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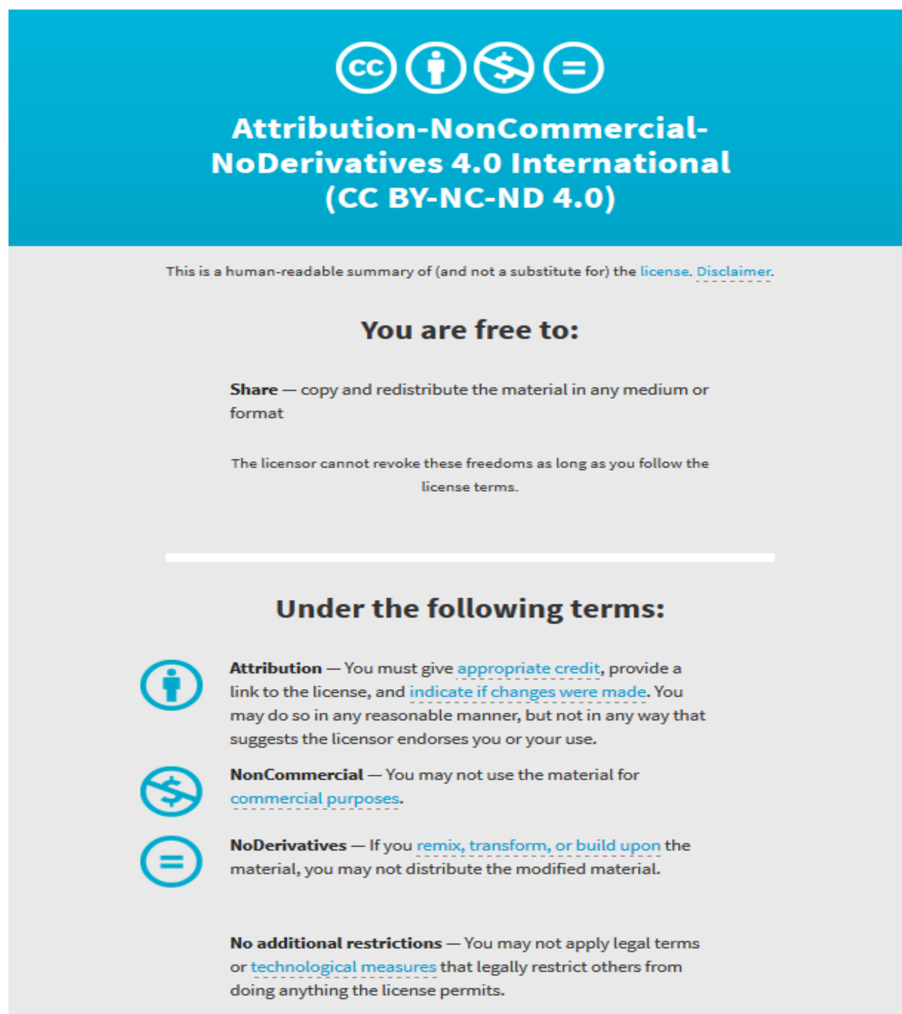

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Pontic dance:

Feeling the absence of homeland

Valerie Liddle

Abstract

Pontic dance originated in the Pontos area of northern Turkey. It survived a genocide and exile of Pontians from that region in the 1920s as well as their migration to Australia thirty to forty years later. In this chapter, I discuss how Pontic dance, in both its choreographic and participatory modes, embodies the loss Pontians feel they have suffered as a result of these ruptures. Pontians assert that it is necessary to have a certain 'feel' in order to dance in an authentic way. Although this 'feel' may manifest itself in the bodily movements of the dance, it is an expression that comes from a sense of loss that Pontians inwardly feel and express through dance, particularly a loss of place and a waning of cultural practice. This loss is referenced in two ways: first, historically, the dances, their execution, costumes and musical instruments embody the loss of the former homeland. Second, the movements of the dance outwardly express the passion the dancers feel about what it means to be Pontian. This chapter explores how the performance space composed of the emotion and sensation of the dance makes present the absence of a way of life in Greece and the loss of the original homeland.

Introduction

Pontic Greeks have a characteristic way of dancing that developed over many centuries in the Pontos area of northern Turkey. The dance practices survived a genocide[1] and their exile from that region in the 1920s as well as their migration to Australia thirty to forty years later. The movements of Pontic dance are different from that of Greek mainland or island dancing. Its dances range 'from the most languid, slow, relaxed, effortless, shuffling steps to the most frenetic, tense, physically demanding and almost violent movement' (Kilpatrick 1975:104), with the dancers' feet covering a small space on the ground. In addition to foot movements, there is 'flexing and rotation of the torso' (105-6), referred to as *shimmying*, which is characteristic of the style of Pontic dance. Almost all dances are performed in a closed circle, with dancers holding hands in particular ways. There is no leader, and any variation in steps can be performed by all in the dance (105-6). All dances have a set number of steps that are repeated over and over again, with the movements of the arms and hands keeping in time to a rhythm that is unique to Pontic dance.

