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Dancing the self

Cypriot sociocultural identity and contemporary choreography

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Dancing the Self:
Cypriot Sociocultural Identity and Contemporary Choreography

By

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Abstract

This practice-integrated research project explores mainstream and alternative embodiments of contemporary Cypriot sociocultural identity through the landscape of contemporary dance, based on the hypothesis that aesthetic movement practice and the dancing self can unearth new knowledge, creative potential, and a clearer understanding of self and other. The theoretical aspect of the research draws upon literature in the fields of Cypriot identity, identity and the body, ethnographic practices, critical pedagogy, and feminist theory. The practical segment of the thesis is comprised of an examination of identity embodiments in Cypriot contemporary dance and a trilogy of collaborative choreographic works entitled *Identity Project*. By employing collaborative improvisational techniques and the exchange of personal narratives with groups of movement artists the dance practice aims to arrive at experiential, intersubjective yet substantiated materialisations of Cypriot identity.

The research begins with investigating Cypriot sociocultural identity at large. However, through the development of the practical work the topic soon narrows to women's realities, feminine identities, female voices, and the role of the aesthetically astute moving body in identity formation. This distillation process discloses the active role of a practice-integrated methodology as a parallel discourse, as several performed subjectivities forge an experientially-based research path. The *performative moment* or *performMent* (my term), a

transformational, lived expression of identity at the conjecture of dance performance, pedagogy, and performativity is a main outcome of the study. I argue that the *performMent* as both a term and genre bridges a gap in current identity discourses. The implications of merging movement with identity research are also posited as they relate to a postcolonial, modernising, geographically divided, and politically conflicted Cyprus, with particular emphasis on women's concerns. Perspectives on the *performMent* as a radical artistic, pedagogical, and sociocultural medium that can invoke awareness, agency, and transformation in both performers and spectators are addressed.

For my children,

Michalis Alexandros

Dimitrios Aristotelis

Sophia Amaryllis

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Locating the Self: In and Out of Context

> I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness.
> — Mikhail Bakhtin (1984:287)

> *I am not; I seem. I do not seem – I am.*
> *I am what you want me to be.*
> — written/spoken text, *kouponi allagis* (2010)[1]

This study has emerged from my experience over the course of twenty years as a dancer, choreographer, dance researcher and movement educator. It is also rooted in my love for philosophy and my persistence in questioning the origin of things. The research is driven by the notion that bodily perception and kinetic dialogical discourse house great potential for alternative ways of knowing. The body as an invaluable epicentre and generator of diverse knowledges is a reality that I have engaged with repeatedly in my dance practice and one that has often led my academic and creative pursuits. Moreover, I frequently encounter my own dancing body and the dancing bodies of others as catalysts for transformation. As such, this thesis is founded philosophically on the premise that the minded, aesthetically moving body has the inherent ability to invoke multiple knowledges, negotiate relationships, divulge personal and political issues, and initiate change.

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[1] Text excerpt written by a female performer in the first choreographic work of this project, *kouponi allagis*, meaning 'exchange coupon', translated from the Greek, *κουπόνι αλλαγής*. Full text can be found in *Appendix B*.

Thematically this project problematises contemporary Cypriot sociocultural identity through the shifting terrain the dancing body in concurrence with relevant academic scholarship. In using the term 'Cypriot' here and throughout the writing I refer to the region, population, language and customs of the Republic of Cyprus, located in the southeast part of the Mediterranean Sea. The Republic of Cyprus consists of the southern half of the island of Cyprus that remained free after the violent Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation of the northern half of the island in July of 1974. Unlike northern Cyprus, the Republic of Cyprus has been recognised worldwide as a nation-state since the invasion and division of the island and has been a member of the European Union since May of 2004. In order to maintain a clear distinction between the two regions, individuals or groups that belong to the population of the occupied territory of northern Cyprus will be referred to either as 'northern Cypriot' or 'residents of northern Cyprus'.

The culmination of this project is multi-layered, made up of various interconnected but distinct strands, located at the interface of identity research, dance practice, pedagogy, and autoethnography. Central to the investigation are the conditions surrounding a series of rich choreographic processes with strong pedagogical and political counterparts; the artistic environment of the Cypriot contemporary dance scene is also of importance. The writing interweaves the multiple facets that develop alongside, and often mold, methodological approaches employed to explore Cypriot sociocultural identity. Topics are frequently presented more than once as they re-surface with new themes and outcomes emerging from the research, as the notion of identity navigates a spectrum between factual issues and subjective discourse.

The substantial and vital practical component of the thesis mainly entails the collaborative creation of three experimental, improvisation-based choreographic works involving Cypriot participants of varying backgrounds; the initial aim was to locate and explore questions and manifestations of Cypriot sociocultural identity that are subtle, bypassed, or hidden in both mainstream society and current identity research. The choreographic processes draw from a number of dance and movement forms that have been prominent throughout my own practice as a dancer, educator, and choreographer, such as improvisation, contact improvisation, release technique, somatically informed dance, Ideokinesis, authentic movement, and physical theatre. A successful integration of many or all of these movement approaches has been central to my creative work, resulting in fresh knowledge, unexpected movement material, a deeper sense of oneself and of others, and a challenge of the status quo.

The minded, aesthetically moving body functions as a lens for examining personal and collective identities in Cyprus. With this phrase I indicate a critical, dimensional, thinking, dancing body, expanding upon dance scholar Carol Brown's notion of the 'minded body' (2010). Findings and knowledges derived from the participants' movement experiences and reflections are re-assessed through relevant scholarship, predominantly in the areas of Cypriot identity, women in Cyprus and the body in culture. Conversely, identity issues located in the theory, prominent or lacking, are brought in to the studio. The project endeavours to locate and reveal new vicinities in the field of Cypriot identity, to situate the body within current Cypriot identity research, to suggest new approaches in researching Cypriot identity, and to unleash the possibility of inciting agency through politicising the body in performance.

