

# Dance Stereotypes. Reflection of gender relations in the 'Karsilama' dance in Greece

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**Abstract:** The research field of this paper is the Greek dance 'Karsilama' as this is danced in the area of Thrace in Greece. More specifically, the research was carried out in the community of Nea Vyssa, which is located in the northern part of this country. The aim of this research is to study the dances of 'Karsilama' in Nea Vyssa, which have rhythm of nine beats (9/8), so that through the analysis of their form, it can be established whether these dances reflect stereotypes of the position of the two sexes in society. The collection of ethnographic data was based on the ethnographic method. Laban's notation system was used to record the choreographic compositions of 'Karsilama' dance, while for the analysis of their structure and form, as well as their codification, the structural-morphological and typological method of analysis was applied, as it is applied in the Greek Traditional Dance and for their comparison the comparative method was used. Finally, the interpretation of the data was held with the anthropological thinking about gender identity as it appears in anthropological views of dance and particularly in Hanna. From the data analysis was found that the 'Karsilama' dances are established the gender hierarchy in the community of Nea Vyssa, highlighting Nea Vyssa in a patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** Greek Traditional Dance, Ethnographic method, gender identity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term "stigma" indicates a negative characterization and comes from the ancient Greek word "stizo" which means to carve and which refers to a mark on the skin (Babiniotis, 1998). According to Whitehead, Carlisle, Watkins, and Mason (2001), in ancient Greece the stigma had a religious meaning and involved the carving of a name using a hot iron. This name was engraved on the individuals, in order to show that they had dedicated themselves to the services of a particular temple. However, this concept later changed and took on a negative meaning. Thus the mark on the body now characterized a person as a slave or a criminal, thus signifying their inferior status, so that "others" who did not have the stigma, to avoid him, especially in public spaces (Goffman, 2001). Of great importance, therefore, was not so much the defamatory quality of the stigma brought by the person who had developed some deviant behavior, rather than the negative meaning and treatment attributed to it by "others".

The modern use of the term refers to certain categories of people, who possess some element of differentiation from "others", while the characteristics and behaviors that accompany this differentiation are related to the mobilization of prejudices against the individuals who bear them. Goffman (2001) argues that stigma is a characteristic of an individual that

is opposed to some societal standard, where the standard is defined as a "normative expectation" in which the individual should possess a certain set of characteristics at some social gathering. According to Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller, and Scott, (1984) a person is stigmatized when associated with a sign or a deviation from a certain norm. In particular, before being stigmatized one must possess some mark, either by nature, or embedded in one's ancestry, or by being a member of some group, which makes one different from some norm (Jones et al., 1984). According to Stafford and Scott (1986), stigma is a characteristic of persons that is opposed to a norm of a social group, where a norm is defined as a shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time. Based on the above, it could be said that stigma is directly linked to the social environment of individuals and is closely related to concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, diversity and stereotypes.

The research field of this paper is the Greek dance 'Karsilama' as this is danced in the area of Thrace in Greece. More specifically, this research study the 'Karsilama' dance, as this performed in the community of Nea Vyssa, which is located in the northern part of Greece. The word "Karsilama", according to one version (Tyrovola, 2000), comes from the ancient Greek 'egarsios' or 'karsios', which means cross. In according to another view (Robou-Levidis, 1995), the word 'Karsilama' is a Turkish noun, derived from the Turkish verb 'karsilamak', which means to go to meet someone.

With the word 'Karsilama', in Nea Vyssa, is meant all the face to face dances of the community. These dances are the 'Varys gisious', the 'Aydinkous', the 'Arapikos', the 'Antikristos', and the 'Pidichtos', which have different musical measures. These dances are also called 'Tsifteteli' (Tyrovola, 2000) by the older residents of the community" (Filippidou, 2006, 2010). The 'Tsifteteli' or 'Karsilama' dance is today considered a women's dance, however in the Eastern traditions it was danced by both men and women (Tyrovola, 2002). Nevertheless, the women's 'Karsilama' dances were modest and were danced indoors and any deviation from this standard stigmatized the woman who performed it (Filippidou, 2010), and the woman was considered immoral and placed on the social fringes.