During fieldwork, I observed these dances many times in many different places, performed by members of the whole community or as choreographed routines in front of audiences. I saw them danced at Pontian dinner dances, at other Pontian community functions, at religious festivals, at wider Greek festivals and as part of commemorative events. Pontians also danced at restaurants, in streets as they led the bride and groom to the church, at wedding receptions and at private homes to celebrate birthdays or forthcoming marriages. Of all the different dimensions of Pontic life which I observed, it seemed to me that dance was to Pontians themselves the most quintessential expression of what it means to be Pontian. It was a means by which they displayed their Ponticness, and through which memories were evoked and intense emotions both shaped and expressed.

Pontians assert that, in order to perform dances in a Pontian way, it is necessary to display a specific characteristic, which they refer to as the 'feel' of the dance. One night at a practice session of the senior dance group of the Pontian Brotherhood in Adelaide, I noticed that one dancer did not quite have the same movement as the other dancers,

1 The claim of genocide is in relation to the death of approximately 350 000 Pontians out of a population of 700 000 in northern Turkey in the early years of the twentieth century. Around the same time, approximately 1.5 million Armenians were killed in Turkey during World War I. In 1997, the International Association of Genocide Scholars acknowledged that the violence that occurred against Armenians conformed to the 'statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide' (as cited in Dadrian 2003:80). Other Christian groups, such as the Greek Orthodox Pontians, now contend that their ancestors also suffered in the same genocide. In 2007, the International Association passed a resolution that recognised a genocide against Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontian and Anatolian Greeks (Charny 2011:33).

even though she was performing the same steps. They were dancing *Samsón*, a dance with a particular bounce that comes from the dancers having straight legs and moving swiftly from side to side. When I asked why this dancer was not displaying the same action as the other dancers, Anoula told me that this dancer was new and had not yet learnt to execute the steps, but that, more importantly, she was not yet 'feeling' the dance. She said that this was important for Pontic dance. 'You have to feel the dance inside', she commented, while indicating her heart area (field notes, 10 April 2006).

Similarly, in Greece, I was told about this 'feel' of Pontic dance. At my first interview with Dimitris, he told me that at the Veria Black Sea Club they encouraged dancers to feel the dance rather than just to execute the steps and keep in time or in line with the other dancers. He then demonstrated how the *Omál* should be danced. 'First', he said, 'I will show you how a non-Pontian person dances the *Omál*'. So Dimitris slowly danced the six steps of the *Omál* in anticlockwise fashion, moving around in a circle: 'He can make the moves but he cannot put in the soul'. Then he said, 'Now I will show you how a Pontian person dances the *Omál*'. This time he repeated the same slow six steps but his whole upper torso moved backwards and forwards. At the same time his arms, bent at the elbows, moved in and out from his upper body. The steps of the dance were just as slow and smooth as in the first version, but the movement of the upper torso gave the impression that the dance had increased in vitality. In this way, the incorporation of the upper torso into the dance gave the 'feel' to the dance. But just as I was beginning to think that he was telling me that if I learnt the correct bodily movement, I would be able to get the 'feel' he was demonstrating, Dimitris added, 'Something is happening inside us' (field notes, 10 September 2006).

An inchoate emotion is difficult to describe. The words that dancers may use to express what they feel within the dance are not the same as the experience of it within the immediacy of the dance. Both Anoula and Dimitris could not adequately articulate what they meant by the 'feel' of the dance. Reflecting that they knew 'more than they could tell' (Polanyi 1967:4), both Anoula and Dimitris could only indicate through their bodies what this experience, as expressed in the dance steps, meant to them. They had a 'tacit knowledge' (1967) of the 'feel' of the dance that they could not express verbally. Anoula touched her heart area to indicate the inner feeling that is expressed in the dance. Dimitris, in contrast, had to demonstrate it in his dance steps. It was not just in the way the steps were danced, the way the dancer moved, the turn of the head, the slight pause of body movement or the shimmying of the upper torso. These visible movements were not themselves the 'feel'. Ultimately, for both Dimitris and Anoula, the 'feel' came from an inner experience. The focus of this chapter is on how this inchoate 'feel', experienced in the bodily movements of the dance, is an embodied expression of an emotional sense of being Pontian, which incorporates both a sense of the loss of the place of Pontos through exile as well as an absence of Greece because of migration.