The following main research questions are explored: What role does collaborative dancemaking, through the interaction of minded, aesthetically moving bodies, play in representing and re-creating Cypriot sociocultural identity? What happens to personal and collective identities when dancers improvise, collaborate and choreograph based on the exchange of personal narratives? How are notions and experiences of self and other affected when the minded, aesthetically moving body consciously engages in a process of self-understanding? What is the difference between improvising on identity alone and in dialogue with other bodies? What does the relationship between performativity and the performance of identity offer in terms of new understandings of identity? How can performative moments, or what I call *performMents* (defined later in this chapter), affect one's sense of identity? An abundance of related questions sprung from these core inquiries during the course of the research, leading to overlaps with the fields of ethnography, pedagogy, feminism, philosophy and performativity. As I have mentioned above, I draw from these research areas extensively throughout the thesis.

Methodologically, this investigation attempts to integrate theory and practice in an interactive manner that renders the two research approaches interdependent and equally significant. I therefore define this methodology as 'practice-integrated'. Movement-driven explorations are posited in continuous dialogue and negotiation with relevant theory in the writing and in the dance practice. The participants were made aware of this method and were invited to address theoretical issues during rehearsals and discussions. The framework of the research methodology will be expanded upon in Section V of this chapter.

II

<u>Practical Matters</u>

The dance-based component of this study took place in Cyprus between 2010 and 2016, and includes many facets. The main pillar is a succession of collaboratively created choreography that I facilitated and structured. The material for the pieces was founded on movement studies, improvisational exercises as well as written tasks that I created specifically for the purpose of exploring Cypriot identity (described in section IV of this chapter). However, movement and text improvisations did not always result in set movement and text; sometimes improvisation was maintained in the final version of the pieces and at other times these experiences remained in the studio. Detailed examples and analyses of the studies, exercises and structured improvisations appear throughout the writing. Another practical aspect of the work is a series of six improvisational workshops I conducted with four female non-dancers for the purpose of investigating feminine identities through the moving body. Specifics of this process and its relationship to the choreography are provided in later chapters. A final important practical research component can be viewed as more akin to fieldwork. Between 2008 and 2016 I attended numerous contemporary dance performances in Cyprus and recorded my reflections in a journal; during this period I also informally interviewed approximately ten Cypriot chorographers. A primary purpose of this inquiry has been to gain a deeper perspective on the presence and portrayal of identity within the contemporary Cypriot dance scene in order to locate our work within a larger context. Information obtained from this venture is also included throughout the writing where applicable.

As indicated above, the participants' input is central to this work, as movement, text, and feedback; examples are included throughout the thesis. During somatically informed improvisational tasks the dancers explored identity individually and collaboratively based on their own movement and text; this process aimed to invoke deeper self-understanding as well as a dialogical exploration of how mainstream representations of identity might coincide with more internal, individualised embodiments of self and other. Although details of movement tasks are provided in later chapters, the terms 'improvisation' and 'somatic', as present in this study, must first be clarified in order to illuminate our movement styles and intentions.

The dance improvisation approach that was implemented in our practice can be can be best defined as spontaneous movement, primarily in a contemporary dance style, performed freely or based on a given structure. Quite different from improvisational moments that typically occur within a movement study, our improvisations were executed without the intention of reaching set movement sequences or motifs and variations. Even if involving repetition or ultimately applied to set movement, they were meant to lead to unexpected movement choices and internal insights, as reflected the following description by lifelong improviser Ann Cooper Albright (2003):

> Where you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It is a place from where more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this place the Gap. The more I improvise, the more I'm convinced that it is through the medium of these gaps – this momentary suspension of reference point – that comes the unexpected and much sought after "original" material. It's "original" because its origin is in the current moment and because it comes from outside our usual frame of reference.
>
> (Albright, 2003: 246)

Contact improvisation was also present in our exercises and choreography, playing a key role both in collaborative pursuits and empathetic exchanges between dancers. I employed a version of contact improvisation in which I have been trained; based on the practice of Steve Paxton a founder of the form, in this form the inner intention is curiosity rather than ambition, and presence in the moment leads the dancer.

> The exigencies of the form dictate a mode of movement which is relaxed, constantly aware and prepared, and on-flowing. As a basic focus, the dancers remain in physical touch, mutually supportive and innovative, meditating upon the physical laws relating to their masses: gravity, momentum, inertia and friction. They do not strive to achieve results, but rather, to meet the constantly changing physical reality with appropriate placement and energy.
>
> (Paxton: 1978: 1)

Moreover, somatic practice, or somatically informed dance, is fundamental to our movement explorations. My approach can be best defined as utilisation of somatic practices to unleash a spectrum of possibilities and diverse bodily knowledges that emerge when placing the moving body at the forefront of understanding. As such, I turn to a well-crafted definition of somatic dance offered by somatic practitioner and educator Leena Rouhiainen (2008), who suggests that the field of somatic dance is

> … an interdisciplinary domain that brings together especially dance, different mind-body techniques, alternative, health-care practices, and psycho-physically oriented psychology. In addition, cultural theory, phenomenology, cognitive science, and neurobiology are evermore often referred to in order to bring clearer understanding to the nature of somatic practices. Somatic practitioners ... consider enhancing bodily awareness as a means of change that supports better bodily functioning, self-understanding, and ethical relationship with others, and even offer measures to transgress prohibiting social norms.
>
> (Rouhiainen, 2008: 242)

7

Similarly, somatic practitioner and scholar Martha Eddy (2002) argues that somatic practice can be a catalyst for dance in the service of critical thinking, and agency in dance-related fields. Eddy's view regarding the advantages of a subjective reality fostered by somatic practice reflects the reasons behind my choice to enrich our practice with somatically informed exercises and improvisations (described and analysed at length in the following chapters).

