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Bodily Responses to Everyday Life in Tirebolu: A Historical Ethnography of Women's Ways of Moving

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Abstract
This research explores how women remember their bodily ways of knowing and their sense of movement in Tirebolu, a town in the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey.

Keywords: Women, Body movement, Bodily memory, Tirebolu, dance

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In their analysis of semiotics of performance, Richard Bauman and Beverly Stoeltje express how "cultural performances" project the social and cultural norms in which they develop. Often situated within the context of musical performance, dance practices are also "public enactments in which a culture is encapsulated, enacted, placed on display for itself and for outsiders."[1] In Turkey, for example, how folk dances were collected and staged since the 1930s, manifests the importance that the Republican regime gave to the concept of "order" in public representations. The history of folk-dance practices during the Republican era shows that folk dances gained their public acknowledgment as much as they conformed to the modernization reforms of the new regime. The folk-dance practice that one calls today "folklor oynamak", emerged as a meta-genre, which encapsulated new aspirations of "orderly and refined staging" during the early Republican era. This modernization process regulated the time span of the local dances and reorganized their floor patterning, therefore transforming them into an urban social dance form. They were included in state ceremonies as much as they conformed to these new regulations, that is, as performed in a much shorter time than in their village, including more women in the performances, and displaying a faultless harmony as a group.[2]

Research on dance history, however, has long been a neglected academic domain. In her study on the history of folk dance research, Lee Ellen Friedland calls attention to the discrepancy between folk dance and folk music research, and shows how the study of folk dancing has long remained in the shadow of musical studies.[3] Although glimpses of dance research can be found since the turn of the 19th century, academic interest in the study of dance grew stronger during the 1960s.[4] The terms of "dance ethnology", "dance anthropology" and "ethnochoreology" were then being used interchangeably, and they mostly tried to decode symbolism in dance movements and comment on the communal meanings assigned to dances. Early research on dance movement benefited greatly from these works to examine meanings assigned to ethnic or national dance genres and events in the ethnographic

1 Stoeltje, Beverly and Richard Bauman. 1988. 'The Semiotics of Cultural Performance.' In T.A. Sebeok and
J. Umiker-Sebeok (eds.). The Semiotic Web. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 585-599.
2 Personal interview with Şerif Baykurt on July 25, 1992, in Ankara. For a review of the canonization of `Turkish Folk Dances', see Arzu Öztürkmen (1993) Folklore and Nationalism in Turkey, PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, pp.294-305. For a firsthand review of folk dance performance in Ankara, see Muzaffer Sözen (1941)" Halk Rakslarından Halaylar", Ülkü, 17/98:111-119.
3 See Lee Ellen Friedland (1998) "Folk Dance: History and Study," International Encyclopedia of Dance Perspectives, ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4 Scholars like Emil Rath (1873-1943) in the US, and Selim Sırrı Tarcan (1874-1957) in the late Ottoman era underscored the use of folk dance in physical education. See Emil Rath (1939) The folk dance in education. Minneapolis: Burgess Pub. Co.; Selim Sırrı Tarcan (1948) Halk Dansları ve Tarcan Zeybeği. Istanbul: Ülkü Basımevi.

context in which they were performed and collected.[5]

The study of dance movements developed also in parallel with some other sociological research concerned with everyday life behavior and expressive movement. Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* appeared in 1956, offering a framework of studying symbolic interaction through dramaturgical analysis. In his footsteps, Ray Birdwhistell's 1970 book *Kinesics and Context* explored body motion as communication, calling attention to facial expressions, gestures, posture and expressive arm and body movements. One should also remind that these years were also the decade where important changes happened within a new realm of folklore research. The "new perspectives in folklore" movement proposed a new defining, where the focus moved from national canonization towards the context of the artistic communication within a given community.[6] This new approach allowed a new understanding of historical and local performative processes as well as the textual analysis of archived folklore genres. One should also add the impact of feminist studies on the study of bodies and their performativity. Judith Butler's approach to gender constitution stressed how the repetition of performative acts mattered, and showed how gendered performativity stood at the heart of everyday life behavior.[7]

Research on ethnochoreology grew stronger in this context during the 1980s, when nationalism studies also expanded.[8] National genres like "national/folk dances" began to be deconstructed, shifting from the "national" towards the "communal". In the last decades, the study of movement further expanded to other genres than dance, including sports or rituals, but most importantly gestures and other body language expressions in the performance of everyday life. One should underline at this point the contribution of the "Study Group of Ethnochoreology," which was established in 1962 under ICTM, the International Council for Traditional Music. Originally founded as a working group led by Eastern European ethnologists, the group was joined by other scholars from around the world, bringing a new perspective