Dance as gesture

Recent theories approach dance from a variety of perspectives. As a cultural manifestation (Kaeppler 1978) and the 'embodiment of cultural memory' (Buckland 2001), dance is seen as a 'rhythmic movement done for some purpose transcending utility' (Royce 1977:5). Other writers study dance from the perspective of 'the moving body' (Farnell 1999), its unique manifestation forming one part of the whole sphere of human movement (Williams 1997; 2004). Hanna describes the multisensory nature of dance and lists its components as 'purpose, intentional rhythm, culturally patterned sequences, and extraordinary non-verbal movement with inherent and aesthetic value' (1979:24). She defines dance as a form of language, an 'extraordinary nonverbal movement' (24) and argues that in the dance these components 'are selected in much the same way that a person would choose sequences of verbal language' (41). All these writers describe the various aspects of dance and its multisensory nature, but none sufficiently explain what the dancers feel when they dance or what the audience feels when they watch them, or how these feelings are produced by dance movements. In contrast to Hanna, Langer (1953) prefers the term *gesture*, in relation to dance, rather than *non-verbal language*, a concept that is linked to a cognitive discursive structure.

> Gesture [in comparison to language] is far more important as an avenue of self-expression than as 'word.' An expressive word is one that formulates an idea clearly and aptly, but a highly expressive gesture is usually taken to be one that reveals feeling or emotion. (180)

Gesture, then, brings us closer to an explication of the 'feel' of the dance.

Langer further argues that any art form has a 'primary illusion' (174). All art is composed of basic materials, but the primary illusion is not to see these but to see the created form. Dance is composed of the rhythmic movement of physical bodies moving through patterned sequences of steps in time and space. This rhythmic motion is what is actually happening, the physical reality or material of the art of dance. The 'primary illusion' of dance is the transformation of the physical movement into the art form of dance as gesture. This transformation, according to Langer, is the 'basic abstraction whereby the dance illusion is made and organized' (174), and it applies to both dancer and those who watch them.

But there is a secondary illusion that comes from a distinction between what the audience sees and experiences, and what the dancers feel and experience. On one hand, the audience sees bodies moving not just in a particular way, but in a way that is out of the everyday way of moving. Seeing these movements or contortions of the body, then, the audience gives meaning to what the movements signify and then responds to the transformation of visible motion into dance gesture, giving a particular meaning to the created art of dance. For the dancer, on the other hand, the ability to perform these movements comes through practised techniques of dance — the basic materials

of the dance. The dancer experiences the dance as kinetic energy, whereby the dancers embody the dance that takes them out of themselves into the immediacy of performing (Langer 1953:196).

The third aspect of the illusion of the dance is that a viewer may interpret that the emotion being expressed through the movements of the dance is actually being felt by the dancers at the time. But dance is a 'virtual' gesture. It does not actually exist but appears to do so, and an audience may respond in an emotive way to that perceived display of emotion. The dancers, in contrast, cannot experience the actual intensity of emotion they appear to be portraying and still maintain the actual practised techniques of the dance at the same time without affecting its performance in some way. Giving the example of the ballerina Pavlova performing the 'The Dying Swan', Langer makes the point that the dancer could not actually feel sick, nor could she feel the emotions attached to near death (177). If she did, she would not be able to execute the dance with the dancing expertise it requires. The dancers do, however, experience an emotion in the dance — but this is an inchoate emotion somewhat similar to musicians who experience 'a particular performative kind of emotion' (Dennis 2002:23), which is different from that experienced by the audience. The movements of the dance are gestures that indicate the emotion of dance rather than the immediately experienced emotions of the dancers at the time. What the dancers feel about the dance at the time is *meta-emotion* (Dennis 2007:121) — a performative emotion and thus a generalised emotion.

While the dance illusion might evoke an emotional response in those watching in the same way that the Kaluli dancers arouse intense emotions in their audience (Schieffelin 1977), this is not the aim of Pontic dance. Rather, it is to perform Ponticness. Through the dance illusion, these actual movements of the dance become virtual emotion that gestures to loss, a loss intrinsically tied to the lost former homeland of Pontos. In the execution of the dance steps, in seeing, wearing and feeling the costumes, and in hearing the sound of the musical instruments, the dancer makes the absence of Pontos present. Most of all, the presence of absence is experienced in the 'feel' of the dance, a 'feel' that embodies a multifaceted expression of the emotions of loss. It gestures to the loss of Pontos and, for migrants, to the absence of the life they once had in Greece. Nick Zournatzidis, a well-known Pontic Greek dance teacher and researcher, reflected this idea when he said to me, 'Now Pontos does not exist. It doesn't create dances anymore. But you have to carry the love of Pontos in your heart. You have to love the culture' (field notes, 29 January 2010). Thus, when Pontians dance, either as part of community celebrations or in choreographed routines, the dances they perform shape these emotions and, through them, the physical space created by the formation of the dance becomes Pontian.