> It is my belief that somatic practice, characterized by a first-person experience within a cultural context, can encourage a move toward a more politicized stance that enables a critique of existing dance, arts, and educational institutions, as well as the agency and empowerment of individuals.
>
> (Eddy, 2002:58)

For the purposes of this research, I will not engage in a discussion on somatic practices unless aspects of the field, such as somatically informed dance improvisations, are pertinent to the practical component of the research. It is important to note, however, that the somatic approach frequently implemented in our process not only aided heightened awareness and interpersonal empathy in the dancers, but disclosed surprising identity embodiments (discussed in detail in later chapters). As mentioned earlier, identity manifested on many levels in this project; in reflection I have come to understand that in viewing our movement process as more significant than the final choreographic product, the issue of identity was perpetually internal to the practical work rather that an outside theme. The undertaking to deepen into identity through corporeal research has been especially effective in expressing, aligning and re-connecting the complex and polarised aspects of Cypriot identity, as 'our bodies both shape and are shaped by our life experiences, ... our corporeal engagement in the world creates meaning in our lives (Albright, 2011: 8).

In this light, the identity representations that emerge in the practical work embody overlapping realities that habitually co-exist in the transitional, modernising, post-colonial, recently European sociocultural reality of Cyprus. Moreover, being both physically and theoretically situated in Cyprus, this research reaps from and contributes to the budding Cypriot contemporary dance scene (discussed at length in later chapters). In short, it can be said that contemporary dance choreography and movement-based performance art in Cyprus frequently engages in current identity issues and discourses, both reflecting and challenging conventional identity representations and triggering awareness of important sociocultural matters.

In specific terms, the material resulting from our practice lead to a trilogy of original choreographic works entitled *Identity Project.* I created these works in collaboration with different groups of performers in Cyprus between September 2010 and May 2016.[2] I apply the term 'trilogy' to indicate that the three works are connected under the broader topic of identity, but also that they were conceived as a dialectical unity in which each piece is an outgrowth of the others. Each segment molds previous embodiments of personal and collective identities, housing internal references to text and movement found in the rest of the material. Consequently, a more detailed and explicit concept of identity is gleaned; this approach is discussed in depth throughout the writing. As mentioned, the choreographic process was continually interwoven with standard theoretical research. Theoretical inquiry was often an impetus behind choreographic tasks; alternatively, artistic outcomes were juxtaposed with theoretical findings. In attributing equal value to theory and practice

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[2] Relevant details of the performers' artistic backgrounds are found in *Appendix B*.

and allowing the two research areas to supplement one another it was hoped that both fresh ideas and embodiments regarding identity would emerge.

As noted above, the evolution of this research process that attempts to equally conjoin theory and practice resulted in what I call a 'practice-integrated', as opposed to a 'practice-led' methodology. They key points of distinction are discussed in detail in section IV of this chapter. As such, it is of great significance to note that the three pieces of *Identity Project* were not created as works of art to stand on their own within the framework of this investigation. Rather, the research process was primary and the final artistic outcomes as subordinate, as the processes of personal narrative and improvised collaboration became a central focal point. This course of events and its outcomes are discussed extensively throughout the thesis.

III

Ethical Concerns

A *Participant Consent Form* that I created for the practical segment of this project was reviewed and signed by all participants in the dance practice (see *Appendix A*). The primary purposes of this agreement were to protect the anonymity of the participants, to inform them of their right to ask or refrain from answering any questions during the process, and to give them the formal right to withdraw from the project at any time. Interestingly, while confidentiality was an option, all participants preferred that I use their real names in my documentation; I also received unanimous consent to quote responses and opinions shared during group discussions and include physical descriptions of the performers in the writing.

However, as Cyprus is small and communities are close-knit and often intertwined, I have included personal information regarding the participants only when relevant to the choreographic practice; in addition, all participants' comments quoted in the writing have been paraphrased. Furthermore, I have replaced all participants' real names with pseudonyms to fully protect their identities. At the commencement of this project I also developed an *Interview Questionnaire* (see *Appendix A*) that was applied loosely during informal, unrecorded interviews with Cypriot choreographers and participants. All information derived from interviews has also been paraphrased.

It is important to mention that most of the creative work for this thesis occurred while I was full-time professor and Programme Coordinator for the Dance BA at the University of Nicosia (Cyprus). In addition, most of the participants/collaborators were students in the Dance Programme at the time, and either former or current students of mine during the rehearsal/performance period. For the first two pieces and part of the third, rehearsals took place in the dance studios of the university. The second and third pieces were performed either as a work in progress or a final work at university dance events. The university environment and inherent relationships, particularly between professor and student, affected and challenged the roles we took on during the choreographic process (further discussed throughout the writing).

Despite ethical precautions and procedures as well as overall good intent there were glitches. Personal material shared during rehearsal under strict confidentiality was sometimes discussed by participants with individuals outside our process, reaching students and professors in the Dance Programme in a form that barely reflected our experience in the studio. Intimate relationships amongst the small number of

students in the Dance Programme further complicated matters, as personal material was sometimes exchanged as gossip, exposing members of the group. This turn of events was brought back into the studio and questioned/discussed as an element of Cypriot identity. I also made adjustments in my practice to protect the privacy of the participants. This altered the study, as information I had counted on was no longer readily available, and protecting participants took priority over openly examining themes. This complex ethical issue and its implications for the research are discussed when relevant throughout the writing and more in-depth in Chapters 2 and 3.