5 For an early approach to the field, see Gertrude Prokosch Kurath (1960) "Panorama of Dance Ethnology", Current Anthropology, 1/3: 233–254. For a critical look at the ethnic and national dance approach, see Irene Loutzaki (Ed. 1994). 17th Symposium of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology, 1992 Proceedings: Dance and its socio-political aspects & Dance and costume. Nafplion: Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation; and Theresa Jill Buckland (2007) Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities. University of Wisconsin Press. For a general review of the history of dance studies, see Selma Jeanne Cohen (Ed., 1998). The International Encyclopedia of Dance. Oxford University Press.
6 See The book "Toward new perspectives in Folklore" was published in 1972, where Dan Ben Amos defined folklore as "artistic communication in small groups." See Americo Paredes & Richard Bauman (Eds.) 1972. Toward new perspectives in Folklore, University of Texas Press.
7 Judith Butler (1988) "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Theatre Journal, 40/4: 519-531.
8 See the works of Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith, and Benedict Anderson who laid the foundation for nationalism studies.

to the study of dance. A most important debate centered upon the discussion of structural analysis, where American anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler proposed the term "structured movement systems" instead of "dance", to offer an analytical methodology to study all kinds of movement genres in their own morphological and semantic system.[9] Approaching movement-related performative genres as "structured movement systems" expanded the research boundaries of ethnochoreology. One should also underline the pioneering work of Drid Williams who approached dance and movement from a semiotic point of view. Williams' work, *Anthropology and the Dance: Ten Lectures on Theories of the Dance* appeared in 1991, providing its readers with a historical examination of the theories of dance and human movement including the dance, sign language, martial arts, and rituals.

In the context of the late Ottoman and early Republican era, the study of dance and music were part of a broader interest in the study of "Turkish folklore". Interest in Turkish folklore had begun in the dissolving context of the Ottoman Empire.[10] These organizations focused mostly on language research. The pioneering scholarship on folk dance research emerged among Young Turk intellectuals like Rıza Tevfik, Selim Sırrı Tarcan and Mehmet Fetgeri Şuenu, who were interested in physical education as a leading aspect of modernization. Rıza Tevfik and Selim Sırrı particularly saw the importance of folk dances as "national representation" as well.

Interest in folk dance research continued during the Republican era. Türk Halk Bilgisi Derneği (Turkish Folklore Association) founded in 1928 published *Halk Bilgisi Toplayıcılarına Rehber,* a guide for fieldworkers, inspired by the works of Arnold Van Gennep, Achille Millien and Hofmann Krayer. The guide was a significant contribution, offering an impressive list of genres available in the realm of Turkish folklore. The list covered a range of folklore topics ranging from verbal genres to material culture, which included among many others everyday life habits, body language, folk dance and music. A large variety of folklore genres have been collected and archived during the Republican era, first under the People's Houses and later in the National Folklore departments of the Ministry of Culture.[11] Along with the oral genres

9 Dance Structures: Perspectives on the Analysis of Human Movement, eds. Adrienne L. Kaeppler & Elsie Ivanchic Dunin. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 17th Symposium of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology: 1992 Proceedings. Nafplion: Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, pp.83-86.

10 Among those institutions, which clearly pursued Turkist goals, Türk Ocakları (Turkish Hearths) were the most effective, along with other Turkist organizations, like Türk Derneği or Türk Yurdu Cemiyeti. See François Georgeon (1980) Aux origines du nationalisme turc: Yusuf Akçura, 1876-1935, Paris: ADPF; Günay Göksu Özdoğan (2002) "Turan"dan "Bozkurt"a: tek parti döneminde Türkçülük, 1931-1946, Istanbul: Iletişim; Jacob M. Landau (1995) Pan-Turkism: from irredentism to cooperation, London: Hurst & Company; Füsun Üstel (1997) İmparatorluktan Ulus Devlete Türk Milliyetçiliği: Türk Ocakları, 1912-1931, Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

11 See Pertev Naili Boratav. 1982. Folklor ve edebiyat, Vol.I & II. İstanbul: Adam Yayınları; Pertev Naili Boratav (1942) Halk edebiyatı dersleri Ankara: Uzluk Basımevi; Arzu Öztürkmen (1998) Tür-

such as folktales, epics or proverbs, folklore studies have included both dance and music in the construction of a national cultural repertoire.[12] Since the early years of the Republican era, ethnomusicologists had conducted important fieldwork and had been involved in international associations.[13] Adnan Saygun, for instance, served as an elected member of the International Folk Music Council (IFMC, later ICTM) executive board during 1947-1962.[14]