The above event also happens in Nea Vyssa. In this community, there are 'Karsilama' dances, which are either women's or men's dances. More specifically, the 'Varys gisious' dance and 'Aydinkous' dance are women's dances, the 'Arapikos' dance is men's dance, and the 'Antikristos' dance and the 'Pidichtos' dance are mixed dances performed by both

men and women. Also, as in the traditions of the East (Tyrovola, 2002), so here too, the women's dances are danced in private spaces and the men's in public spaces. However, differences also appear in mixed dances, with the 'Antikristos' dance being danced in private spaces for women and in public spaces for men, while the 'Pidichtos' dance is danced in public spaces by both sexes, but maintaining the distinction between the two sexes, which they never dance together.

Based on the above, the aim of this research is to study the dances of 'Karsilama' in Nea Vyssa, which have rhythm of nine beats (9/8), so that through the analysis of their form, it can be established whether these dances reflect stereotypes of the position of the two sexes in society.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The collection of ethnographic data was based on the ethnographic method, as it is used in the science of dance (Buckland, 1999) and as it is conducted in the context of a "native anthropology" of dance (Boulamanti, 2014; Buckland, 1999; Charitonidis, 2018; Dimopoulos, 2011, 2017; Felföldi, 1999; Filippidou, 2011, 2018; Fountzoulas, 2016; Giurchescu, 1999; Koutsouba, 1991, 1997; Loutzaki, 1989; Niora, 2009, 2017; Sarakatsianou, 2011; Sklar, 1991; Tyrovola, 2008). More specifically, the ethnographic method was based on the use of primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources refer to the data from the field ethnographic research carried out from 2004 to 2022 and is part of a wider research on the dance and cultural identity of the inhabitants of the region of Thrace, in Greece. The research focused on the community of Nea Vyssa of Evros in Greece, which is inhabited by refugees from the region of Eastern Thrace, which today belongs to Turkey. The research data comes from a) in the form of participatory observation (Gefou-Madianou, 1997; Lydaki, 2001), which is considered as the main method of field research (Buckland, 1999) and b) in the form of interviews with informants (Thompson, 2002). Secondary sources refer to the review and use of the existing literature (Thomas, & Nelson, 2003), which moved to identify both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources refer to the direct access to original texts of authors, while the secondary sources refer to the books of other scholars, who evaluate and examine the primary sources.

Laban's notation system (Hutchinson, 2005; Koutsouba, 2005), was used to record the choreographic compositions of 'Karsilama' dance, while for the analysis of their structure and form, as well as their codification, the structural-morphological and typological method of analysis was applied, as it is applied in the Greek Traditional Dance (Karfis, 2018; Koutsouba, 1997, 2007; Tyrovola, 1994, 2001). Finally, for the comparison of the choreographic compositions of the 'Karsilama' dance in Nea Vyssa, the comparative method was used (Ogurtsov, 1983).

To finish, the interpretation of the data was held with the anthropological thinking about gender identity as it appears in anthropological views of dance and particularly in Hanna. (1987, 1988). This is a theoretical model that sees the perception of gender as a field of negotiation, cultural symbol or social relation (Strathern, 1976, 1988; Papataxiarchis, 1992), as well as an analysis criterion of the local population (Papataxiarchis, 1992).

## III. THE 9/8 'KARSILAMA' DANCES

Nea Vyssa is in the northeast lowlands of Greece, south of the old Greek town of Edirne (Adrianoupoli), which now belongs to Turkey (Filippidou 2010, 2018), with a population of 900 residents. The residents are descendants of refugees of Bosna or Vosnohori of Bosnohori which was situated a few kilometers northeast of Edirne in Turkey.

Bosna was a multicultural community as they inhabited it families that arrived there from different corners of the Ottoman Empire, such as Adrianoupoli, Filippoupoli, Chios, Varna, Saranta Ekklesies, Asia minor, Kappadokia, Pontus and other areas. These ethnic groups altogether created the community of Bosna (Filippidou, 2006, 2010). This is the reason why this community has a dance repertoire different from the rest of Greek Thrace, which is dominated by the face to face dances, in other words by the 'Karsilama' dances, which exist mainly in the dance repertoire of the beaches of Asia Minor and Cappadocia (Tyrovola, 2002).