Another ethical issue stems from discrepancies linked to the collaborative aspect of the practical work. As suggested by choreographer and scholar Jo Butterworth (2003), there has been a shift in past decades from individually-led choreographic processes toward inclusive and democratic dancemaking; yet the contribution of collaborators toward movement and conceptual material can bring up ownership issues or cause power struggles in the creative process, raising important questions regarding authorship, co-authorship and expressive interpretation. This issue is addressed as it applies to the inclusion of disabled dancers in chorographic processes in an article co-authored by dance scholar and artist Sarah Whatley: 'While the choreographer may compose the dance, why can the dancer not be considered as an arranger of that composition?' (Whatley et al., 2015). This was a concern during *Identity Project* due to the dancers' limited experience in collaborative dancemaking; on the other hand, my extensive involvement as dancer and choreographer in dancer-generated works has helped me negotiate challenging moments. Details regarding these and other working relationships are provided in Chapter 5.

IV

Identity Project: A Collection of Attempts

The first piece of *Identity Project*, entitled *kouponi allagis (κουπόνι αλλαγής)* – Greek for 'exchange coupon' – was made in collaboration with four artists, two women and two men, during the fall of 2010. It was choreographed and rehearsed in the dance studios of the University of Nicosia in Nicosia (the capital city of Cyprus) where I then held the post of full-time lecturer and Dance Programme Coordinator. Three of the four performers were my students at the time and one a colleague at the university. *Kouponi allagis* was performed at the first annual *NoBody* Dance Festival, organised by renowned Cypriot dancer and choreographer Arianna Economou, in late October 2010 at the Pallas Theatre in the old town of Nicosia. The funds for the festival were provided by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture; all performers were paid equally from the stipend received.

The second work also has a Greek title, *ap'to plevro enos andra (απ'το πλευρό ενός άντρα);* the phrase is a play on words, with the double meaning of 'emerging from the rib of a man' and 'at the side of a man' in Greek. *Ap'to plevro enos andra* was made in collaboration with six female performers, all current or former students at the University of Nicosia, in the spring of 2011. This piece was also rehearsed at the dance studios of University of Nicosia; in various forms, it was performed at formal and informal venues, including the Day of Dance lecture demonstration series at Castelliostissa Church (Nicosia). The finished version of *ap'to plevro enos andra* was featured in *Bodyprints*, the annual final concert of the Dance Programme of the University of Nicosia, at the Pallas Theatre in Nicosia in early June of 2011.

The last piece of *Identity Project*, originally entitled *bare-ly there*, is alternatively called *sxedon-edo* (*σχεδόν-εδώ*) in Greek, meaning 'almost-here'. This work has had an unconventional progression, created in stages between 2012 and 2016, in collaboration with different groups of artists. The final version of the piece therefore does not feature all of the collaborators, despite the inclusion of some of their input; an analysis of this process and its evolution is analysed in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion. In remaining true to collaborative choices during the creative processes, *bare-ly there* is referred to by its English title throughout the thesis, while the first two pieces are referred to by their Greek titles. Again, details pertaining to all three works are discussed throughout the thesis as they are at the crux of the research.

The thesis is supplemented by three appendices. *Appendix A* consists of the *Approved Ethics Application*, the approved *Participant Consent Form* and the original *Interview Questionnaire. Appendix B* includes information on the collaborators' artistic backgrounds, key segments of text performed in the first two works, and relevant feedback. *Appendix C* includes information on the collaborators in the final version of the third piece and the full text that was improvised upon in performance.

V

Methodology: Practice in Theory/Theory in Practice

As mentioned above, while the research methodology of this study relies heavily on the practical segment, *Identity Project*, it can best be termed 'practice-integrated' in contrast to 'practice-led' or 'studio-based'. Alternatively, it is important to note that the practical component of this thesis has not been categorised as 'subordinate

fieldwork', as I had originally envisioned, despite strong elements of ethnographic fieldwork present in the choreographic process and analysis of the work (as I will discuss below). While it is not possible to arrive at a strict definition of any method of practical research, I have settled on descriptions of certain research approaches that best suit the strands of inquiry during this project as well as the method that ultimately served the intentions underlying the practical work.

Before, however, engaging in a discussion of specific practical methodologies (that I deem significant in order to properly frame this work), it is necessary to briefly address the differences between more traditional academic research and practice-based research in the creative arts. Dance philosopher and scholar Anna Pakes argues that research with a strong practical component that focuses on the process as opposed to product (performance) provides a unique 'space for reflection' (Pakes, 2009: 20) Pakes' view on the role of practical knowledge in dance research is based on Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, a form of practical knowledge rooting in the 'experientially particular' (Pakes, 2009: 19). Her insights on the forms of knowledge gained though practice-based research experience are highly relevant to this work, and are referred to extensively in later chapters. Pakes contends:

> With such reflection may come a heightened awareness of oneself and one's encounters as an artist as the basis of any performance event. And this awareness is arguably a form of phronetic insight developed through the practical itself.
>
> (Pakes, 2009: 20)

Along similar lines, scholar, choreographer and interactive artist Kim Vincs (2007, 2009), points to the growing prominence of an experiential or practical component in graduate and postgraduate dance degrees. According to Vincs, the increase of

performance work as part of postgraduate dissertations over the last two decades has resulted in a new research genre; she argues that 'in this form of research legitimate claims are embodied predominantly within the practice itself' (2009:1). Vincs continues by describing and the symbolic languages inherent in the findings of this type of research as 'emergent, contingent and often interstitial, contained within both the material form of the practice surrounding the form' (2009:1).

In order to further distinguish theory-based and practice-based research I turn to the work of drama teacher and scholar Brad Haseman. Haseman (2006) calls the difference between the two styles the 'qualitative/quantitative divide', arguing that the quantitative approach relies heavily on the testing of postulations founded on a deductive method:

> In ruthlessly testing such hypotheses, this research approach measures and quantifies phenomena, constructing them in terms of frequency, distribution and cause and effect. The ultimate goal is to isolate principles which allow for a generalization of findings and the formulation of invariable laws. … The result is a set of research methodologies which aim to eliminate the individual perspective of the researcher (and, if human subjects are involved, the views of those subjects being studied).
>
> (Haseman, 2006: 1-2)

Alternatively, Haseman (2006:2) emphasises the central role of subjectivity in qualitative research, as it results in 'embracing the perspectives both of researchers and participants'; he deems the two research approaches polarised, as stemming from 'fundamentally different views of the world'.

