrete links between companies and dancers across the world would constitute its own web of international ties. Adding another layer to that observation is the fact that international collaborations across different dance companies do sometimes have little to do with diplomatic negotiation’s settings. Even if their work would solely focus on the artistic encounter, it still brings professional dancers from different countries in a collegial form, for formats that are more often than not out of the ordinary and that they, as well as the public, will remember. Thus, it can be argued that even when the aim of the dance collaboration is not of a diplomatic nature, it does still contribute to the shaping of international relations between grassroot-level agents of the artistic world, according to the concept of “transnational ballet world” (Wulff 1998, p. 31).

*a. Dance as an international collaboration element soothing diplomatic negotiations: a historical tradition.*

Dance, further than an instrument being used to fulfill the design of Nation-States, usually aiming at maximizing their national interests, can also be regarded as a helpful catalyst of cooperation and collaboration between States on the international stage.

If the polymorphous and malleable aspect of dance was demonstrated above as being an efficient element for the use of dance as a soft power tool, it can also be integrated in the success formula of dance as a material representation of international collaboration. Dance as a non-verbal practice and display can be considered as an asset for diplomatic communication as constructive processes can be built-up on ambiguity (Welch 2017). In the example of a diplomatic-centric setting, diplomats can have their own interpretations about the positions of the represented territories, while experiencing a pleasing moment of artistic mastery (Welch 2017). Thus, this openness in representations' interpretations can play in favor of international collaboration as more positive outlooks can be promoted through this soft communication means. If the subtle, wordless aspect of dance can reveal to be an advantage for thinking dance as a container of IR, it can also be for representing dance as a soft power tool, as well as for analyzing dance as a collaboration catalyst.

Dance as a vector of collaboration on the international stage is far from being a new idea or practice – using dance as a means for smoothing diplomatic processes and negotiations is indeed quite a historical tradition.

### *Ballet for Westphalian Peace (1648)*

A cornerstone for ballet diplomacy is to be illustrated at the Congress of Westphalia (1645-1649) (Welch 2017). In the first months of the negotiation, a pause took place around Carnival to celebrate Mardi Gras, and this diplomatic recess enabled the performance of a ballet, emerging from the French delegation: the *Ballet de la Paix*, or Peace Ballet (Welch 2017). This Westphalian entertainment conveyed the message of the need for peace and thus the need for diplomats to come to an agreement, to collaborate with each other in order to safeguard a sustainable peace (Welch 2017). While showing influence and soft power, in line with the previous argument about dance as an element of soft power during entertainment moments at high-level international conferences and congresses, the French and overall the diplomats at the Congress of Westphalia reinvented “ballet as a diplomatic lingua franca for the post-Westphalian era” (Welch 2017, p. 108). Moreover, the *Ballet de la Paix*, building up on the tradition of allegorical iconography and ballet des nations, combined what would be associated with court entertainment with a more participative form afterwards, where attendees would be encouraged to join the dance, having a, interpersonal function adding up to the aesthetic and cultural function (Welch 2017). For the actual negotiations to result in success, building trust and establishing good interpersonal connections was key – as in any negotiation, where the ‘balcony diplomacy’ occupies a relevant place, being associated to the “spirit of diplomacy” (Bély and Richefort 2000, p. ) – and was enabled and enhanced through the dance element (Welch 2017). This last element relates to the “diplomacy of the spirit” (Bély and Richefort 2000, p. ), present at the Congress of Westphalia, where diplomacy materializes itself also through the exchange of ideas, culture, philosophies, and religions (Bély and Richefort 2000). The main idea that was conveyed through the *Ballet de la Paix*, as its name indicates, is a peaceful, harmonious world order, addressing the collective community and emphasizing on international collaboration rather than on highlighting one

kingdom's power over the others (Welch 2017). It can also be observed that the *Ballet de la Paix* was a manifestation of the unprecedented cultural shift in Europe operated by the implications of the Westphalian treaties, such as the emergence of sovereign and equal Nation-States (Bull 2012). If the ballet could not hide Europe's divides, it performed well to display an idealized version of Europe, hinting that a beautiful process – peace – is underway and that kingdoms would unite to make that peace-making process a reality (Welch 2017). In that sense, it is possible to say that this *Ballet de la Paix* helped smoothing diplomatic negotiations at the Congress of Westphalia, contributing, to some extent, to the success and signature of the Westphalian treaties, advocating for the cessation of religion wars in Europe to ensure peace, entailing efforts from all kingdoms encouraged to work together to achieve this goal.

#### *European Concert of Nations (1814) – Dance Diplomacy in Practice*

*“Le congrès ne marche pas, il danse”*<sup>8</sup>

(Prince de Ligne, Congress of Vienna)

Another instance where dance diplomacy was used to achieve a collaborative diplomatic spirit among the Nation-States was during the Concert of Nations at the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) (Mahiet 2011). Indeed, the Concert of Nations plays a significant role in the imagination of international collaboration and coordinated political action, and it is a historical event where dance and music contributed to establishing a peaceful atmosphere while enabling differences to be expressed (Mahiet 2011).