The development of two modes of Pontic dance

Pontic dances developed over many centuries in the highly dissected geographical terrain of the Pontos region. Because some isolated villages had little contact with other villages or regions, a variety of distinctive dances evolved that often had slight variations in their steps and way of dance.[2] Not all the dances that were danced in Pontos survived the genocide and exile from Pontos: the knowledge of some dances or their particular mode of execution disappeared when whole villages were destroyed. Those that did survive continued to retain their important place in religious and communal village life in Greece and later in the diaspora. With the waning of some other cultural expressions, such as language and food, dance became an important means whereby Ponticness was preserved and expressed.

After their exile to Greece, in 1923, Pontians tended to be wary of outside political influence and sought to retain their ethnic boundaries despite the pressures to assimilate into mainstream Greek culture. Many 'became ethnicists, actively interested in maintaining their cultural community' and preserving their 'traditional heritage' (Fann Bouteneff 2002:47). By the 1950s, when Pontians started to marry out of their community, teaching dance to the younger generation was seen as one of the important ways in which some aspects of Pontic culture could be retained. While community dance continued, gradually the many clubs and organisations, which were originally formed for Pontian community support, began to teach choreographed routines of Pontic dance to their young people: routines that could be performed by a dance group in front of an audience. Hence, out of the movement to preserve Pontic culture and to pass it on to the younger generation, a second mode of dance began to emerge.

This same development occurred over a twenty-year time span in the Pontian migrant community in Adelaide. Its Pontian Brotherhood was founded in 1958 for mutual support of Pontian migrants. By the 1970s, the need for communal support of the migrant group was not as pressing, and fewer families and young people were involved in the Brotherhood. Some young people whose families did not attend Brotherhood functions grew up without knowing how to dance Pontic dances. For other young people, who were exposed to Pontic dancing through family and community functions, dancing did not now play the same part as it had in the village lives of their parents or grandparents growing up in rural Greece. To counteract these trends, in 1972 a dance group was formed in the Pontian Brotherhood in Adelaide, where Pontic dances could be taught by a specific dance teacher in a more formal setting. From then on, two modes of Pontic dance could be seen at Pontian functions

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2 Vasilis Asbestas from the Black Sea Club of Veria contends that his research points to the fact that there are about twenty main Pontic dances and that the others are variations. He said that these variations result from the different musical instruments that were used and from climatic, geographical and political conditions (field notes, 5 September 2011).

— dances where the whole community participated, and the newer choreographed ones performed by the dance group.

Folklorists studying the effects of an audience on various ethno-dances note the development of the two modes of dance over time and distinguish between them in various ways. Hoerburger (1968:30) refers to them as 'folk dance in its first existence' and 'folk dance in its second existence'; Shay (1999:33) as 'dance in the field' and dance as a stage performance; and Nahachewsky (1995) speaks of them as 'participatory' and 'presentational' dance. Although Nahachewsky's terms succinctly differentiate between the two, the term *presentational* does not take into account Langer's specific use of the word, where she distinguishes between the '"discursive" symbols of language and the "presentational" symbols of art' (1966:8). In making such a division between a dance that is in front of an audience and one that is not, folklorists such as Nahachewsky fail to take into account the function of dance as a 'perceptible, self-identical whole' (Langer 1966:7), where it formulates and presents the feelings of the inner-life experience, regardless of whether the dance is in front of an audience or not. I will refer to these two modes of dance as *participatory dance*, where the whole community joins in the dance, and as *choreographic dance*, where it is performed in front of an audience, requiring prior planning and rehearsal. However, I understand them both to be within the same art form. Indeed, Pontians themselves do not make a distinction between the two. They never intimated to me that that one was more 'Pontic' than the other or that one had a higher value than the other.

Two modes of dance at a Pontian community event

At one of the first Pontian events I attended, I observed both modes of Pontic dance. This was at a dinner dance held in August to honour Panagia Soumela, patron of the original monastery in Pontos.[3] This particular event, typical of other later Pontian community gatherings I observed both in Adelaide and in Greece, was held at the Polish Dom Polski function centre. On this particular night, the space inside the hall became demarcated as Pontian. It was decorated with balloons in the Pontian colours of yellow and black, and the banner of the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia hung from the stage. A *lyra* player played and sang Pontian music. The *lyra*[4] is a

3 Panagia (*Panayía* in Greek) refers to Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, as the all-holy one and the foremost among the saints. A special feast day on 15 August celebrates her death and her bodily resurrection and assumption into heaven. *Soumela* is a contraction of σ σου (*s sou*) in the Pontian dialect meaning 'of the' and Μελά (*Black Mountain*), so the title means *The Virgin of the Black Mountain* (Miller 1926:62). The monastery of Panagia Soumela is set at about 1150 metres above sea level in the mountains, fifty kilometres from the coastal city of Trabzon on the Black Sea in Turkey. Now in ruins, it is still a site of major religious significance for Pontic Greeks.