Similarly, Vincs (2007) presents subjectivity as the main element distinguishing practice-based or studio-based research from traditional methods:

16

> Studio-based research in dance … shifts the focus of dance research from the idea that dance is a product, a repository of knowledge or ideas that can be interrogated and interpreted to the notion of dance as a field in which knowledge is produced. The subjectivity of the artist, itself a complex, rhizomic web, is a part of this field in which knowledge is produced.
>
> (Vincs, 2007: 100)

Vincs (2007: 100) suggests that rather than the dance being the outcome of thought-based research, 'dances are the actual process of thinking, and this process is the core methodology of studio-based dance research'. In a later study, Vincs (2009: 2) connects practice-led research with 'knowledge-generation … linked to issues of embodiment'. Vincs argues that the embodied nature of dance is primary in practice-led research while the textual remains subordinate, stating that 'creative approaches to layered documentation can function as durable artefacts of creative research', referring in particular to the materialisation of alternative discourses, 'such as metaphor, allusion and symbol' (Vincs, 2009: 1). At the same time, Vincs points out the difficulties in what she calls a 'co-embeddedness of both discourse and practice in art-making and scholarly writing' (2009:2). Symbolism, unconventional frameworks and complexities in connecting theory and practice were emergent throughout this project (discussed later in this chapter and throughout the writing).

Further in line with Haseman's view on the centrality of subjectivity in practice-based research, Estelle Barrett (2007), writer and scholar in the fields of embodiment in aesthetic experience and creative practice as research, presents subjectivity as a pivotal element in creative arts research and the sighting of new wells of knowledge:

> Because creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the

> basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. An innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view, particularities of lived experience that reflect alternative realities … marginalized or not yet recognized in established theory and practice.
>
> (Barrett, 2007: 143)

In this light, the particiaption of multiple subjective, lived experiences of identity to disclose obscure aspects of Cypriot identity in *Identity Project* categorises this research as 'qualitative', as Haserman (2006) terms it, or 'creative arts research' as described by Barrett above. Moreover, it can be said that the somatically informed movement explorations in *Identity Project* reflect Pakes' (2009) view that practical knowledge begins with increased self-awareness that extends to an understanding of outer circumstances. I will now discuss the relationship between theory and practice that classifies this research as practice-integrated rather than practice-led.

As stated earlier, despite my limited experience in practical research methodologies, my goal in this study was to maintain a rich, interlinked, and largely egalitarian relationship between theory and practice, so that neither would take the lead. Yet the anticipated impartiality between theory and practice was difficult to obtain, and was continually re-adjusted and re-balanced. It can thus be said that the final methodology grew out of an initial unsatisfactory positioning of *Identity Project* as subordinate fieldwork, as well as the shortcomings of the project's structure when it was subsequently approached as practice-led. As *Identity Project* progressed, it also became clear that our approach held attributes of ethnographic fieldwork, or dance anthropology (though my studies have not been in these fields). Ethnologist Adrienne L. Kaeppler (1999) describes the work of the dance anthropologist as such:

> While anthropologists of dance and movement study meaning, intention, and cultural evaluation, the activities that generate movement systems, how and by whom they are judged, their aim is to understand how the examination or analysis of movement systems can illuminate the sociocultural system – data that can be attained only during fieldwork (Kaeppler, 1999: 16).

Both the creative process of *Identity Project* and the goal driving it resonates with Kaeppler's definition above; as already mentioned, in our case the chief aim was to arrive at new knowledge in the area of Cypriot sociocultural identity through bodily practice and subsequent reflection/analysis of that experience by the participants (including me) and the facilitator (me). The specifics of this process are illustrated throughout the thesis, but are discussed at length in Chapters 1 and 5.

Dance ethnologist Anca Giurchescu (1999: 41) describes fieldwork as a collaborative process between researcher and subject, centralising the role of subjective voices and personal narratives, calling it a 'fascinating, yet unpredictable and subjective search for knowledge and understanding of any given socio-cultural reality'.

> Field research constitutes communicative interaction, on intellectual, affective and expressive levels, between the researcher and individual community members; both bring their personalities, life histories, ideologies and knowledge into that exchange.
>
> (Giurchescu, 1999: 48)

The above description strongly resounds with our process in *Identity Project*, as lived experience shaped both the content and methodology of the research (analysed at length in later chapters). The examination of Cypriot sociocultural identity through *Identity Project* drew upon the participants' personal histories and perspectives on identity, including my own, as well as their responses to theoretical perspectives I

brought into rehearsal. In our exchanges and explorations we trusted, as Pakes (2003) suggests, in the potency of embodied experience to reveal new wells of knowledge. Conversely, the written documentation of practice-based experiences and understandings that emerge from reflections presents a challenge, questioning 'whether the practice itself or the reflection upon it embodies the knowledge artistic action produces' (Pakes, 2006, online). This issue is addressed in Chapter 5.

As such, it is of great significance that the role of the practical component does not only serve to provide ethnographic data. As discussed at length in Chapter 1, the embodied experiences of identity molded my writing and influenced my choices in academic sources. The making of *Identity Project* created a vibrant 'space or subspace within which to think about dance' (Vincs, 2007: 100). It was through the dance-making that I was able to distinguish which questions were vital regarding Cypriot identity, and which research method, or combination of research methods, were the most appropriate in tackling the questions and further related issues. As such, the dance practice was active in forming the research methodology rather than existing alongside the academic research or within an existing methodology. This deep integration of the practice with the theory renders the practical component of this work more organically central than ethnographic fieldwork.