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<sup>8</sup> “The Congress doesn’t progress—it waltzes”, translation by Nicholas Parsons, in *Vienna: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.

An element that is worth mentioning is the instrumental role of the waltz as an informal moment between diplomats at the Congress of Vienna: it engendered excitement, movement, and harmony, where graceful and shining aspects were present, all of that conveying a pleasurable time at the Congress (Rémond 2020). The fact that this diplomatic momentum allied negotiation efforts for international politics and enjoyment and conviviality through dance and music rendered the Concert of Nations of 1814-1815 unique (Mahiet 2011; Rémond 2020). The same combination of aesthetical and cultural with interpersonal functions of dance are shown here: through exchange between fellow colleagues in an informal setting, the atmosphere for *a priori* successful and constructive negotiation processes was set right (Mahiet 2011).

#### *Late XIXth century Franco-Russian rapprochement: The Dance Magic*

Another example is a negotiation taking place between Russia and France in the XIXth century, where ballet played a key role to ensure smooth and eventually successful diplomatic relations between the two entities (Mahiet 2016b). Preparing the success of the Franco-Russian Alliance in 1894, it is noteworthy to mention the *Sleeping Beauty*, premiering in Russia in 1889 (Kennan 1984). The use of magical elements in the ballet plot, added to the spectacular displays on the stage, converge towards an aesthetics of magnificence, of greatness, that could positively reflect upon the legitimate power – which is, in this case, the Russian tsarist regime (Mahiet 2016b). This aesthetics phenomenon can be referred to as the imperial “scenario of power” (Wortman 2000), as the costumes, the sets, the choreography, the music, and the overall imagery proposes a flattering picture of the Russian tsarist power. Thus, the “instrumental representations of government and authority” (Mahiet 2016b, p. 120) were strengthened through the depiction of fairy tales in a spectacular way throughout the

ballet story. Furthermore, the absolutist imagery was supported by a clear choreographic reference to the ceremonial *ballet des nations* usually taking place during Louis XIV's court entertainments in France in the XVIIIth century (Mahiet 2016b).

If *Sleeping Beauty* ballet had an influence in the smoothing of the Franco-Russian relations in the late XIXth century, another ballet contributed to these successful negotiations: it is *The Nutcracker* (1892), including its first representation at the Mariinsky Theater in Saint-Petersburg in Russia and its replication in 1896 during the Russian diplomatic visit to Paris (Mahiet 2016b). To begin with, an element playing in favor of a Franco-Russian rapprochement via this cultural production is the fact that it was created by French and Russian artists: the ballet choreography was invented by Marius Petipa, while the music was composed by Piotr Illitch Tchaikovsky, supported by the Russian Director of the Imperial Theaters Vsevolozhsky (Mahiet 2016b). Building up on the ballet creator's identity and nationality, the mixing of French and Russian aesthetic symbols and references is another element to take into account when implying that this ballet smoothed out the diplomatic relations between France and Russia, culminating in the 1894 alliance (Mahiet 2016b). Indeed, the blending of imperialistic-tsarist elements with Republican ones is a core feature of the *Nutcracker* ballet: while the representation of the *ballet des nations*, constituting the second act of the *Nutcracker*, echoes an imperial-induced harmony, costumes were inspired by Republican French uniforms (Mahiet 2016b). Another substantial element to take into account, similarly to the *Sleeping Beauty*, is the enchantment produced by the aesthetics of the *ballet-féerie*, also composing the essence of the *Nutcracker* ballet (Mahiet 2016a). These "aesthetics of wonder" (Mahiet 2016a) had then contributed to making a positive impression not only on the Russian public, but most importantly on the Russian tsarist leadership,



leading it to consider positively the idea of an alliance with Republican France (Mahiet 2016b).

Thus, the enchantment of international negotiations through dance is an important element to take into account in taking stock on successful negotiations.

*b. Dance as a playground for new international synergies: a current practice.*

Dance as an element of value-creating international processes and negotiations does not remain a thing of the past – as dance evolves across time and space, dance is still a relevant content of international relations insofar as it can create new synergies and bridges between Nation-States. This subsection bears the terminology ‘playground’ and ‘new international synergies’ in a conscious way: ‘playground’ to suggest a more creative and playful register since the subsection will be focusing more on a dancers-centric approach. This point of view is further supported by the use of ‘synergies’ rather than ‘relations’, signifying that the subject matter to be tackled here does not take place at an inter-State level constructed by diplomats’ interactions. Here, not only is the perspective going to be more contemporary-centric, but also will encompass a dance network analysis, creator of international relations at a grassroots, artistic world level, taking dancers as agents. The point here is to demonstrate the contribution of dancers as agents to the shaping of international relations in the sensible world. If a peculiar focus is intended to relate to African spaces, further examples non-related to this geographical reality will be mentioned.

