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Tracing The Landscape of Dance In Greece by Katia Savrami
(review)

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López Rodríguez prioritizes the economic and social consequences of the recession to explain the recent past of flamenco dance through the conceptualization of the term “queer” as economically marginal. In tune with other cultural activities within the Spanish territory during the crisis, flamenco is defined during this period by its precarity. This resulted in the disappearance of an artistic network, leading to an impoverishment of flamenco dancers who ultimately started to dance in the streets or came back to the *tablaos*. The supposed artistic freedom of these spaces is brilliantly problematized by the author (241), but the originality of this chapter resides in two fundamental notions for queer flamenco today: historia *guiri* del flamenco (*guiri* history of flamenco) and LGBTQ-F activism. “*Guiri*” is an ambiguous Spanish term usually used to refer to white foreign tourists spending their vacations in Spain. López Rodríguez engages with international scholarship and practice to advocate for the importance of international approaches to flamenco for which other scholars such as K. Meira Goldberg and Ninotchka Bennahum (2003) have advocated. From Kazuo Ohno’s homage to *La Argentina* to relevant world dance figure La Meri, the author clearly demonstrates that flamenco does not only come from Andalusia, despite its institutionalization when declared intangible heritage by UNESCO in 2010 (275). López Rodríguez also emphasizes the importance of LGBTQ-F activism in the last decade. By adding an *F* in reference to the first letter of the term “flamenco,” the author highlights the practice of artists such as Manuel Liñán or Carlos Carvento to explicitly underline the social impact that emerges at the intersection of flamenco dance and the defense of LGBTQ+ rights. López Rodríguez ends this chapter by briefly engaging with notions of coloniality, disability, and race in relation to flamenco dance in order to expand his understanding of the term “queer.”

To conclude, López Rodríguez advocates for the life-changing potential of flamenco dance and advocates for the term inclusion rather than for a queerer understanding of queerness. His intellectual project presents a publicly engaged academic dimension that also appears in his role as a dancer and choreographer as well as in his participation in different public media. This book is, in fact, an example of both academic writing as well as a rich text

for broader audiences. Despite of the length of the book, its division in short sections contributes to an agile reading. The same structural facet of the text partially weakens the argument building, whose main goal does not ultimately turn into a clear thesis apart from the one that the title states. López Rodríguez’s diverse entry points of inquiry allow the reader to be exposed to a multitude of queer flamenco practices while also raising provocative yet-to-be-answered questions for the field. *Historia queer del flamenco* is an important contribution not only to flamenco studies but to dance and Peninsular studies as well. This book opens the door for new scholarly endeavors within flamenology, serves as a reference for similar intellectual exercises in other dance genres, and engages with current conversations in contemporary Spain that often relegate flamenco to the periphery.

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TRACING THE LANDSCAPE OF DANCE IN GREECE

by Katia Savrami. Foreword by Ann Cooper Albright. 2019. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 155 pp. £58.99 hardcover. ISBN(13): 9781527542204. ISBN(10): 1527542203 doi:10.1017/S0149767720000406

Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece is an overview of the historical trajectory of concert

dance practices in Greece. Following Greece's financial crisis in the last decade (2009–2019), there has been a surge of scholarly interest in the field of concert dance in Greece, which has produced a plethora of journal articles,¹ dissertations,² and conferences addressing Greek contemporary dance practices. In this new line of research, Katia Savrami's book is the first extensive publication that introduces Greek concert dance (including both ballet and contemporary) to English speaking audiences. Dance studies—as an academic field of inquiry—is, to this date, not established as a scholarly discipline in Greece, which adds to the significance of this contribution. This work aims to set a foundation for future researchers interested in contributing to the development of the field in Greece. It is also intended to serve as a comprehensive source for current dance students in Greece who “need to learn the power of their own history” (xi), as Ann Cooper Albright aptly remarks in the foreword.

Divided into four chapters and a preface, *Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece* centers around two main questions: “whether and in what way dance in Greece has been influenced by the ever-changing aesthetics of classical and modern, or contemporary dance in Europe and America” (xvii). The book also asks how the cultural heritage of antiquity along with the tumultuous sociopolitical history of Greece “have influenced the creation of a reflective dialogue with the systems of knowledge, both empirically and theoretically” (xvii).