I thus emphasise once again that this study cannot be labeled as 'practice-led' or 'studio-based', as the research questions and findings do not stem from and lead back to the choreographic process. It can be argued that the parameters of a practice-led study are set by the subordinate nature of the academic discourse which theory supports the outcomes of the practice, or where the creative process is

actually the object of analysis (Vincs, 2009). In the case of *Identity Project*, The practice does not lead the discourse and render the academic research secondary; the choreography was not created to stand alone, but conjoined with theory under the arch of the research process, hence the term 'practice-integrated'. The subjective experience of identity is a central and dynamic force; it perpetually finds its way onto the shifting podium of writing/dancing this study, moving between three strands that are interlinked and interdependent: dance-making, pedagogy and personal narrative. These strands will be expanded upon below and in later chapters.

I will close this discussion with a brief reiteration of the relationship between theory and practice in this project. The practice-integrated research methodology revolves primarily around *Identity Project*; I expand upon the choreographic process in Chapter 1. In making three dance works representations and embodiments of sociocultural, ethnonational and gender identity are explored through movement and text exercises and improvisations, and shared by the participants, who are also performers and collaborators. The resulting movement and text is implemented as raw material for improvisation and collaborative choreography. Relevant theory (reviewed below) is expanded and challenged as it is informed by compositional choices and reflective analysis. Reflection is an important component in bridging theory and practice as the findings in the movement practice and related theoretical notions are both discussed. In turn, the movement practice and findings are further reworked with theory, aiming to expose nuances and paradoxes embedded in contemporary Cypriot identity. The ultimate goal is to invoke new understandings and experiences of identity itself.

As the project develops the broader topic of Cypriot sociocultural identity is distilled, settling first in the area of gender, followed by feminine identities, and ultimately on more subversive representations of woman, self and other. I use the term 'feminine' instead of 'female' regarding identity to emphasise the social construct of identity; I view the term 'female' as alluding to the biological aspect of gender, and will be used as such. Women's multiple sociocultural realities, feminine voices and spaces and the performance of the feminine are traversed through the recounting and exchange of personal narratives. These stories are written, spoken or explored somatically and as improvisation before text and choreography are set. The evolution of the research methodology is discussed at length in Chapters 1 and 5, while improvisational exercises and contemporary styles specific to each piece are described in relative chapters. Critical points of adjustment regarding the balance between theory and practice are addressed throughout the thesis. Excerpts from a process journal I kept during the research are included in the writing where applicable in indented italics.

VI

Relevance to Other Research in the Field

Over the last few decades a great number of cultural theorists and dance scholars have been devoted to the examination of the epistemological status of the body as well as the moving body as a site of cultural representation and transformation. Feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 1995, 2010), drawing on the writings of French philosophers Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray, has coined the subversive concept of 'feminist corporeality' in considering representations of the body. Gender theorist Judith Butler (1988, 1990, 2004) has yielded the

pioneering notion of gender as a construct, critically influencing the intersecting fields of gender, identity and the body. Sociologist and former dancer Helen Thomas (1995, 2003, 2013) writes extensively on dance and culture, while anthropologist Jane Desmond reinforces the connections between dance and cultural signification through her research (1997, 2001). The work of dance scholar and dancer/improviser Ann Cooper Albright (1997, 2003, 2013) engages performing bodies as artistic and political ground for alternative materialisations of identity; her unique research resides at the conjecture of dance improvisation, identity, and performativity. Choreographer and scholar Susan Leigh Foster (1995, 1996, 2010) intersects post-structuralist theory and dance research, focusing on the vital issues of gender-based power issues in renowned choreographic works as well as the kinesthetic experience of the spectator. Finally, the value of somatic practices in dance-making, pedagogy and agency, essential to my approach, has been illuminated by dancers and somatic practitioners Martha Eddy (2002, 2004, 2009) and Leena Rouhiainen (2008).

As mentioned above, the work of dance scholar Anna Pakes (2003, 2004, 2009, 2011, 2013) emphasises the significance of dance practice and dancemaking as generators of knowledge; Pakes continues to broaden the field of dance epistemology through her research on the relationship between achieving knowledge and practising dance. Correspondingly, dancer, choreographer, and scholar Carol Brown (2008, 2010, 2013), regards creative collaboration within practice-led research investigations as a subversive act that activates the disclosure of obscure, and otherwise unobtainable, pockets of knowledge. Along with the work the above-mentioned theorists, Pakes' and Brown's theories will be revisited and expanded upon in later chapters.

The above list references only a small portion of the cross-disciplinary dance scholarship that has established the immediacy of the moving body as invaluable in indicating and imbricating personal and political issues pertaining to culture and identity embodiment. I have turned to this growing area of research to argue that bodies do not passively absorb or reflect sociocultural practices, beliefs and expectations, or emptily encase social constructs; rather it can be argued that 'lived bodies strain at the seams of a culture's ideological fabric. Inherently unstable, the body is always in the paradoxical process of becoming – and becoming undone' (Albright, 1997: 5). When viewed in this light, the body will inevitably move beyond the conditions of the site of representation and proceed to take on new forms, continually acting as a nexus for the transformation and re-invention ideas, identity and culture. As I have sated, with this work I hope to contribute to this potential in the area of Cypriot identity representation and, in particular, feminine identities.

As mentioned earlier, since this project is located at the intersection of Cypriot sociocultural identity and the lived experience of identity embodiment – a hybridic research area that is still significantly under-researched and therefore not yet distinct – but further reaps from several other fields, including auto-ethnography, pedagogy and feminist discourses, I have employed fundamental critical perspectives in corresponding areas. For example, the unique and pioneering work of education philosopher John Dewey on experiential learning and what he has coined the 'aesthetic experience', dating back to 1934, is a driving force in our practical research. Moreover, the field of critical pedagogy, first developed by educational theorist, educator and activist Paolo Freire in his 1968 work, *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed influenced choreographic choices and intentions. I deepen into the theories of Dewey and Freire in later chapters as they emerge in our practical work and relate to other theoretical notions. In addition, I bring forth scholars and cultural critics that have built upon the work of both philosophers in the next section of this chapter and Chapter 1 as they are relevant to the pedagogical strand in our process.