The dances of 'Karsilama' in Nea Vyssa are performed in rhythms of four, five and nine beats. The rhythms of four beats of 'Karsilama' dances are performed only by women, the rhythms of five beats are performed only by men, while the rhythms of nine beats of 'Karsilama' dances danced by both sexes, but maintaining the distinction of men's and women's dances, as rarely would a man dance with a woman and this would only happen if they were close relatives.

In this paper, the 'Karsilama' dances of nine beats were chosen to be studied. These are two, the 'Varys gisious' and the 'Antikristos'. 'Varys gisious' is a women's dance that takes its name from its slow tempo. Varys means heavy, that is very slow (Filippidou, 2006, 2010). Also, this dance is also called 'gisious', that is smooth, because it is danced without many twists and kinks (Filippidou, 2006, 2010). It is a dance that used to be danced in the old 'ballo' (no longer exist), that is, in the friendly and family feasts, which took place in the homes and in which only married or engaged couples participated. It was also danced inside homes at weddings, where the bride danced with her friends, until the groom's relatives came to pick her up and take her to the church, where the sacrament of marriage would be celebrated. However, on both of the above occasions, the dance was performed by a single couple while the other participants watched (Filippidou, 2006, 2010) (pic. 1,2).



Pic. 1 The 'Varys gisious' dance



Pic. 2 The 'Varys gisious' dance

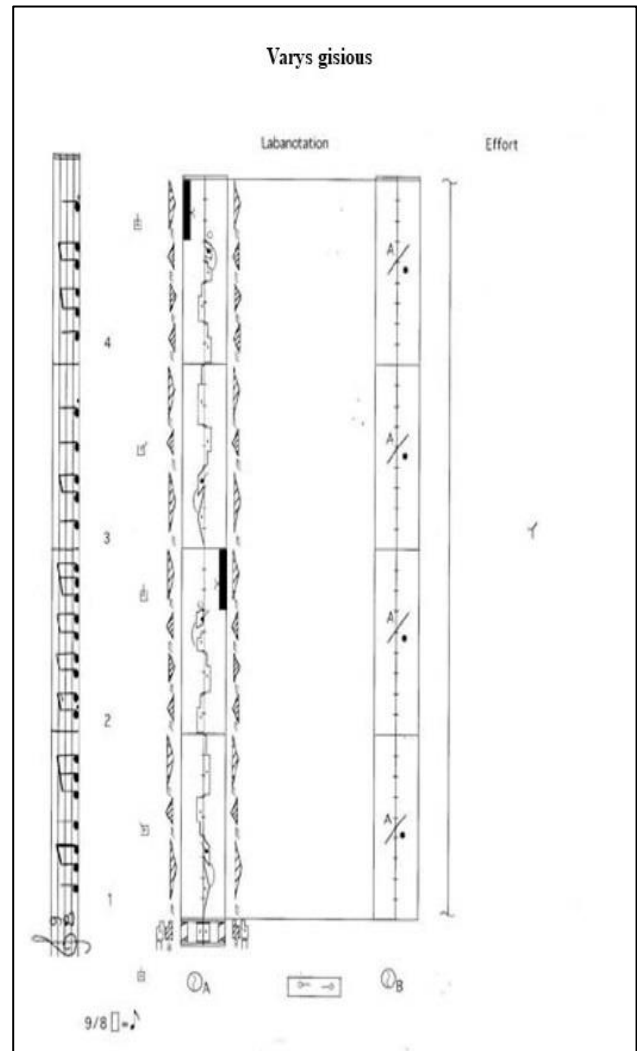


Fig. 1 The recording of the Varys gisious dance (example with kinetic variations for the basic dance phrase)

Table I. Kinetic type of the Varys gisious dance

Varys gisioius, Nea Vyssa Thrace, Greece 9/8 (2+2+2+3/8), AN/ΦΚΑ, Γ	
F	$\Psi 1 [\delta^{4/8} + \alpha_0^{2/8} + \delta^{3/8}]$
	$\Psi 2 [\alpha^{4/8} + \delta_0^{2/8} + \alpha^{3/8}]$
	↑   ↑   ↑   ↑   ↓   ↓   ↓   ↓