Speaking to the first question, chapter 1, titled “Ballet in Western Culture: Origins and Evolution,” traces the genealogy of ballet as a discipline starting from court dances, and moving through Ballet d'Action and the Ballets Russes to the prominence of ballet in the Soviet Union. In the development of the genre, Savrami highlights how “ancient Greek culture was a vital source of inspiration for the development of the arts in the baroque period, contemporary classicism, and modernism” (1). At the end of the chapter, she juxtaposes the brief history of ballet to the concurrent historical events that shaped the Greek nation-state, such as the Byzantine Empire (330–1453) and the Ottoman occupation (1453–1821), thus illustrating why the arrival of the genre in Greece was delayed.

Chapter 2, “Issues of Greek History and Cultural Identity,” is much more focused on the development of dance practices in Greece and introduces two contested approaches to contextualizing national identity: Hellenism and Greekness. The former, regarding political ideals, is linked to antiquity and the European Enlightenment, while the latter is perceived as “lived experience rather than idealized condition” (14). A brief historical overview of the formation of the modern Greek nation opens the chapter, tracing pivotal political events from the post-Ottoman occupation era (the 1830s onward). The first theatrical performances in the newly independent Greek State were “Melodrama,” a melodized theatre play including “singing, acting, and dancing” (17) and the popular form of entertainment “Epitheorisi,” “a genre of theatrical art that was created in Greece in the last quarter of the nineteenth century” (18). Moving from these popular forms of entertainment to the realm of modern dance, Savrami then tracks the origins of the genre in Greece in the first decades of the twentieth century through Eva Palmer-Sikelianos's Delphic Festivals (1927 and 1930), Isadora Duncan's “New Dance,” and the legacy of Koula Pratsika—the acclaimed mother of Greek modern dance and founder of the first professional dance school in 1937. In parallel to this genealogical trajectory, Savrami then introduces the initiation of ballet schools in Athens and proceeds to the complex negotiations between dance and the political sphere from the 1950s to the 1970s, which were tainted by events such as the 1967–1974 dictatorship. During the seven years under the totalitarian “Regime of the Colonels,” the arts were censored and many artists were deprived of their political rights, as the regime's agenda used art as a propaganda tool. The concluding sections of the chapter critically review the state of professional dance education in Greece, as validated in 1983 under the Ministry of Culture. Savrami illustrates how cultural policies have been dependent on the ruling parties and have thus intensely fluctuated since the 1980s. She laments how “professional dance education in Greece always seems to be in a mode of austerity” (41).

This powerful quote permeates the rest of the book, as chapter 3, “The Establishment of Ballet in the Greek National Opera,” chronicles the cultural, social, political, and financial

contexts and struggles in the process of establishing ballet as an art form independent of the opera. One of the prime challenges faced, according to Savrami, was that “the distinct high art of ballet was not part of Greek culture. So, its development as a theatrical form in retrospect required a well-organized and established institution in the field of cultural production” (49). She continues: “Ballet mostly appeared as part of operas, operettas, and theatrical plays, and was not established as an autonomous art form” (51). Savrami captures the gradual institutional shifts and identifies influential figures, such as the Greek National Opera’s directors that contributed to the eventual autonomy of ballet as an art form. It is the first time, in both Greek and English scholarship, that such a detailed overview of the history of ballet in Greece is provided.

The fourth and final chapter, “New Policies in Dance: The Challenges of the Twenty-First Century,” focuses primarily on the decades prior to and during the Greek crisis. The opening sections offer a historical overview of the genre of contemporary dance and briefly address the decade of the 1990s, recognized as one of the most prolific times for Greek dance. The first half of the chapter focuses on the initiation of new modes of collaboration and artistic collectives that emerged during the crisis, as well as performative events in social spaces, such as refugee performances, festivals, or research initiatives in direct response to the political shifts. The second half of the chapter offers a detailed examination of a new direction taken for the Greek National Opera Ballet, which relocated to a new space in 2017 and underwent a series of directorial changes. At the end of chapter 4, a short coda serves as a conclusion for the entire manuscript, posing questions paving the way for future researchers: “What will happen next?” “How will the change in dance practices in Greece occur?” (118).