*Dance exchanges and international artistic residences – dancers as international network agents*

The shaping of the sensible world by dance can take the form of new international strategy at a dancer-agent level, materializing itself through dance exchanges and international artistic residencies between dance companies. This would entail a perspective where dancers are considered agents of an international network being built by their interactions on the dance field across borders. Indeed, such an idea is encapsulated in the “transnational ballet world” concept (Wulff 1998, p. 31): through transnational mobility and the interconnectedness of ballet personnel across all Nation-States, including recognition and mixing between national ballet styles, dancers and dance companies construct their own relationship webs across borders (Wulff 1998). A strong focus in this sub-subsection is placed on mobility and attractivity of mobility, as it is a means for dancers to develop and promote their careers through tours and workshops (Wulff 1998). International mobilities of dancers can be long-term, as when integrating another dance company than one of its own national dance companies, or short-term, when touring or production preparation trips (Wulff 1998). In the end, “every [dance] production is a result of the cooperation of people from different countries”<sup>9</sup> (Wulff 1998, p. 40).

**Dance collaborations between France and Russia: the Ballets Russes<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>9</sup> The word ‘dance’ was modified by the author of the thesis, for enlargement purposes while the original quote states: “Every ballet production is a result of the cooperation of people from different countries” (Wulff 1998, p. 40). In the present use, it was modified to not be ballet-centric, and to focus on dance in general instead.

<sup>10</sup> The name is intentionally written in French as this is the proper name of the dance company.

The first case study that will constitute the demonstration that dance can create synergies at an international level, adopting an dancer-agent-network perspective, is the dance collaborations between France and Russia, culminating in a Franco-Russian dance company: the Ballets Russes. On top of the eminent relevance of this company on the dance history frame, it builds up on previous elements about France in the previous chapters, and will provide some information in the lead-up to more Russia-focus content further below.

If the Ballets Russes were not created in the aim of bringing both States closer, as the impresario of the dance company Sergei Diaghilev was interest-driven and motivated to make his structure succeed (Buckle 1984), thus leading him to adopt strategies to reach for the best artists in each domain to make his shows spectacular (Christout 1966). That element considered and put aside, the Ballets Russes did in fact help shape international relations in a practical way as they were promoting creative and technical-knowledge information flows benefitting both France and Russia, enabling the betterment of relations between dancers and dance companies from both States. Diaghilev's creative spirit enabled the re-birth of ballet in France at a time where ballet was considered as old-fashioned: through the combination of tradition and modernity, or even exotism, Diaghilev managed to enlarge the repertoire of ballet, incorporating thus a significant Russian contribution to a historically French art (Auclair et al. 2009). Through exchange, communication, and dialogue between French, Russian, and other international counterparts, new international synergies could indeed happen in the dance field, also reaching unprecedented aesthetic creations (Bourcier 1978).

### **Dance collaborations between France and African States: the case of the Preljocaj company**

Another body of examples to demonstrate the shaping of the sensible world through dance as a collaboration method to build synergies between dancers-agents in an idea of a global network of dancers is to be found at the Anjelin Preljocaj dance company. This example, based in the French context, further builds on the previous knowledge about dance in France, with a gradual geographical remoteness in selected examples, progressing towards Africa – which will constitute the next example to support this subsection.

The Preljocaj company has indeed developed several partnerships with dance companies abroad: Albania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Israel, Mali, Morocco, Tunisia – to cite some of them, from the 2018-2019 season onwards<sup>11</sup>.

As dance companies see the potential in connecting globally to establish international partnerships, they are de facto actors in the shaping of international relations at a dancer-agent level, constituting a network of dancers collaborating at a global scale. These artistic, knowledge, and human flows at an international level do create this dance network, building new synergies across borders – dance is indeed a creator of international relations in the tangible world.

### **Dance collaborations in Africa: the case of the Ecole des Sables in Senegal**

Last, but not the least, the gradual progression of case studies lead to the examination of contemporary dance collaborations in the African context, building-up on the dancer-agent-network perspective: the intense circulation of agents, the formation of networks through dance productions and trainings at a continent-scale (Andrieu 2014) will be studied through the case study of the Ecole des Sables (Senegal), based on its consensual influence in the contemporary dance world.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://preljocaj.org/ballet-preljocaj/cooperation-internationale/>

To begin with, the Ecole des Sables in Senegal constitutes a significantly innovative dance hub, attracting dancers all across the world, further expanding the dancers international network and fostering further international synergies. Founded in 2004 by Germaine Acogny and her husband Helmut Vogt in Toubab Dialaw in Senegal, it is by now an “unmissable school” (Broué 2024) by its unique approach, combining technical teaching and a holistic, whole-life approach. Indeed, the Ecole des Sables draws its appeal as a dance hub from the combination of dance learnings, especially the Acogny technique, aiming at mixing African traditional styles with the Western ballet style, the engagement with nature, and the collaboration with different agents from the Toubab Dialaw village (Broué 2024). With regards to the technique, Acogny is considered to be the first to draw a synthesis between Western classical ballet and African dance styles, and, ultimately, to propose a dance style that is both African and universal (Swanson 2019). Core to Germaine Acogny’s technique is also the inclusion of meditation and nature celebration moments in the training she delivers, beginning each day of training with a sun meditation, feet in the sand (Acogny 2024, in Broué 2024). When trainings are given and dancers come from all across the world to receive that training, the dancers do not only learn the Acogny technique and other dance styles, but they also learn the culture, the food, the different processes at play in the Toubab Dialaw village where they actively contribute and become part of the community during their stay: this pedagogical stance does not only foster collaboration among international dancers at the Ecole des Sables, but also goes beyond the dance field to unite foreigners and locals for a given period of time, based on Léopold Sédar Senghor’s vision that it is through the eyes of foreigners that one realizes its own culture (Acogny 2024 in Broué 2024). Additionally, with her emphasis on transmission and intergenerational dialogue, Acogny delivers her choreographies and techniques to young dancers, who then create their own training centers in their own countries to pass on the knowledge (Acogny 2024, in Broué 2024). With all that