On the other hand, the 'Antikristos', which means face to face, is a male dance that was also danced indoors and mainly in the coffeeshouses of the community (Filippidou, 2006, 2010). However, it was also danced outdoors, mainly at weddings, when the women were inside the house and danced their own dances. We rarely meet the 'Antiksitos' with a mixed relationship of dancers, i.e. a man dancing with a woman (an example is a father dancing with his daughter, who is getting married) and this because considered reprehensible by the local community (pic. 3).



Pic. 3 The 'Antikristos' dance

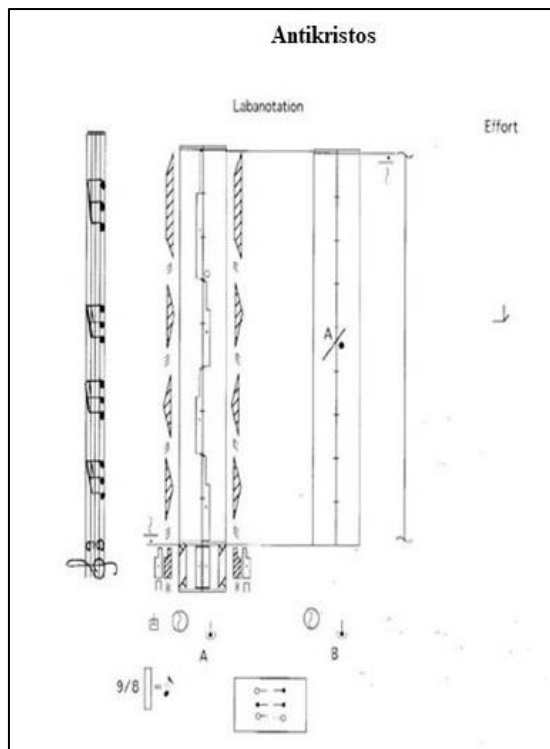


Fig. 2 The recording of the second version of the Antikristos dance

Table II. Kinetic type of the Antikristos dance

Antikristos, Nea Vyssa Thrace, Greece 9/8 (2+2+2+3/8), AN/ΦKA, A	
F	$\Psi 1 [\delta^{2/8} + \alpha_0^{2/8} + \delta^{2/8} + \alpha_0^{3/8}]$ ↑    ↑    ↑    ↑    ↑
	$\Psi 2 [\delta^{2/8} + \alpha_0^{2/8} + \delta^{2/8} + \alpha_0^{3/8}]$ ↓    ↓    ↓    ↓    ↓

Table III. Comparative and concise table of the component elements of the two 'Karsilama' dance

PARAMETERS	VARYS GISIOUS	ANTIKRISTOS
<b>Choreography</b>	One basic dance phrase that is repeated. Relative improvisation.	A basic dance phrase that is repeated. Relative improvisation.
<b>Kinetic unit</b>	Basic dance phrase constantly repeated, with many kinetic variations.	Basic dance phrase constantly repeated, with kinetic variations.
<b>Steps</b>	Small with supports on the sole.	Moderate with supports on the sole.
<b>Handle</b>	Hand in high place with movement right-left). The palms of the hands are in front of the body at face level.	Hand in high place with movement right-left). The arms are open at the side above the height of the face level.
<b>Use of space</b>	Face to face dance. Free use of space.	Face to face dance. Free use of space.
<b>Dancers' position and gender</b>	Only women .	Men and in special occasion and women.
<b>Rhythmic pattern</b>	9/8 (2-2-2-3)	9/8 (2-2-2-3)
<b>Rhythmic organization</b>	Slow and stable.	Moderate and accelerated tempo.
<b>Musical accompaniment</b>	Music accompanied by a song or only song	Music accompanied by a song or only song
<b>Method of interpretation</b>	Small and restrained movements.	Dynamic movements.