Tirebolu Women's Experience on "Becoming Brides"

My initial interest in Tirebolu was rooted in the social history of Tirebolu. As my mother's native town, Tirebolu has been a place where I had a strong sense of belonging since my childhood. With my sisters, we passed most of our summer times in the town, listening to stories regarding the glamorous past of the town, where women painted the walls of their houses or played piano and violin, and attended garden parties organized in the Republican Park. Most of these conversations, however, both in Tirebolu and in the Tirebolite communities of Istanbul and Ankara, would voice out a strong sense of loss of that lifestyle. In the 1990s, as women's studies were developing rapidly in Turkey, I began to listen more carefully to these stories. My research process began by recording some spontaneous family and friend conversations from 1994 onwards. These were life stories that mostly revealed how women perceived the gradual local change in their town. Women's accounts of their domestic and local experiences included many stories about Tirebolu's old populations, especially the Greek and Armenian communities. They formed the beginning of my upcoming multi-sited historical-ethnography research, which I had the opportunity to publish over the years.[15] This essay will

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kiye'de Folklor ve Milliyetçilik. İletişim Yayınları.

12 See Arzu Öztürkmen. 2014 "Entre éthnologie européenne et approche américaine du folklore: Les repositionnements de la recherche sur le Folklore en Turquie", Folklores et politique, eds. Jean-Sébastien Noël, Antoine Nivière, Didier Francfort & Stanislaw Fiszer. Éditions Le Manuscrit; Arzu Öztürkmen. 2012 "Dancing around Folklore: Constructing a National Culture in Turkey", A Companion to Folklore Studies, Regina Bendix & Galit Hasan Rokem (Eds.). Blackwell Wiley, pp.305-324; Arzu Öztürkmen. 2010 "Folklorla Oynamak:" Yerellik, Milliyetçilik ve Ötekilerimiz", Sözde Masum Milliyetçilik (Ed.) Herkül Millas. İstanbul: Kitap Yayınları, pp.251-286.

13 See Kubilay Kolukırık (2014) "Osmanlı Devleti'nde İlk Resmî Konservatuvar Olan Dârülelhanda Derleme ve Yayım Faaliyetleri," Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi 1/35: 479-798; İbrahim Yavuz Yükselsin (2011) "Etnomüzikoloji Açısından Ahmed Adnan Saygun", Bilig Dergisi, (57), 247-277; Arzu Öztürkmen. 2002 "I Dance Folklore," Fragments of Culture: The Everyday Life of Turkey, eds. Deniz Kandiyoti & Ayşe Saktanber. London & New York: I.B.Taurus, pp.128-146; Berna Kurt (2017) Ulus'un Dansı: 'Türk halk oyunları' geleneğinin icadı. Pan Yayıncılık.

14 For a brief review of Turkish scholars' involvement with ICTM, see http://ictmturkey.org/about. Accessed on 19 September, 2021.

15 See Öztürkmen, Arzu. 2003. "Remembering through the Material Culture: Local Knowledge of Past Communities in a Turkish Black Sea Town," Middle Eastern Studies, vol.39, no.2, pp.179-193; Öztürkmen, Arzu. 2005. "Local Responses to Regional Change: Memory of a Social and Economic Transformation in a Turkish Black Sea Town," East European Quarterly, 39/1, pp. 47-62; Öztürkmen, Arzu. 2006. "Remembering conflicts in a Black Sea town: A multi-sited ethnography of me-

particularly focus on how Tirebolu women expressed their past experiences on their bodies along with their movement patterns within their household and the public space in Tirebolu.

When I began collecting women's life stories during the mid 1990s and early 2000s, many of these narratives were centered on the themes of "personal misfortune", "family pride" or an "overwhelmingly busy daily life." They all referred to the social and material change that the town had seen over the years. One thing that caught my attention was how women chose to verbalize their sense of belonging to their domestic and public spaces through their bodily experiences and an adventurous mobility between marked spaces. In many women's narratives, characterizations such as "beautiful", "frivolous" and "being a highland girl" were associated with the perilous zone of the female body and the necessity of being locked up within the house. As one narrator put it, "Beauty was a trouble, as it would create fancy for the girl." At an age when young girls were about to start attracting attention, keeping them at home was also a strategy to keep them away from formal requests for the girl's hand. Still, early marriage was inevitable in Tirebolu, and an existential struggle was underway for every bride who found herself in a new household at a very young age.