innovative approach, Acogny is recognized as the “mother of African contemporary dance” (Andrieu 2014), which makes collaborations with the Ecole des Sables attractive and engendering a rich network of dancers-agents around the world, creating international ties through the dissemination of this technique and through flows to go get a training in Senegal. All in all, the Ecole des Sables in Senegal holds a significant place on the dance collaboration spectrum, reaching international levels through knowledge transfers, trainings, and collaboration of multiple dancers-agents from different countries and continents, ultimately creating an international network.

As an innovation and professionalization hub, the Ecole des Sables attracts dancers from across all African States, as well as Europeans and American dancers. The same goes for the Termitière, constituting another significant dance hub in Africa in Burkina Faso, continuing the work of bringing dancers from all around the world to learn their peculiar techniques, and of mixing different cultural codes (Andrieu 2014).

#### *Dance creating international synergies through the mixing of cultural codes*

An additional layer of complexity can be brought to this analysis: if dance companies and dancers, acting as agents of an international network of agents, are able to create international synergies thanks to multipartite collaborations, so could the mixing of various artists and cultural frameworks through dance. In other words, not only can dance as an international collaboration create value through the physical encounter of dance companies from across the world, but can also do so through the non-discursive mixing of various dance registers, *in fine* resulting in the merging of references from various countries.

A first illustration that can come to mind, building up on the previous argument, is the dance style developed by Germaine Acogny from the Ecole des Sables: indeed, she is a

pioneer in mixing Western classical ballet aesthetics and techniques with various traditional and patrimonial African dance styles, giving birth to a whole new dance and approach (Swanson 2019). She is the first to propose a dance style that is both Pan-African and universal (Swanson 2019). From criticism and racist hostility towards her body while she was learning classical ballet in France, Acogny decided to merge both cultural codes and found this new school of dance (Swanson 2019). Heir of Maurice Béjart with the Mudra-Afrique project, then through the Ecole des Sables that she founded with her husband, she proposes a merger between various African dance styles, resulting in a school offering a platform for Pan-African identity development through the mergers of different cultural elements from diverse African countries (Swanson 2019). Acogny did not only perform and gave form to this new technique, but also theorized it, marking the intention of mixing different cultural codes: she advocates for “*l’ouverture aux danses du monde : danse afro-américaine, danse européenne dite classique, danse hindoue*”<sup>12</sup> (Acogny 1980, p. 24). Furthermore, the Ecole des Sables training includes a course with explicit mention to cross cultural knowledge transfers in the field of dance techniques: the ‘Echange des savoirs’ course is designed to hand over patrimonial dances from different African countries in order to constitute a database for contemporary dancers, merging different dance styles from around the world (Acogny 2024 in Broué 2024). This technique, resulting from aesthetical and cultural mergers across different continents and countries, is not only confined to the Ecole des Sables, but is now taught worldwide through certified instructors that built up on the Acogny heritage at the Ecole des Sables (Swanson 2019).

Another example can be found in the work of Dada Masilo’s company. This dance company, bearing the name of its choreographer from South Africa, also merges ballet traditional codes with African dance styles, resulting in the mixing of cultures and aesthetics

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<sup>12</sup> “Openness to dances from around the world: African-American dance, European dance referred to as ballet, Hindu dance” (own translation, attempt to be a culturally-informed translation rather than literal).

from different parts of the world. Dada Masilo's interpretation of 'Swan Lake' is an adequate illustration of such a process. Through this artistic-cultural production, the mixing of aesthetic codes, stemming from diverse socio-cultural geographies, emerges the way forward to invite to a collaboration between South Africa and other countries, even if only at the level of international collaborations strictly linked to the field of dance – and not to political-diplomatic processes.

Last, but not least concrete example of dance as generating international dynamics in the field of dance is taking place between Reunion Island (France) and Spain, involving both the realization of an artists' residence, resulting in the mixing of two cultural-artistic languages, and the production of region-wide performances. Multiple initiatives are to mention, all following the stream of uniting Spanish and Reunionese dancers, each of them bringing their techniques and traditional heritage: while the Spanish dancers would bring flamenco, the Reunionese ones would bring maloya. While these projects always also include music, this paper will only focus on the dance part given the chosen subject matter. Safran, produced in 2018, was the first ever established international collaboration between Reunion Island and Spain at the dance level, supported by regional artistic institutions. The three editions of the '*Les Rencontres*' festival in 2019, 2022, and 2023, were the occasion to further deepen the bonds between the two territories and two cultures through the dancers' network.