4 Also known as the Pontic *kementjé*.

three-stringed, bottle-shaped instrument about 45-60 cm in length and about 7-11 cm in width. It is played with a bow by the musician who, either sitting or standing, holds the instrument in an upright position in front of them.[5] Although it was one of a range of musical instruments that were played in Pontos, the *lyra* is now the most recognised and most loved of all the Pontian instruments. Surviving exile and migration, the *lyra* has become the instrument that most encapsulates Ponticness, and hence its sound on this night deemed the space inside the hall to be Pontian.

Many of the 900 people who had purchased tickets sat in groups of ten to twelve at round tables around a central dance floor. This area would be further marked as Pontian once the dancers made the space their own through their dance. The majority of those who attended were of Greek background, with those from the Pontian community predominating. People of all ages attended this function — parents with babies in pushers, young children, teenagers, young adults and grandparents. At our table, there were three generations of the same family. Gradually, people arrived at the hall and, having purchased their meals, brought the food to their tables, where it was shared with other members of their family and friends. At the end of the meal, the compere for the evening, George Donikian, a well-known television presenter who is of Armenian background, described how the traumatic events of genocide have continued to have an effect on him and his family. In conclusion, he said that this night would 'give all people a sense of who Pontian Greeks are, where they come and what it means to be from Pontos'. At the end of his speech, the president of the Brotherhood then asked everyone to stand for a minute's silence to remember those who had died in the Pontian genocide.

Although the Pontian dinner dance was a joyous occasion, a mood of sadness pervaded this segment of the evening. Through the discursive symbols of language, the speaker's ideas and feelings about genocide and exile were made objective. They were transformed into 'things' and 'facts' to 'note, remember, and think about' (Langer 1966:8) in the one minute's silence. But a sense of Ponticness did not only come from words. Although words can describe what happened, the intensity of the feelings attached to the genocide cannot be easily articulated. Through presentational symbols within the art form of dance, the 'idea' of the feelings associated with being Pontian were given form by the dances that followed.

In time with the *lyra*'s introductory notes and the strong *daoúli* beat[6], the junior dancers, ranging in age from five to ten years, slowly danced onto the dance floor. Dressed in the club's black and yellow tracksuits and holding their hands at chest

5 I have used the pronoun 'them' to refer to the musician in order to be inclusive of both genders. However, while women are not precluded from playing the *lyra*, during my fieldwork I saw only male musicians.

6 Originating from Pontos, the *daoúli* 'is a two-headed drum played with a stick or the hand' (Kilpatrick 1975: 279). It is used to keep the beat of the dances.

height, they moved gradually around the outside edge of the dance floor and proceeded to dance the slow steps of the *Dipát* and *Omál*, finishing with the dance *Ebbr' Opís* to take them off the dance floor.

An intermediate group of dancers between the ages of eleven and thirteen years straight away moved onto the floor. In contrast to the juniors, these dancers wore traditional Pontic costumes. The girls wore gold satin skirts, with a patterned, fringed scarf draped over them and a short maroon jacket on top. They wore maroon silk scarves over their heads with gold-coloured coins attached. The boys wore black trousers with a black jacket and a black head-covering with bandoliers, containing imitation bullet cartridges, over their shoulders. This group performed a wider range of Pontic dances than the junior group, including a number that were more energetic and required more intricate steps.

The last to perform were the senior dancers, comprising seven men and six women. They entered the dance floor, the women from the right and the men from the left, meeting together in the middle of the floor and joining hands, with men and women interspersed. They, too, wore traditional Pontic costumes, but their dancing steps were much more complicated and performed more expertly than the previous two groups. In one particularly vigorous dance, the *Sherranítsa*, the six women moved forward and performed very spirited movements: their steps were quick and small, their arms moved backwards and forwards and from time to time they stamped their feet. After they had finished this segment, the women moved backward and the men moved forward. Once again, their dance was very energetic, with their hands and arms moving backwards and forwards and then up over their heads. At one stage, they turned to the right and then the left, stamping their feet in each direction, all with a shimmying of their upper torso, characteristic of Pontic dancing. Moving back, they joined the women and moved around the edge of the floor in a circle with their arms interlocked at shoulder level. The men then moved forward and performed another dance with their hands held high, finishing by kneeling on the ground.

To end, they danced a knife dance, known as *Piçak Oyünü*. In this performance, two men wielding knives danced improvised steps of attack and defence. Their steps were small and again there was the shimmying of the upper torso. Although at this event the two men supposedly killed each other, in other versions I saw in Greece, the men pitted themselves against each other in a show of strength, as in preparation for battle, but then at the end they embraced. Throughout all of these performances, the audience members responded by clapping in time to the beat of the rhythms of the dances and, as the intensity of the dances increased and the rhythms and movements became more vigorous, by whistling, cheering and stamping their feet.

