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## **The changes in the traditional dancing and its function in modern society. The example of Karpathos Island.**

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### **1. Introduction**

The traditional dance is a means of social expression; in fact it is among the most formal ones since all the community members participate into it. Therefore we cannot study the dance without looking at the society where it occurs. Its form and functions are defined by the prevailing social conditions. Marigoula Kritsioti and Alkis Raftis presented a social approach of this kind in their book “Dance in the culture of Karpathos” which discusses dance throughout a century. When a society changes it is only natural that the form and the functions of all social events will change as well. Such changes can be observed today in the Karpathian festivals and dance. In my study I aim to describe these changes. Observing and monitoring dances and festivals of the island as well as interviewing the locals collected the information presented below. Wanting to study the modern dance trends I interviewed youngsters, locals and emigrants as well as musicians, dancers, singers and spectators.

Marigoula Kritsioti describes the Karpathian society by saying: “Today the Karpathian society consists of the emigrants that return every summer and the locals. Both of them try to be modern as the former are affected by the foreigners’ way of living and the latter by television, newspapers and tourism”. The Karpathians have gradually become more open to new experiences and are more easily affected. The values of the past fade and are replaced by new ones. In such an unstable society how could the dance remain static? Let me comment on the new trends of the Karpathian dance, giving information when necessary about its older forms. Finally I will try to explain these changes.

## **2. Frequency and duration of festivals**

The folkloric celebration which took place either on the occasion of a saint's celebration or a happy family event (wedding, baptism e.t.c.) would last for several days in the past, very often for a whole week. The most remote churches used to celebrate for three days: the day before, the day of the celebration and the next day. In our days celebrations last only one day. This happens because today there are innumerable entertainment choices. People can watch television, go to a bar e.t.c. Very often young people leave the festival around midnight in order to go to the local bars.

In addition traditional festivals occur less often. In the past festivals were organized not only on specific religious celebrations but also whenever people felt like it. The musicians did not demand a fee in order to play. One reason why this does not happen today is that musicians have become professionals whose aim is to earn money. Even on special occasions such as Madonna's day (Panagia) in Mesochori village for example, no dancing took place this summer because of the absence of musicians.

## **3. Ways of learning how to dance**

In the past families and the community were responsible for teaching the dance to young people. Once every week, usually on Saturday nights, they would organize *horostasia*, which were a kind of dance schools. The elderly and the best dancers were in charge of teaching the dance to the young. Later on the traditional dance became part of the school curriculum. In our days *horostasia* have been replaced by the Lyceum of Greek Women and the cultural clubs of each village, yet a big part of the youths does not participate in these lessons. As a result some of them, especially the boys, do not know how to dance. Therefore when young teenagers want to express themselves through dancing, the festival itself is turned into a dance school. Very often tourists, who are eager to learn the traditional dances during a festival, make it difficult for the local dancers to perform.

## **4. The architectural shape of *horostasi* (dance-floor)**

This was the topic, which I thoroughly studied and presented in my announcement at the 16th International Congress of Dance Research [1]. Therefore I will be brief.

The shape of the traditional *horostasia* (open-aired or roofed) could be circular, rectangular or parallelogram. Regardless of their shape the

spectators sat around the musicians who were always in the center and the dancers moved around the edge of the *horostasi*, facing its center. In neoteric architectural shapes of the *horostasi* we can observe musicians sitting at one edge of the *horostasi*. The dancers dance in front of the musicians and the spectators sit at the other edge of the *horostasi*, far away from the musicians. The main reason for this is the almost catholic use of technological means (sound amplifiers) by the traditional musicians. It is not necessary for musicians to sit at the center of the *horostasi*, as was previously necessary for acoustic reasons. A combination shape has been adopted in order to solve the visual problem. The musicians sit at the edge of the *horostasi*, the spectators sit in the center and the dancers rotate around them, as they did in the past before the use of sound amplifiers.

## **5. The musicians and the music**

Lyre and *tsabouna* (bagpipe) was the oldest combination of instruments. The *lirokoudouna* (the bow bells of the lyre) beat time. The lute, which accompanies the lyre, appeared approximately in 1900. The use of the bagpipe has been gradually restricted and is played almost only in the northern villages of Karpathos Island. In Menetes and Arkasa villages the violin has replaced the lyre.