To sum up, dance is an international collaboration playground, as it enables to strengthen bonds across nations in a dancers-agents-network perspective, compliant with the "transnational ballet world" (Wulff 1998) concept. This is a further point to demonstrate that dance is indeed a tangible matter of international relations, shaping the sensible world in a significant way, although at its dance-scale.



### **3. Dance as a resistance and advocacy arena.**

As dance as a content of international relations enables a large variety of interpretations and applications due to its malleability and nuance potential, if it can be used as an instrument for States to show their soft power, as well as an entry point for international collaborations, dance can as well be an arena for resistance against oppressive situations and for advocacy. Dance can act as a contestatory material having the potential to criticize the international status quo and the current world order (Rottenberg 2020), proposing a new narrative, thus a new content of international relations. In such a perspective, it can be observed that inter-State conflicts can be reacted to through the dance institutions and dancers themselves, as it can be observed in the Russian-Ukrainian case. After the rise and fall of the Russian reference on the international ballet stage, Ukrainian ballet companies and dancers know a gradual global recognition. On top of that, dancers as artists can engage in political statements through their dance engagements and further professional choices.

In a more peoples-centric perspective, dance constitutes a powerful tool used by communities whose cultural identity has been or is still being denied from them by colonial powers. Dance bears within itself a component which makes resistance personal, intimate even, as the resistance instrument is the body. This is particularly relevant when taking decolonial philosophical lenses: dance served and still serves as a powerful platform for oppressed peoples to resist colonial occupation. In the end, it can be regarded as a medium for advocacy – potentially for a more peaceful international order, as can be helped with an application of the previous thought frame proposed in the first part.

*a. Resisting imperialism: Ukrainian resistance in the face of Russian aggression.*

Dance can indeed serve as an instrument to resist injustice and to advocate for better livelihoods: it is employed in the frame of the resistance against imperialism. Dance here creates new tangible elements and repercussions on the international stage, thus resulting in a content of international relations. Here, this argument will dive deeper into dance as a practice to resist imperialism in the case of the Russian war on Ukraine. In this example, dance as a content, as a concrete material, responds to the consequences of international relations.

*The rise and fall of the Russian hegemony on ballet*

Ballet has been a powerful cultural, identity-shaping, and state-strengthening tool for Russia and the USSR. Indeed, it could be referred to as the *de facto* official art of State (Ezrahi 2012). Moreover, a variety of techniques and aesthetics of ballet were shaped by Russia. From the technical side, the Vaganova technique influenced ballet instruction worldwide and was classed as one of the best, most referred to techniques (Ezrahi 2012). The instruction language in the USSR was also Russian (Ezrahi 2012) – and not another language or other languages pertaining to the other territories falling under the USSR, nor was it translated to those languages. However, since the illegal aggression of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian ballet world has known significant challenges, such as cancellations of ballet productions, trainings, artistic residencies, or paused licensing entailing a reduced available repertoire. In the end, if Russia is still a historical reference for ballet, it transitioned

from national symbol to isolation symbol, appearing at an international level as a boycotted institution (Marshall 2022, New York Times).

### *The rise of Ukrainian talents*

Ukraine and Russia share a common historical trend in the tendency to emphasize ballet as a predominant discipline. For Ukraine, an interesting development happened after the dissolution of the USSR: ballet then became a symbolical instrument of national identity. Not only was the theme of national identity incorporated in *libretti* of Ukrainian-produced ballet pieces, but was also materialized through the nationalization of Ukrainian ballet theaters. This appears as both a substantive inclusion of the Ukrainian identity pattern in the practice of ballet production and a concrete, sensible world-shaping manifestation. Within the major ballet companies in Ukraine, including the National Opera of Ukraine and the Kyiv State Choreographic College, a subtle balance is trying to be achieved between proposing a repertoire that combines both national identity exaltation and nostalgia from the Soviet influence on ballet production and techniques. So, it is possible to say that there is an influential linkage between Ukrainian national identity and the Ukrainian dancing community.

### *Dancers taking position: staying or leaving?*

#### *Ukrainian dancers*

Ukrainian dancers have taken different paths to respond to the Russian aggression in their country. While some of them, working in Russian ballet companies, left their work

country and current employment, some of their counterparts followed the same path within the borders of Ukraine, leaving the ballet company to support the country's war effort. One significant example is the one of the ballerina Olesya Vorotruyuk from the National Opera of Ukraine: as soon as Ukraine was attacked by Russia in February 2022, she left the ballet company and engaged in the military forces to defend Kyiv.

### *Russian dancers*

To begin with, if this first example is not a dancer, he is vital to the good achievement of the artistic excellence promised by the Bolshoi: conductor Tugan Sokhiev, musical director of the Bolshoi, decided to resign as a consequence of the pressure that the war in Ukraine caused him<sup>13</sup>.