When all the dancers had left the floor and the applause had died down, the *lyra* and the *daoúli* started to play again. This time there was no particular announcement

by the compere or general invitation to join in the dance, but people knew that this was the time for them to dance together. Many people, men and women, young and old, started to get up to dance, the first dancers forming a circle around the outside of the dance floor. When anyone wanted to join in the dance they moved in between two other dancers, unclasped their joined hands, linked up with the dancers on either side and continued the same hand movements, quickly picking up the rhythm of the dance steps. Similarly, individuals chose when they would leave the dance circle. Soon there were more than a hundred people on the dance floor and three concentric circles had been formed to accommodate everyone who wanted to dance. The *lyra* and the *daoúli* set the pattern and rhythm of the dances. At first, there were the slower dances such as *Omál*, *Dipát* and *Tík*, and then later the faster dances such as *Tík Tónyia* and *Kotsari*, the steps becoming smaller to accommodate the quicker rhythms. Often, a segment of dance lasted up to forty minutes, with the same sequence of steps being repeated over and over again. Late into the night, many people still continued to dance. It was obvious that this participatory dancing and socialising with each other was a most enjoyable experience for all taking part, and it formed the longest part of the evening's entertainment.

The 'feel' of loss in choreographic dance

First, the primary illusion that occurred through the choreographic dances was that the physical movement of the dancers was transformed into the art form of dance as gesture. Secondly, this dance-as-gesture was interpreted and named as Pontic dance. The audience saw not just the dancers 'running around or twisting their bodies' (Langer 1957:5), but 'forces that seem to operate in the dance' (1950:226), which formed a '*dynamic image*' of the dance (1957:5, italics in the original text). The audience saw past the basic materials that were used to create the dances — such as the patterned sequence of the dance steps, the rhythmic movements of the arms and hands, the slight rotations of the torso and the shimmying of the shoulders and upper body — and knew them to gesture to Ponticness. The actual physical movements of the dance were real, but the dynamic image was virtual or an illusion. The gesture the audience saw shaped and gave form to their actual emotion — their idea of the 'feel' of the dance. And, as the actual movements become more in accord with the idea of Ponticness, the perception of the actual movements disappeared and the image of Ponticness became more apparent, and it was this that drew their emotional response.

At the Pontian dinner dance, the dances immediately followed the stories of genocide and the one minute's silence for its victims. Performed against this background, and with the men wearing bandoliers with imitation bullets, some of the more vigorous dances gave form to the feelings that Pontians have about conflicts with the Turks, which have existed for many centuries. In the performance of one

of the warrior dances, *Piçak Oyünü*, the movements of the two dancers particularly indicated those of combat, and were a further link to genocide. Pontians believe that this dance, and the other better-known warrior dance, *Sérra*, are derived from ancient war dances called *Pyrrhichios*, thought to prepare soldiers for war by performing in advance the movements that they would use in combat. *Sérra* is most closely associated with Ponticness, and its tempo and movement are particularly aggressive and very physically demanding. Pontian associations worldwide nowadays require that *Sérra* be danced only by men. Although the Pontian Brotherhood dance group allowed women to dance as men in its other dances, it did not have enough men to perform *Sérra* at that time. The performance of *Piçak Oyünü* was the closest they could come to performing one of these warrior dances. But other dances such as *Létchi*, *Letchína* and *Sherranítsa*, which both men and women dance, have come to resemble more and more the combative nature of the warrior dances and always evoke an enthusiastic audience response. The choreographed dances, presented with traditional Pontic costumes and musical instruments, were influential in shaping the feel of the loss of Pontos in a way that language cannot.

This is reflected in Evagelia's reaction to seeing some of the vigorous Pontic dances:

> I wondered if one source of the 'strength' of the Pontian is from the dance. Both men's and women's dances are quite aggressive and fast-paced in most instances. I know how I feel when I watch them or when I dance some of them. One feels invigorated and energised. It's a much more visceral reaction than just joy of music. It's more about the grunt and the call in the dance, the pound of the foot on the ground, the unified turn and stare of the dancers — a call to action, perhaps? The deep primal drumming of the daoúli. I think that when you put together the stories of the genocide and a strong aggressive dance, perhaps we see that as strength in numbers and community. (Personal communication, 18 May 2009)

While Evagelia could say that these dances made her body feel 'invigorated' and 'energised', she could not completely describe her feelings about them. For her, the 'idea' of the emotion connected to the genocide was presented in the image or virtual entity of the dance. It was expressed by the 'grunt' of the dancers, the 'pound' of their feet and the 'stare' of their eyes. Seeing them as gesture, she gave meaning to them and perceived that the movements signified the loss of Pontos and the genocide of Pontian people. In so doing, they formed and shaped her emotions.