From the recording and the analysis of the two 'Karsilama' dances in Nea Vyssa it emerged that, the 'Varys gisious' dance consists of a dance phrase consisting of two meters of 9/8, which correspond to two kinetic motifs. In each kinetic motif there are three not isochronous movements equal to 4/8, 2/8 and 3/8. All movements form a total of two groups of movements, which are repeated throughout the repetition of the kinetic motifs.

The 'Antikristos' dance consists of a dance phrase consisting of two meters of 9/8, which correspond to two kinetic motifs. In each kinetic motif there are four not isochronous movements equal to 2/8, 2/8, 2/8 and 3/8. All movements form a total of two groups of movements, which are repeated throughout the repetition of the kinetic motifs.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to study the dances of 'Karsilama' in Nea Vyssa, which have rhythm of nine beats (9/8), so that through the analysis of their form, it can be established whether these dances reflect stereotypes of the position of the two sexes in society. In order to initially achieve the aim of the research, the structural composition of the nine beats Karsilama' dance in Nea Vyssa had to be determined. To make this happen: a) the 'Varys gisious' and the 'Antikristos' dance were recorded, b) their component elements were classified, c) their dance form was identified and d) their dance form was coded.

From the analysis of the data it is observed that both dances are face to face dances characterized by a free use of space and

a free choreographic structure. However, women improvise less than men, with minor variations on the basic dance phrase, which are limited to turns around the axis of the body (often not complete) and changes of dance direction. Also, the women's movements are small and smooth, without twisting and swaying of the torso and the head. Finally, regarding the movements of the hands, they are in a closed position in front of the forehead level and move right-left, with the palms open.

On the other hand, men have more improvisational freedom, freely moving their upper body and flexing their torso whenever they wish. Their movements are faster than these of the women and more dynamic, performing quick turns around the axis of the body, as well as kicking the feet on the ground. Their hands are open at the side, above the level of the face, while they keep the dance rhythm, tapping their fingers. Also, their hands can move, slightly, right-left or be fixed in a high position, above the level of the face.

Therefore, differences are found between the two dances, both in terms of their movements and in terms of their morphosyntactic elements. The 9/8 beats of the 'Karsilama' dance of men, it is danced in closed places, such as coffee houses. But in the context of the wedding, where the whole community is present, it is danced outside in the courtyard of the house, in contrast to the women's dance which takes place inside the house. Therefore, the 'Antikristos' dance emerges as a public dance practice exclusively for men. On the other hand, the 'Karsilamas' dance of women is limited to the limits of a private space, adopting the identity of a private women's dance practice.

Based on everything that has been said so far, it is established that the dominant gender in the Nea Vyssa community are the men, who are the main driving force within the family and are the only ones who have a say in decision-making, concerning the family. This fact can be seen both from the way of performing their dance, which is improvisationally free throughout the body, and from the place of their dance which is the public space.

On the contrary, women they appear as weak and passive 'objects' in the concrete social system and are possessed of humility, modesty and shame. This fact is evident from the way they perform their dance. Their dance is a) improvisationally limited, b) smoothly, without twisting and bending of the torso and c) the hands move in front of the face, as if trying to hide it. Also, this fact becomes evident from the place where their dance is performed, which is the interior of the house, where no one can see them, apart from their relatives.

Thus, through the 9/8 beats of the "Karsilama" dance in Nea Vyssa, the position of the woman in society and by extension in the family is established. The women not only must be, but also show morality. They achieve this by suppressing themselves (Papataxiarchis, 1992), even in the dance, as they bear the 'responsibility' of protecting the family honor.

In conclusion, from the analysis of the dances 'Karsilama', 'Varys gisious' and 'Antikristos', the gender hierarchy in the

community of Nea Vyssa is established, which highlights Nea Vyssa in a patriarchal society. Even today, when the institutional equality of the two sexes exists, the patriarchy in Nea Vyssa continues to exist. And this is established through the dance 'Karsilama', which, although it is now also performed in public spaces by women, nevertheless, continues to maintain the relationship of female or male couples.

However, each research raises more questions than it probably wishes to resolve. On this basis, in future research, it would be good to study the existence or non-existence of differences in the "Karsilama" dance, of both women and men, over time. And if there are differences, to study the reasons why they were created.

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