On the ballet stage, prominent Russian dancers have denounced Russia's aggression in Ukraine, even to the point of resigning from prestigious Russian ballet institutions such as the Bolshoi. It is the case of Olga Smirnova, high-profile star dancer that used to work at the Bolshoi Ballet, as well as Alexei Ratmansky, renowned choreographer and former artistic director of the Bolshoi. He said he was "unlikely to return to Russia "if Putin is still president"" (Marshall 2022, New York Times). From Olga Smirnova's side, she clearly explains that there is a before and an after of this event, which brings consequences: "I am against war with all the fibers of my soul (...) I never thought I would be ashamed of Russia, but now I feel that a line has been drawn that separates the before and the after" (Marshall 2022, New York Times). Indeed, journalist Marshall further wrote in the New York Times in 2022:

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<sup>13</sup> [Guerre en Ukraine | Des danseurs étrangers quittent le Bolchoï | La Presse](#)

*“Her move is one of the most visible symbols of how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has upended ballet, as prominent artists shun Russia’s storied dance companies; **theaters in the West cancel performances by the Bolshoi and the Mariinsky**; and dance in Russia, which had opened up to the world in the decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, seems to be turning inward again.”*<sup>14</sup>

The fact that Olga Smirnova, internationally renowned ballerina, left the Bolshoi has had consequences on a reputational level for the Bolshoi, and even for Russia as a whole, provoking a “seism” (Libération 2022). It has further been described as a “*blow to the pride of a nation where, since the days of the czars, ballet has had an outsize importance as a national treasure, a leading cultural export and tool for soft power*” (Marshall 2022, New York Times).

#### *International dancers and ballet staff*

Numerous international dancers also showed their support for Ukraine by leaving major Russian ballet companies in 2022 following the Russian aggression on Ukraine, such as the Bolshoi. David Motta Soares<sup>15</sup>, from Brazil, and Jacopo Tissi<sup>16</sup>, from Italy, are two examples from the Bolshoi<sup>17</sup>. From the Mariinsky side, the male main lead Xander Parish<sup>18</sup> decided to leave the company and the country, explicitly because of the war in Ukraine<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Emphasis brought by this author.

<sup>15</sup> [David Motta Soares | I can’t describe in words what is going through my head and heart. I’m deeply sad to say that I have left the Bolshoi Theater my teachers... | Instagram](#)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/CazpLVsg-vp/>

<sup>17</sup> [Guerre en Ukraine | Des danseurs étrangers quittent le Bolchoï | La Presse](#)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/Caxj21HOqGK/>

<sup>19</sup> [Guerre en Ukraine | Des danseurs étrangers quittent le Bolchoï | La Presse](#)

Some other dancers expressed taking a break from their current employment in Russian top ballet companies, such as Victor Caixeta, from Brazil, second soloist at the Mariinsky theater of Saint-Petersburg<sup>20</sup>.

Other staff members of ballet companies, such as Laurent Hilaire, French director of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, resigned from the company after the war against Ukraine began.

### *Dance institutions taking position: banning Russian companies and repertoire?*

Ballet institutions worldwide have taken a number of measures since the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Many European countries especially have erected policies to stop collaborations with Russian cultural institutions, including ballet companies such as the Bolshoi or the Mariinsky (Marshall 2022, New York Times). For instance, the Royal Opera House of London took the decision to cancel all summer's Bolshoi performances because of the war (Agence France-Presse, in La Presse, 2022). They indeed had a residency with the Bolshoi scheduled. Other dance companies in the UK have canceled their engagements with Russian dance companies, such as the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre and the Royal and Derngate in Northampton, canceling their collaboration with the Russian State Ballet of Siberia (Khomami 2022, The Guardian). In Ireland, the Helix Theatre in Dublin also canceled its representation of *Swan Lake* by the Royal Moscow Ballet to show solidarity with invaded Ukraine (Khomami 2022, The Guardian). In the Netherlands, the Dutch National Ballet canceled a residency of the Mariinsky, stopped all collaboration in the scope of a ballet festival in Saint-Petersburg, and stopped all collaboration with the Moscow International Ballet Competition as well (Marshall 2022, New York Times).

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<sup>20</sup> [Guerre en Ukraine | Des danseurs étrangers quittent le Bolchoï | La Presse](#)

On top of banning Russian ballet companies, Russian repertoire was also banned as a reaction to the war. Furthermore, Russian ballet companies found themselves also restricted in the repertoire they could exploit, as the control for the licensing of Western choreographies reside mainly in non-Russian institutions (Marshall 2022, New York Times). Institutions such as the George Balanchine Trust or the Ballets de Monte Carlo have respectively paused licensing or tried to without success (Marshall 2022, New York Times). The key idea to keep in mind here is the will from Western ballet institutions to cut ties with the Russian ballet heritage, leading to a cultural exclusion from Russia triggered by its own decision to invade Ukraine.