Musicians used to play only traditional melodies. The prevailing dances were the Kato, the Gonatistos, the Pano and the Sousta. The Kalamatianos and other Greek traditional dances appeared rarely at the end of the festivals. The tips of the singers paid the musicians. In addition the dancers offered a small amount of money to them when they danced at the beginning of the dance (*kavos*). At weddings the dancers threw money in a basket during the *foumistos* dance. Offering money was not obligatory, even though it was accepted, since the musicians were not professionals.

Recently many changes have been observed in similar situations. Bands have replaced the traditional combination of the lyre and the lute. New instruments appear in the traditional festival: guitars, synthesizers and drums accompany the traditional lyre. The almost catholic use of sound amplifiers changes the original sound of the lyre. Both traditional and modern bands appear at festivals sometimes. The Karpathian melodies are enriched by non-local music. This phenomenon disturbs the Karpathians. The young musicians play faster. The young dancers prefer these fast melodies. On the contrary the elderly are disturbed.

Musicians are paid differently in our days as well. In the 60s the rich American emigrants started using the dance in order to show off.

They would give a lot of money to the musicians in order to impress the locals. As a result the musicians have become more professional and demand a fee in order to play at festivals. Since in our days there are various ways of showing off, such as driving an expensive car or having an expensive house, there it is no need to give money to the musicians at festivals. Consequently whenever the musicians feel that they will not get enough money at a festival they demand to be given a fixed amount of money. They rarely participate in celebrations organized spontaneously since making enough money is not guaranteed.

## **6. The participants of the dance**

In the past the Karpathians had few cultural differences, as their choices were limited. All the members of the society escaped from their daily routine through their participation in festivals. There were rules, which were accepted by everybody. The new economic status, which was the result of the post war emigrational wave, undermined the old traditional structure of Karpathian society. The emigrants and the locals, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate had to share festivals and respect its rules.

The showing off of the rich emigrants has made it impossible for the poor locals to take part in the dance, since they are unable to give so much money to the musicians while dancing. Lately, the main dancers are women who dance even though the men are absent. They can be seen dancing at the beginning of the dance as well, despite the fact that men previously dominated this position. In addition the second-born women have a right to dance. In the past they were allowed to dance only on condition that their first-born sister had been already married.

Children and tourists often take part in the dance, especially in the summer. As I have already mentioned the dance itself has turned into a dance school. This bothers the elderly who mostly dance during the winter months. As a result the emigrants are those who preserve the customs and traditions. It is said that the Karpathians of America respect the tradition more than the locals. The inhabitants of the north part of the island as well as the people who live in Olympos have the same respect for tradition. Many of the changes described in this announcement have not affected the remote Olympos village yet.

## **7. The dances, their performance and their function**

The dances fall into three groups according to Marigoula Kritsioti and Alkis Raftis [2]. The first group consists of four dances (the Sianos or

Kato, the Gonatistos, the Pano, and the Sousta), which are danced one after the other. The second group includes dances, which are danced on special occasions, such as weddings and carnivals (the Arkistis, the Foumistos, the Piperi e.t.c.). In the last group we find dances, which are of secondary importance, and are danced after the dances of the first group (the Zervos, the Kefalonitika, the Pentozalis, the Kritikos e.t.c.). The first group dances are ritual. They are considered to be more important because the Karpathians express the society rules through them.

In our days, the emigration wave and the growth of tourism have undermined the old social structures. As a result the dance, which reflects the social status, has changed as well. The dances of the first group have lost their social meaning and today the new dancers are not really interested in them and they ignore their rules. The dances do not have a special meaning for them as the society has changed. Due to the indifference shown by the young about the first group dances, today most celebrations start with the Kalamatianos (dance of the third group). This happens because they want to please the young in order to stay at the festival for a longer time. Furthermore modern Greek dances such as the Hassaposervikos, the Zeibekikos, the Aptalikos and the Tsifteteli appear in traditional festivals as both traditional and modern bands play there. Some years ago there was only one circle of dance, which symbolized the unity of the society. Today we can see two or three circles while the dance occurs.