VII

Thesis Summary

On the whole, this investigation can be viewed as a dialectical, collective journey that inhabits embodiments of Cypriot Identity at many stages. The chapters are written and arranged in a manner that attempts to capture the essence, lived experience and organic progression of each phase as it interfaced with theoretical findings. The theme of Cypriot sociocultural identity as identity embodiment and the related implications regarding transformation and agency within a transitional, modernising, postcolonial sociocultural reality emerge throughout the research.

Chapter 1 addresses the prominent identity issues that situate this project, including an overview of past and present constructs of Cypriot sociocultural identity as well as political conditions that contribute to perceptions of self and other. I explain the evolution of the methodology and the emergence of a phenomenon I call the *'performMent'*. The *performMent*, and the related act of *peformMent-ing*, is proposed as a lived experience of identity within a suspended but fully active performative state. The *performMent* arose from the significance of, and need for, both a term and performance genre that allows for the transgressive performance of

identity. Resonant with Dewey's notion of a heightened aesthetic experience sustainable in life as well as art (1934), the *performMent* organically integrates performance, performativity, pedagogy, and agency at the interface of the self/other dialectical relationship (also see Chapter 5). The emergence of diasporic voices in this research, my positionality in the practical segment, and the relationship between the Cypriot Contemporary dance scene and this work are also examined.

Chapter 2 is mainly structured around the creative process and outcomes of the first piece of *Identity Project, kouponi allagis*. At the onset an attempt is made to tackle the theme of identity at large; within this (retrospectively) somewhat naïve and monolithic venture, I aim to arrive at a more candid and spontaneous version of self that extends beyond the formulaic artistic, academic and social frameworks I have encountered in theoretical discourse and those I initially observed in rehearsals. *Kouponi allagis* explores the potential to break free of identity stereotypes at the juncture between writing, improvisation and performance with two female and two male artists. This collaboration and its outcomes are analysed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 focuses on the development, reflections and findings of the second piece in *Identity Project, ap'to plevro enos andra/from the rib of a man.* As analysed in Chapter 3, in Greek this phrase has connotations from the Old Testament relating to Adam and Eve. The word 'plevro' indicates both 'rib' and 'side', giving this title (and choreography) a double meaning that depicts woman as either one 'extracted from a man' or 'residing next to a man'. *Ap'to plevro enos andra* is concerned with past, current and alternative inhabitations of feminine identities in Cyprus through exploration of the multiple roles in which women find and define themselves in

modern Cypriot society. Another important aspect of this segment of practical research is the manner in which the collaborators, all young women at the time, navigate a creative process that builds what they refer to as a 'safe feminine space' where their daily experiences, thoughts and feelings could be revealed and shared. I analyse how the creative process, discussions and discoveries have contributed to contemporary notions of the Cypriot woman and Cypriot feminine identities.

Chapter 4 explores issues that arise during failed attempts to complete the third piece of the trilogy, *bare-ly there*. Through reflective inquiry important premises are dislodged that underscore performance as a transgressive pedagogical, performative and political act (terms analysed in this chapter), a notion proposed by sociologist Norman K. Denzin, who argues that 'in the discursive spaces of performativity there is no distance between the performance and the politics that the performance enacts' (2003a: 258). Denzin's theories as well as those of other scholars are applied to our choreographic process, yielding questions of performance vs. performativity, art as liberator, feminist ethnography, and agency, particularly as they converge in the notion/act of the *performative moment* or *performMent* – again resonant with Denzin's construct of performance ethnography as 'praxis … a way of acting on the world in order to change it' (2003a: 262). The *performMent* is also discussed as emerging from liminal or 'in between' places, akin to cultural theorist Homi Bhabha's notions of a marginal 'Third Space' or a 'Cultural In-Between' (1994, 1996, 2006).

Chapter 5 looks at a causal, underlying ethnographic layer to the *Identity Project*, particularly as it manifests in the creative process of *bare-ly there*. As the subjective experience of the shifting position of narrator, as well as my own, is now openly

included in both the writing and the choreography, *bare-ly there* traverses the fields

of reflexivity and auto-ethnography. Of additional importance is the role of personal

narrative in the re-identification process experienced in *performMent-ing*.

The Conclusion re-addresses the initial research questions as well as new ones that

sprouted throughout the project. The significant threads and outcomes of *Identity*

Project are analysed in correlation with relevant theory. In particular, I address the

results and possibilities of consciously *peformMent-ing* identity and examine the

sociocultural pretexts that motivated a collective decision to include improvisational

performMents 'in the making' in the last version of *bare-ly there*. The identity

constructs explored in *bare-ly there* are quite unpolished and raw in comparison to

the two previous works of *Identity Project* as well as the prevailing aesthetic in

current Cypriot contemporary dance. The vividly different choreographic framework

and the conscious artistic choices in *bare-ly there* challenge the current performance

paradigm in Cyprus, producing alternative performed identity embodiments and

points to alternative lived identity constructs.

Moreover, the potential inherent in the aesthetically moving body to affect

transformation and agency within a rapidly changing and complex sociocultural

reality are outlined and discussed as areas of future research development. Finally, I

argue for the inclusion of the body in current Cypriot identity research. As I

emphasise throughout the thesis, the body and its corporeal experience is absent

from current theoretical writings on Cypriot sociocultural identity. I propose to give

the aesthetically moving body a central role an alternative, complementary, and

enriching methodology. I argue that the central presence of bodily experience within

Cypriot identity research not only enhances existing academically-derived or sociologically rooted knowledge, but also invokes unprecedented knowledge, insights and awareness of self and other (Rouhiainen, 2008; Pakes, 2011; Albright, 2013). As such, I point to new and vital modalities and possibilities concerning Cypriot women, feminine identities and the experience of self and other in a nation still marked by distinct polarities, political conflict and geographical division.