These elements demonstrate the reaction of the ballet world in the face of international relations developments such as the Russian war on Ukraine: not only did the ballet world react instead of staying silent, but it took concrete and severe action to ban Russian cultural heritage, materialized by defections from Ukrainian, Russian, and international dancers, and other staff members, as well as by institutional responses, entailing banning repertoire, pausing licenses, and stopping collaborations. Dance is thus proven to be a relevant arena of resistance against imperialism and war, as well as an arena of advocacy of the Ukrainian independent identity, talent, and art. Dance can also embody these functions for other oppressing situations on the international scale: it is the case in the example of colonial situations, as it will be studied now.

*b. Resisting colonial Zionism: Palestinian resistance in the face of Israeli aggression.*

After studying how the dance world reacted to the Russian aggression on Ukraine, showing opposition from the Ukrainian dancers and ballet companies, as well as from allied Western ballet companies, the focus will now cover the use of dance as a resistance movement in the face of the Israeli occupation on Palestine. As land, a Nation-State, and a culture are being denied to the Palestinian people, the dance act emerges as a deeply subversive element, resisting on the international stage and on an artistic level against a colonial power (Mills 2017).

Dabke – also known as dabka – is a Palestinian traditional dance stemming from ancient roof-reparation techniques, usually practiced as a group and therefore emphasizing the sense of community, and described as the most publicly promoted form of dance in the contemporary West Bank (Rowe 2010). The communitarian element of it is a cornerstone of this national dance, as the practice of this dance enables to maintain solidarity and cohesion in the community (Mills 2017). It is usual that dabke is learnt in this spirit of togetherness at celebratory events, weddings, through peer-imitation. Building onto these tenets, dabke as a traditional Palestinian dance is the concrete expression of the will for cultural autonomy through dance (Rowe 2009), resulting in implying the will for independence and territorial integrity in order to experience Palestinian culture in the context of a Nation-State whose borders are respected. In the context of Palestine, even more so since October 2023 with the escalation of the Israel-Palestinian conflict into a war on Palestine, dance becomes a means for resistance, advocacy for the Nation-State autonomy, solidarity, and hope, challenging the will to oppress and colonize (Rowe 2009). The incorporation of the concept of ‘post-salvagism’ (Rowe 2009) in the understanding of dabke as a resistance means, entailing the preservation of cultural traditions while taking into account the current reality and updating it to the current practices and challenges, enables to see how oppressed peoples use



their traditional culture in an innovative way as a tool for resistance, while paying attention to preserving their essential qualities (Rowe 2009).

Since the conflict escalation in October 2023, expressions of dabke dance can be seen across the Internet and social media. Dabke as a resistance means against colonial Zionism is to be found in multiple locations and contexts, serving differentiated functions, while bearing the similarity of a dance of cultural expression, and thus, of resistance in a context where exhibiting this cultural autonomy is disruptive. It is possible to see dabke danced by everyone and in all contexts, from tragic and explicitly war-related to joyful moments of celebration in community. For instance, it is possible to see reportage-like footage on social media of groups of Palestinians dancing dabke in front of Israeli snipers, having a clear resistance meaning attached to the performance of the dabke dance<sup>21</sup>. Other dance and video productions are more organized, aimed at being posted on social media and at conveying a message advocating for the freedom of Palestine and Palestinian people, resorting to images associated with resistance and claims of autonomy<sup>22</sup>. Dabke is also danced by youth and children, as it can be seen in this video of Palestinian youngsters dancing at a displacement camp, aiming at forgetting about the war while claiming their identity, sharing a common moment of joy in community<sup>23</sup>. Although the reference to the war is clear with the context of the displacement camp, the dance conveys both joy and resistance. Dabke, in the end, can also be a purely joyful experience, danced for holidays and celebrations, such as this girl dancing dabke in a celebration moment<sup>24</sup>, expressing joy and pride. All in all, dabke is a powerful tool for the Palestinian people to show resistance through dance, being a concrete

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<sup>21</sup> [Palestinians Perform Palestinian Dabke in front of the Israeli snipers](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Leve Palestina - Dance from Palestine](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Palestinian Children Dance Dabke Together At A Displacement Camp In Gaza #gaza #palestine #shorts - YouTube](#)

<sup>24</sup> [A girl dances Dabke on eid in Gaza #gaza #palestine #freepalestine #shorts - YouTube](#)

material of international relations, including when it comes to international-level resistance claims.

*c. Resisting colonialism: Enslaved people's resistance in the face of dehumanization.*

It has been demonstrated in the upper subsections that dance is a powerful tool for resistance and for advocacy at an international level, with Ukraine resisting Russia through its dancers and its companies, to oppose imperialism, and with Palestine resisting the colonial Zionist enterprise of Israel. Now, to conclude this section on dance as a resistance and advocacy means, the case of a culture created by enslaved people will be explored: the case of *maloya*, created in Reunion Island, France. The rationale for this subsection is a bit different as it digs deeper in the intrications between dance and international relations: as slavery resulted in part from power dynamics between dominating States, and enslaved people creating these artistic forms as means for survival and resistance, it can be said that these dances are products of the international order of a given time at a given place. What's more, this subsection will be the occasion to pay tribute to the contribution of enslaved people to world culture, as they originated not only context-specific traditions to resist, but traditions that are perennial in time and that now stand as representatives of their land on an international scale. While capoeira for instance is rather well-known from the global public, it is not the case of *maloya*, that this study aims at popularizing a bit more with this example.