But, because the practised techniques of the dance produce an intense emotional response in Pontians, the audience assumes that the dancers are feeling the emotions that they are expressing through the gesture of the dance. The dancers, however, experience the dance in a different way. For them, it is an embodied form, something they feel within their bodies. Features such as the shimmying of the upper body, the vigorous contortions of the shoulders, the leaps and the stamping, are actual movements and indicate the physicality of Pontic dance, but they are experienced as the spatial

patterning and kinetic energy of the dance. In the execution of them, they produce 'a new body-feeling, in which every muscular tension registers itself as something kinaesthetically new, peculiar to the dance' (Langer 1953:203). In experiencing the dance in this way, a body-knowledge is formed that defines the dancer's understanding of what their bodies are capable of doing with others within the dance (Dunagan 2005:31). This may be sensed as a new body-feeling, but the ability to perform the movements comes from practising the techniques of the dance.

The dancers, therefore, cannot experience the actual intensity of emotion they are portraying and still maintain these techniques at the same time. Indeed, if they had been feeling the emotions expressed in the more vigorous dances, it might have been possible to see that intensity displayed in their faces. On the contrary, I noticed that the facial expression of the dancers did not change when they moved from a sedate dance such as *Omál* to the more vigorous ones of *Kótsari*, *Moscof*, *Létchi*, *Letchína* and *Sherranítsa*. Their faces remained composed as they concentrated on the dance itself. The specific emotion of loss that Pontians feel is not experienced by the dancers in choreographic dance: what they say about the experience of the dance is not the same as the feeling of it at the time of the dance.

This is not to say that the dancers do not respond in an emotional way, but rather that it is a performative emotion that comes out of the kinetic experience. After dancing at the monastery of Panagia Soumela in Greece, one of the Adelaide dancers said that she had experienced a feeling that she had not felt before — 'something in me … that … felt good. Like, this is where I should be … It was quite emotional, really'. She could not say what this emotion was, but attributed what she felt to the crowds, to the way the compere introduced them, and the hype about them coming all the way from Australia. She could say afterwards that she felt something, but this is not the same as what she actually felt at the moment of the dance. 'Just to be in this country and to dance on this stage made it surreal', she said (field notes, 20 November 2006). Hence a generalised emotion, rather than actual emotion, becomes the 'feel' for dancers in choreographic dance. The physical movements become virtual gestures that express ideas of emotion connected to the loss of Pontos and the genocide of its people. Whereas choreographic dance is instrumental in shaping the feel of the loss of Pontos, participatory dance, along with the emotions it evokes, shapes the feeling of the absence of the way of life in Greece.

The 'feel' of absence in participatory dance

Functions such as the Pontian dinner dance are attempts in a small way to recreate the celebrations of Greek rural village life, where dance played a key role in the various social events and at important yearly religious celebrations. Despina, who has been in

Australia for over fifty years, recalled how she danced from a very early age in her village in northern Greece. She said:

> At night time, to amuse ourselves my father would sing (we could not afford to have a lyra) and our whole family would dance. We danced the usual dances — Tík, Omál, Dipát, Kótsari and Karsilamá. The neighbours would often say to us how they were happy to see us all dancing. Always during the summer there would be festivals where there would be dancing. We would go to different villages or people would come to ours. I can remember my mother and grandmother dancing on occasions such as weddings. (Field notes, 29 November 2006)

These kinds of village festivals are no longer experienced by Pontians in the diaspora. 'These days are gone and will not come back again', Despina lamented. But when people, like Despina, join with others in participatory dance at Pontian functions, the 'feel' of these remembered dances evokes both a memory of a past time as well as a sense of the absence of Greece. Both memory and a sense of absence become encapsulated in the 'feel' of the dance.

This 'feel' through the dance is transmitted to the next generation in a Pontic milieu. In the past in Greece, children did not learn through formal instruction at a dance school, but in a village setting where the whole community, young and old, took part. While children of the diaspora might be taught the steps and movements of the different dances at formal dance classes, they learn something else when they take part in participatory dances in the social setting of a community gathering. In this mode, children are not segregated from adults but are encouraged to dance alongside them. It was very common to see parents or grandmothers taking the hands of young children and dancing with them in the circle of the dance. Often they were tugged one way and then the other as they tried to keep up. But although no adult was formally teaching them, they were not only learning the steps of the dance but also absorbing the 'feel' of what it means to be Pontian.

As with dancers who perform choreographed routines, dancers in the participatory mode experience the dance as kinetic energy and spatial patterning which not only takes them into the immediacy of performing but also constitutes for them an embodied knowledge of what it is to dance Pontic dance. The sense of touch is fundamental to this process. The dancers attend to the embodied presence of others by dancing in close proximity to each other. They join hands by placing their right hand on top of the left hand of the person next to them and keep their upper arms close to their bodies with their elbows bent, allowing the lower arms to move backwards and forwards. In some dances, the dancers place their hands on the shoulders of the person next to them, intertwining their arms at shoulder level, or, in the more vigorous dances, they raise and lower their arms together in time with the quickened tempo. Here, the sense of touch comes through not only the fingers, where the 'skin mediates between the body

and the surrounding environment' (Rodaway 1994:42), but also through a 'haptic sense', which