Changes can also be observed in the performance of the dances, because of the Karpathians' introduction to other dances. Another reason for this is the variety of dancers as some of them reside in America while others inhabit in Athens, in Rhodes or in Karpathos. Manual workers as well as scientists, who are less flexible, share the same dance. The use of non-traditional instruments also affects the dance performance. The use of drums undermines the melody and causes the dancers to move less gently. The women tend to dominate the dances lately, since the men are absent most of the times. This has made the dance look like "a boat sailing without a captain". Men and women behave in different ways at festivals at present. In the past it was improper for a woman to talk or laugh while dancing. A behavior of that kind was considered to be immoral and inferior. Today women joke, laugh and talk whenever they please without feeling guilty.

The dance served many social purposes in the past. It was related to the socialization of the young, the sharing of authorities between the members of the society, the differentiation of sexes, the showing off of wealth and power and finally the reconfirmation of rules. Of course it was

also a means of personal expression. Now that the dance has changed so much it is only natural that its functions have changed too. Today the dance in Karpathos Island is a supplementary form of social expression since there are various alternatives. The Karpathian of today can express himself in many ways, show off in many places, meet new people, and have relationships at bars, on the beach as well as at festivals through dancing. Sometimes the dance turns into a folkloric fiesta, which attracts the tourists, and it is capitalized in order to make a profit.

## **8. Why do we keep on going to festivals then?**

Many of my informers feel sad about all these changes. They still care about the customs and they are disappointed because tradition changes more and more each day. This love that they have for tradition motivates them to continue going to festivals. Some people told me that they still go to festivals because it is the place where they can meet their friends, old classmates or emigrants. For others going to festivals is a religious obligation.

## **9. Epilogue**

I would like to end my announcement with the quotation of an informer, Panagiotis Skevofilakas, about the period of dictatorship. “In 1967 Pattakos (one of the dictators) came to Karpathos, I had a Chevrolet at that time. The police captain asked me if I could drive Pattakos from the airport to the city. He spoke to the Karpathians and asked them which of their problems would they like to be solved by him. The Karpathians shouted that they would like to be free to celebrate. They were not allowed to have celebrations after 23:00 pm. The emigrants coming from America looked forward to dancing but the police did not allow them to do so. They did not request a better airport or road networks to be constructed”. In my opinion if history was repeated the young Karpathians would have the same request today. Despite the changes of the dance one thing has remained unchanged, the desire of the Karpathians to express themselves through dancing and celebrating. There are teenagers who dance for hours without knowing or caring about the dance rules. This promises a positive future for the traditional festivals.

## 10. Notes

[1] Vassilis I. Gergatsoulis, “*Neoteric architectural shapes of the Karpathian dance-floor*”, Proceedings of 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Dance Research, edition of International Organization of Folk Art – Greek Section, International Dance Council – CID, “Laomedas” Association of Corfu, Athens 2002, pages 49-58 and 256-267.

[2] Marigoula Kritsioti and Alkis Raftis, *Dance in culture of Karpathos*, edition of Greek Dance Theatre “Dora Stratou”, Athens 2003, p. 365-434.

## 11. Bibliography

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3. Gergatsoulis, Vassilis I.: “*Neoteric architectural shapes of the Karpathian dance-floor*”, Proceedings of 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Dance Research, edition of International Organization of Folk Art – Greek Section, International Dance Council – CID, “Laomedas” Association of Corfu, Athens 2002, p. 49-58 and 256-267.
4. Kavouras, Pavlos: “*The dance in Olymbos village of Karpathos. Cultural change and political confrontations*”, Ethnografika 8, P.L.I., Nafplion 1992, p. 47-70.
5. Kritsioti, Marigoula: “*Structure and function of Karpathian dances*”, Karpathos and Folklore, Proceedings of Karpathians Folklore Conference A (Karpathos Island, 26–27 March 1994), Karpathos Courthouse Publication, Athens 1998-2001, p. 125-140.
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8. Mihaelidis-Nouaros, Mihaeel G.: *Folklore miscellany of Karpathos*, volume 1, Athens 1932.
9. Turner, Jonathan H. and Maryanski, Alexandra: *Functionalism*, The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, San Francisco 1979.

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