*Maloya – from enslaved people's resistance means to a regional emblem*

Maloya is a form of dancing resistance from slaves in Reunion Island, former French colony, and now a French overseas region and department. In the XVIIIth century, people were brought from South African regions and Madagascar to be enslaved in Reunion Island in sugar or coffee plantations, and manage to survive and resist through maloya dance (Banaré 2013). If maloya has also a sacred component, design to enter in transe and communicate with higher powers, the secular dimension will be here considered, implying using maloya as a communication means: enslaved people in Reunion Island used maloya to “spread messages about the plantation masters, plans to escape, to organize revolts” (Waterschoot 2018, p. 28). They could communicate between plantations through this newly-created dance and music – what's more, in a new language that they created: Reunionese creole. The practice of maloya dance gave agency back to enslaved people, enabling them to get organized as a resistance group, to plan for their *marronages*.

Beyond remembering the memories of slavery, maloya also serves another purpose: advocating for equality and identity. Indeed, maloya has also a history linked to the Communist party and movement in Reunion Island; in the 1950s, it advocated for Reunion Island’s independence from the French metropolis, and maloya served as a key instrument in advocating for such a reality. Maloya indeed reflected a “communist, autonomist and independent(ist) discourse” (Medea 2004, p. 286). More than advocating for independence, maloya played a key role in enabling the Reunionese people’s advocacy for equality compared to French citizens from Hexagonal France.

Last, but not least, maloya serves as a third advocacy purpose: the advocacy of an identity. If the claims for independence became significantly marginal, asserting the Reunionese identity is still very much a current phenomenon. Maloya is indeed an object for identity formation for Reunionese people (Medea 2004).

To sum up, dance is a real object of tangible international relations in the sensible world since dance enables the concrete materialization of protest, resistance, and advocacy. This is even more true when it comes to identity, where cultural traditions can be expressed through dance expressivity, performance, or structural instances.

## **Conclusions**

Dance and international relations entertain a complex, multifaceted and multi-levels linkage. If dance, nor international relations, can be reduced to only one aspect of their respective discipline, there can be an attempt to grasp a holistic idea of their main concepts and components and to bring them into a synthesis across these two different literature bodies.

If the objective of this thesis was not to be exhaustive, nor to be considering only a single element of the intrications between dance and international relations, it would have shown the richness of these two discipline's mixing. The goal was precisely this: uncovering the wide range of interpretative possibilities in the field of IR thanks to the dance analytic tool, both as a metaphorical frame as a concrete tool for the shaping of the sensible world's international politics. While this enterprise is ambitious, and has its pitfalls, it could at least provide a large range of theoretical and concrete examples of application of dance as both a container and a content of international relations, hopefully widening the analytical lens and

research objects in the field. Therefore, after this demonstration, it is possible to answer the research question and its subsequent hypotheses:

1) “dance is an interesting and useful tool to shape the world of ideas of IR, as it revolves around marginal conceptions of IR that are collaboration-centric”:

2) “dance is a relevant material element composing international relations, as albeit almost ignored, it does produce bonds at an international scale, fostering relationships across Nation-States or acting as a resistance mechanism”:

Thus, it can be said that while both hypotheses were corroborated throughout the data analysis, highlighting in which ways dance was both a relevant metaphorical frame to shape the discipline of IR and a significant tangible element shaping international relations in a concrete way in the sensible world, the study still enabled to bring some nuance to these initial claims. The nuance did not undermine the very question, which is connected to showing the importance of the dance subject in IR, but has rather highlighted additional elements, exploring the malleable and flexible frame that dance is, and its ability to stretch to make diverse considerations coexist, from value-creating to value-claiming in a theoretical part, and from soft power, to collaboration, to resistance in a more concrete way. If anything, it can be said that the nuancing of the hypotheses is more observable on the first one than on the second one, given that the first claim did not include confrontational aspects of the dance metaphor, while the second hypothesis already included the aspect of resistance in its assumption.

In the attempt to bridge both disciplines and *in concreto* mechanisms, various elements could be unveiled regarding dance acting as a metaphor for the purpose of reframing the IR discipline. Furthermore, proceeding via the studying of case studies enables us to identify distinct aspects of dance as a tangible practice in the face of actual international interactions between power entities, including but not limited to Nation-States. Thus, if

dance, as well as international relations, can uncover various definitions and interpretations possibilities, this study tried to reconcile these different and diffused conceptions into a solid synthesis browsing different levels of understanding and of conception.

All in all, dance and international relations are closer in meaning, encompassing both abstract and concrete elements, collaboration-focused and confrontational-focused elements, as well as different ways of performing it, than one might think. A thought that emerges is the hope of a gradual interest of academia for these dance frames and empirical examples, in order to build a more comprehensive understanding of IR, as well as a more collaboration-oriented school of diplomacy, enjoying the dance over the final pose.

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