Since women in Tirebolu got married almost as a teenage girl, their story repertoire in their old age would usually consist of those they heard from their in-laws, rather than from their own family. I had the opportunity to meet many of them in those houses, where they once came as brides and now they have taken over. In many cases, women built their narratives around the stories focusing on the material life-taking place in these houses, where they experienced the transition from adolescence to femininity. One of them expressed her experience as "I came as a bride to a household of twenty people!" While the term 'twenty people' is a symbolic number, it sums up the family order in which many other brides had also found themselves. Between the mother-in-law, father-in-law, sisters and brothers-in-law along with their husbands and wives, the new brides were involved in a choreography called the 'settled order', in which everyone had a predetermined role. In many cases for brides to learn this choreography, marriages were scheduled just before the newly wed husband would go to do his obligatory military service. This way, brides would undergo a 'training' of the everyday life performance in their new house, while their spouses were away for more than a year. In other words, each bride would take both a spatial and physical training, where their relation to space defined the scope of their movement patterns, while their relation to their own body structured "how to behave."

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mory." New Perspectives on Turkey, Spring 2006.

The Movement Patters of Tirebolu Women

In the early years of marriage, Tirebolu brides were under the strict control of their in-laws. It was entirely up to their mother-in-law to manage when and whom they could visit. Even if they had a warm relationship, and such visiting days would already be pre-set in a certain order, many women underscored how the moment of asking permission to visit their own families was a distressing experience. One narrator remembered the delicacy of asking the permission "at the right time, in the right place." She recalled how she herself went up and down the stairs to catch the best moment to ask to leave. Another remembered that even going to a mevlüd, the most legitimate religious reunion, often organized by neighbors or relatives, would be a problem.

Here, one should remind that the social status of the brides determined how they would position themselves in relation to the space surrounding them. Most middle-class women expressed that they were constantly warned not to look out from the window nor open the door when they were alone at home. A woman narrator, who was the bride of a wealthy household, remembered how her husband always stipulated that servants open the door. He was mainly afraid that his wife would come face-to-face with a maraba, a local farm worker. The sight of the women's body was refrained even from a gaze, as such experience would transform into a descriptive narrative, thus into a "gossip". However, such encounters could be different for women from lower-income families, who freely used their windows, even the open outdoors, as a natural extension of their domestic space. Tirebolu was a hilly town with long stairs, which would function like streets. After housework, many women would sit in front of their houses, using that space as a public chatting area among neighbors. However, for upper-class women, the doors and the windows set the boundaries of their privacy.

The indoor mobility was indeed as complex as the outdoor. Where and how women could move was the staging of a "choreographic training" of the "established order" within the house. Every bride in Tirebolu had to learn quickly her place and mission of her new home. The kitchen and the pantry would be kept locked and mostly controlled by the mother-in-law. For example, in the memory of a narrator, the entrenched image of her mother-in-law was still shaped as "a woman swinging a noisy keychain around her waist." Since the pantries were often locked, it was the case that nursing brides starved in their own homes. A 100-year-old narrator ironically listened to such a story from her own mother-in-law:

> *We were two brides who had just given birth. And we would watch out the pantry's door with eyes open. Once we found it open, we would sneak in to take one or two cookies. We would*

> *wait until our mother-in-law fell asleep. We would also steal from the daily milk a bit, and mix them all and eat.*

The mother-in-law was the central axe of this everyday life performance. First, they had complete control of the cooking activities. Many women described how the kitchen work was heavy. The term "kitchen work," also pointed to a "skillful performance." For many Tirebolu men who were obsessed with taste, food was also a knowledge that men also interfered. Husbands were the masters of the marketplace. They would choose the "best" meat, the "freshest" vegetables, fruits, herbs, and eggs. Some men also developed certain rules of their own, ranging from how to cut the lemon or how long the pot would be left on fire. The so-called "skillful performance," required all of these rules to be learned and practiced by the brides. To be diligent (hamarat) and resourceful (becerikli) were key to a successful performance. The success was often measured if the bride envisioned what, when and how to wash, chop, serve. The most important point was to do all of these without being told. One could very well describe the overall performance a "dance with the kitchen", often accompanied with a humming.

In fact, the narratives transcended the domain of the kitchen, referring to a wider concept of "service" in everyday life. An embodied alertness was the key to "service performance." Serving the husband, the father-in-law, and the guests, and doing all the necessary errands, could be compared to the improvising dancers or sprinting athletes. This included preparing slippers in advance, holding cologne to the visitor, bringing water without being asked, harnessing the stove, and sitting in a temporary place to wait for the next move.