Tracing the Landscape of Dance in Greece is a very ambitious work, in that it attempts to capture the trajectory of two entire genres in a period spanning over a century. The boldness of this endeavor at times becomes an obstacle, as it is incredibly challenging to provide sufficient background for the multiple levels of complex interrelations, such as between dance and national identity, or institutional frameworks and politics. Because of this, the work may

prove hard to follow at times for readers not already familiar with the ways that the Greek dance scene is structured. Additionally, the concise summaries of historical events and academic discourses Savrami offers in the chapters, for the purpose of situating Greek dance in an international context, inadvertently lead to generalizations that undermine the complexity of the ideas she is tackling, especially in instances in which the author draws on other disciplines such as gender studies. An example thereof is a discussion of dance as a predominantly female occupation: “Zouroudi needed male partners for her pieces, so she employed men and taught them ballet. In the Greek male-dominated society, ballet was considered feminine. In addition, homosexuality was a criminal offence, considered to be a pathological and psychiatric disorder” (33). This statement invokes a conflation between gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, which has been teased apart in international critical dance studies scholarship. That being said, with the intended audience of (Greek) young researchers and dance students in mind, the book provides a solid introduction into the multiple discourses that dance in Greece is engaging with and is thus a valuable compendium serving as a springboard for further research.

As the title of the book suggests, the “landscape” of dance in Greece encompasses a broad field of artistic activity. The author’s most original research is weighted toward ballet, while the material on contemporary dance primarily leans on already existing literature (such as unpublished doctoral dissertations) in the small, yet, quickly growing field of scholarly dance research in Greece. Structurally, the chronological progression of the chapters makes the work easy to peruse, yet there are some sections (e.g., the history of ballet in the first chapter, or the extensive literature review of the development of conceptual dance in chapter 4) that distract from the book’s argument. However, in spite of such minor shortcomings, the book’s value as the first English language manuscript to achieve such comprehensive documentation of the Greek concert dance scene is indisputable.

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Notes

1. Indicatively, in these journal articles the authors are tracing the changes evidenced in the field of the performing arts during the crisis and document new trends that emerged such as the artistic occupation of the Embros theater that became an open forum for artists (Argyropoulou 2012), the rise of collaborative practices (Tsintziloni and Panagiotara 2015), an intense focus on the body and physical practices (Tzartzani 2014), or the emergence of precarious aesthetics in response to budget cuts (Zervou 2017).

2. Examples of unpublished dissertations on dance and the Greek crisis include Betina Panagiotara (2017) and Natalie Zervou (2015). Panagiotara focuses on the shifts observed in artistic practices, structures of production, and discourses of precarity surrounding the practice of dance during the crisis. She tracks several case studies with diverse foci such as prestigious festivals hosting dance performances, the practice of writing about dance, or choreographic collectives and collaborations. Zervou employs an ethnographic approach to document how perceptions of national identity, citizenship, and the racial construction of Greekness shifted during the crisis. Using dance works presented in the first half of the crisis (2010–2015), she theorizes contemporary dance performances as the primary sites for negotiating Greekness during the crisis.

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DRUMMING ASIAN AMERICA: TAIKO, PERFORMANCE, AND CULTURAL POLITICS

by Angela K. Ahlgren. 2018. New York: Oxford University Press. 198 pages., 22 photographs, appendices, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$105.00 hardcover, \$36.95 paper. ISBN: 9780199374021 doi:10.1017/50149767720000418

As a staged, choreographed performance of neo-folk ensemble drumming in Japan since the 1950s, *taiko* reached North America in 1968. Although the number of articles on the form has grown over the past two decades, Angela K. Ahlgren's *Drumming Asian America: Taiko, Performance, and Cultural Politics* is the first scholarly monograph examining taiko in Asian American contexts, followed only by Deborah Wong's *Louder and Faster* (2019). Combining historical research, performer interviews, ethnography, auto-ethnography, and theoretical analysis across six chapters, Ahlgren explores the experiences, ambivalences, and sometimes overlapping identities of Japanese American, Asian American, white, black, feminist, and queer taiko performers, positing that they (and more) cocreate Asian America and participate in its racial formation.

Reordering the book's subtitle to "Cultural Politics, Performance, and Taiko" may present its arguments more accurately. That the first chapter introduces no less than eight ways the book's ambitious objectives and rationales indicates a prismatic and ambiguous scope less about taiko itself and more about cultural politics, justifies this notion. For example, Ahlgren's