> … renders the surfaces of the body porous, being perceived at once inside, on the skin's surface, and in external space. It enables the perception of weight, pressure, balance, temperature, vibration and presence. (Fisher 1997:4-11)

When I was dancing Pontic dance, I became aware of the weights that the dancing bodies support: the pressure brought to bear on the arms and hands by other dancers on either side of me, the sense of balance in relation to various dancing surfaces, as well as the awareness of the rise in temperature of the dancing bodies and the quickness of the breath as the tempo of the dances increased. Most of all, I felt the shimmying of the upper torsos of those next to me. Because shimmying is so characteristic of Pontic dance, the haptic sense is more than corporeal positioning. These movements, therefore, 'are never simply individual ones; they are always associative and therefore communicative, a process in which emotion is ever implicated' (Lyon 1995:256). Thus the body-feeling of dance is experienced as a generalised emotion; it gestures to the sociality of dance, but it is shaped by memory.

Mihalis migrated to Australia from his village in northern Greece in 1960. When I asked him what he feels when he dances, he said:

> As soon as I get into the dance, the first thing that gets into my mind [is] a picture [of] my village where my mother, my father were dancing that simple dance. And then all the memories come of all those people united: they call to each other; they lived together; they suffered together; they helped each other; they shared the happiness and the hard times together; they felt the necessity to exchange with their friends or their neighbours they lived with. So all those memories, they come in my mind and I say first of all what I feel … er … er … something like I'm getting warm; [this feeling] gets into my body and … and I'm feeling something, something which brings me upside down and I have to concentrate on that picture where I've seen my parents, I've seen my village where they were there, and the picture in there is all those people there in that particular time when they were entertaining themselves and they left everything behind, all the differences if they had any between them, all the difficult times, all the suffering they had through the years. That particular time it was only for the entertainment; they are giving their soul to the dance and with that picture it drags all the history behind it … What they suffered, where they came from, how they used to live, how hard their life was, what they did. (Field notes, 27 October 2007)

For Mihalis, his emotions were aroused through the memories he had of dance in his village, but he was not able to put these exactly into words. The discursive symbols of language were unable to exactly describe his feelings when he danced. It was 'something like' he was 'getting warm'; it seemed to get into his body and bring him 'upside down'. But what he described were bodily sensations rather than the emotional feeling itself. It was, however, through these senses that the dance 'dragged' into the present the place

of his youth. It connected him to the memories of his parents and the way they danced in his village and their struggle to survive in Greece. Rather than a presence of the loss of Pontos, as in choreographic dance, the participatory mode evokes the memories and emotions that are connected to the social nature of Pontic dance. Older Pontians, particularly those who learnt to dance in Greek villages, remember the sociality of physically dancing with their parents and grandparents. It is this remembrance that helps to shape the 'feel' of Ponticness and incorporates into participatory dance the absence of the presence of Greece.

Conclusion

Both the participatory and choreographed modes of Pontic dance play a fundamental role in Pontian community functions. Through the dances, the distinctive costumes and the musical instruments, these dances not only connect Pontians to their social, geographical and historical background, but also gesture to loss that has been shaped prior to the dance as the result of genocide, exile and migration.

In choreographed dance, both dancers and audience might share the same underlying emotion of loss, but there is a difference between how the audience and dancers sense this emotion. In the performance, the dancers are engrossed with the 'actual' bodily movements of the dance, the textures of the costumes and the rhythm and tempo of the music, and they sense this feeling as kinetic energy. Their response is a generalised emotion. The audience response is of a different nature, one where a transposition occurs. Although they see the components of the dance, they 'see', 'hear' and 'understand' the dance to be essentially Pontian. Their energetic applause is in response to this display of Ponticness, which symbolically represents the loss of the place of Pontos.

In participatory dance, the experience of embodied sociality stretches over generations and shapes the feel of what it means to be Pontian. The kinds of festivals in village settings where dance played a key role in social and religious celebrations can no longer be experienced by Pontians who live in the diaspora. Nevertheless, when older members of the migrant community dance the same dances to the same musical instruments as they had in their villages, the movements, rhythms and patterns of the dances not only evoke memories of the past but also express through the dancers' bodies the sociality of dance as a way of expressing the 'feel' of being Pontian. This notion of Ponticness continues to be transmitted to the next generation in a Pontic milieu in the diaspora. Although the children and grandchildren of Pontian migrants might be taught the steps and movements of the different dances for choreographed routines at formal dance classes, when they join with others in participatory dance at community functions, they can 'feel' the sociality of Ponticness as an embodied experience.

Whether the dance is performed by young or old, the image of an inner 'feel' of Ponticness is given an expressive form when time and time again it is performed at Pontian community functions. Formed and experienced through embodied action and the memories and emotions it evokes, Pontic dance becomes an expression of what it means to be Pontian for both dancers and for those who watch it.

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