In this context, all Tirebolu houses could also be considered as a large stage. Their interior layout was designed to the finest detail, and the rooms were carefully arranged so that each item had its own place. The newly-weds would be given a room within the household, and that room would be the bride's only private space to take refuge. One narrator referred to the concept of "patience" as the only rule of living a harmonious and peaceful life in such narrow domestic space. In her own words, "no one wanted to add tension to the already boredom of everyday life, so showing respect and patience was compulsory." There were also narratives that accounted for conflicts emerging from sharing common objects, like carpets, chairs, or kitchenware.

Brides were also expected to "perform silence", a process where the female body functioned as a place of self-retreat. If there was nowhere else to go, most women were "staying silent" and taking refuge in their own bodies. In fact, in the first week after marriage, some women performed a ritual called "gelinlik tutmak", as a display of bridehood. This post-nuptial ritual called

the bride to keep muted, avoiding any speech until she was invited to speak by her mother-in-law. This could take months, and the newlywed bride hardly said a word during visits to the neighbors. It appeared that the female body, which was seen as a threating area during premarital stage, had become a site for the personal retreat in the bride's new house.

The presence in the house was also like a game of hide-and-seek for new brides. Certain times and places were coded with particular meanings, and one needed to chase the right moment to move in between the rooms. For example, taking a bath had a direct reference to sexual intercourse, as a religious obligation. One narrator referred to this experience as 'bath fear' or a 'secret bath', which she associated with her inner voice "Ahh! They heard the noise; ahh, they saw my hair wet!" Another narrator remembered that she was once caught by her father-in-law, who had to go to the toilette at a rather late hour, passing through the bathroom where she was taking a bath. Not to be caught, she immediately locked the door from the inside, and did not respond to the old man's calls. As the father continued to bang on the door, the mother-in-law, who finally understood the situation, called him back. Realizing that the bride was hiding herself, she gave her a few minutes to escape to her room.

Some Tirebolu women remember with a certain anger today the periods when they were doing intensive housework. I heard from a narrator who resented how she missed part of her youth:

> *I was engaged at fifteen, I found myself at thirty-five with children and all the other work. I suddenly got old... Our youth passed by through endless housework: no washing machines, no dishwashers, no electricity! We would open our eyes at daylight to the housework. We had people who served us as well, but we never relied entirely on them. Every morning, a pile of diapers, loads of laundry! And we were so good at housework. I say this because we would also find time for entertainment. We would do the housework and play cards at the same time. We used to manage them both. But I also remember how much we would be exhausted.*

Many women also remembered a deep concern to protect their bodies during their adolescence and young age. The most important reason for this was the "kız çekme" tradition, a practice of kidnapping the girl. Narratives of being kidnapped made an important part of the repertoire of girls' conversations. They also had another function. The telling of these stories created a "horror movie effect" for the young girls, so that they would be alert and

take responsibility of their own faith. Kidnapping stories often referred to the female body as a "fortress" that needed to be constantly defended. They all pointed out to the full responsibility loaded on the shoulders of young girls until they were married. In this regard, it was necessary not to trust anyone. Capturing girls could also occur as a collaboration between the kidnapper and one of the girl's cousins. There were also cases where even fiancées kidnapped their bride-to-be in order to escape wedding costs.

The kidnapper did not even have to go too far. To tightly wrap the girl around her waist and neutralize her would be enough to be "dishonored". Being touched was perceived as if the girl lost a tag game. Even being "seen" by a man without knowing it would be considered as a disgrace. In one narrative, the narrator sadly recounted being caught by her own fiancée, while she was chatting with friends at dusk. Accordingly, as the girls were sitting together in front of their house, they noticed a projector light coming from a boat and illuminating them. Terrified that they could be identified and therefore became a gossip material, they all escaped in fear.

Our body language and physical expressions have changed significantly since the early years of the Republic. One can clearly observe this change by looking at the film footages from the earlier decades of modern Turkey, or by observing the body language of our elderly. Undoubtedly, this change was closely related to how women's social roles and clothing have changed in public domain over the years. Since the 1990s, for example, a major discussion has developed around the phenomenon of 'veiling', inquiring whether women opened themselves up more in the public sphere, by being covered. New and different forms of gestures also emerge. Today's kafa tokuşturma, head-banging salute is another small example. In this sense, different movement systems and body languages point to important breaking points on our new socialization habits. How we move in everyday life reveals therefore new meanings we assign to these movements, as much as in dance and in other structured movement systems.

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Photo 1: *Tirebolu, Early 20th Century*

Photo 2: *A young bride, with her first child. Courtesy of Nakipoğlu family.*