VIII

A Note on Self

> External perception and the perception of one's own body vary in conjunction because they are the two facets of one and the same act.
>
> – Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962: 237) [3]

In closing this chapter I deem it necessary to point out that notions of self and other brought forth in this project frequently (though not solely) reflect a subjective and relational experience of self and other rooted in phenomenology. As indicated by the words of French philosopher Maurice Merlau-Ponty (above), the interconnectedness – or sameness – of self and other is a precursor to perception. Similarly, as stated by dance movement therapist and movement analyst Janet Kaylo in her article entitled *The body in phenomenology and movement observation* (2003, online) objects, material becomings and lived moments 'are not phantoms floating between the material world and the mind, but rather have a relation to each other precisely because of the orientation they have to our perceiving and moving bodies'. Within each subject's reality therefore exists an inner and outer self, or multiple selves, in

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[3] This quotation is from the English edition Merlau-Ponty's famous volume, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated of the original French version published in 1945.

relation to multiple inner and outer others. In order to symbolise this dynamic, throughout the writing the word 'self' is often separated from prefixes. For example, the word 'oneself' is written as 'one's self', 'herself' as 'her self', and so on. A thorough analysis of notions of self and other including a more organically active and creatively expressive self present in this work is found in Chapter 2. Perspectives of self and other conveyed by the collaborators appear throughout the writing.

IX

Epilogue #1

I must first sit a little, cooling my arms, that the fatigue may go out of them; because I sit.

I do merely listen, watching for story, which I want to hear; I sit waiting for it, that it may float into my ear.

These are those to which I am listening with all my ears; while I feel that I sit silent. I must wait listening behind me, while I listen along the road; while I feel that my name floats along the road; they (my three names) float along to my place; I will go sit at it; that I may listening turn backwards (with my ears) to feel my feet's heels, on which I went; while I feel that a story is the wind.

It, the story, is wont to float along to another place.

Then our names do pass through those people, while they do not perceive our bodies go along. For our names are those which, floating, reach a different place.

The mountains lie between two different roads.

A man's name passes behind the mountain's back; those names with which returning he goes along.

– Statement by K'abbo, African Bushman[4]

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[4] Anonymous excerpt from *Body Space Image* (Miranda Tufnell & Chris Crickmay, 2014: 206).

Chapter 1

Performing Identity

I

<u>Enter Self: A Somewhat Messy Affair</u>

> *A tall, lean, muscular woman enters, walking backwards heavily on a diagonal from upstage right. She is dressed in fitted, ripped jeans, an old blue tank top, and cracked combat boots. Around her shoulders another light-coloured shirt drapes her shoulders in a way typically worn by dancers during class. She stomps and turns; she stares at us; she seems angry; she looks sexy. Downstage left, a pair of stiletto heels waits to be claimed. The performer's clothes appear to be of great importance, acting as layers of her Self, representing her various roles, names, personas. As the 11 minute piece unfolds she wrestles with and ultimately strips down cloth and movement, until she becomes a minimal self – perhaps 'herself' – but not quite.*
>
> – From my notes (2007)
> Description of Lia Haraki's solo, *Eye to I* (2005)[5]

How does one perform identity? Which identity does one perform? How does the medium of performance affect the meaning? Which embedded – and embodied – experiences rise to the surface, and which are left behind?

The desire to embark on this research project was initially sparked by questions such as these that raced through my mind as I first watched a digital version of Lia Haraki's solo described above in 2007. Alone in an empty classroom late one night after teaching a Dance History II course at the University of Nicosia, I was searching for material to show in the following week's lesson on Cypriot contemporary dance. Having studied with Ann Cooper Albright as an undergraduate, and ever since

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[5] *Eye to I* received honorary awards in the 2005 at the 5th Cyprus Dance Platform and subsequently toured to Greece, Germany and The Netherlands from 2005 to 2006.

engaged in research and creative work that involves identity, I was adept at efficiently enjoying while simultaneously analysing autobiographical performance. Yet as I watched *Eye to I*, I immediately realised I was seeing something different from anything I had previously seen, even in the context of European contemporary dance. The difference was not, of course, thematic; the topic of identity has been popular performance material for decades in contemporary dance and performance art (Gere, 1995; Grau and Jordan, 2000; Desmond, 2001; Albright, 2013). There was something about the message Haraki communicated that seemed unprecedented.

Though Haraki's provocative aesthetic did not exactly impress me as original, her performance displayed a stark sincerity and her edgy style appeared to be a consciously experimental attempt at the avant-garde within the conformist dance community of Cyprus (discussed below). While accommodating my personal taste, this was nothing new. What struck me as different was an underlying discourse that translated into a deeper somatic language, laden with raw emotion and overt symbolism, congealing as an almost adolescent expression, a rather naïve cry for understanding through over-exposure, a rough layer beneath that contradicted the outer technical proficiency and polished outcome. That evening I recorded the most memorable moments of the piece in my journal:

> *Haraki continues to de/reconstruct herself using her clothes, morphing into different characters, or selves. The rhythmic music changes into a loud drone and her white shirt/jacket becomes a mask. As she falls to her knees downstage right, it seems to have covered her face and torso on its own; she is distorted, almost as if she has contracted a disease that has wiped away her features, leaving only the shape of a wide, silent scream underneath. Her ultimate emergence from this suffocating cloak is an equally dramatic battle, underscoring her struggle with her own self.*

At a later point she strips down further, lifting her tank top to reveal her abdomen, deliberately expanding her lower belly and then spreading both hands over it as if cupping an unborn baby. I feel a bit embarrassed – I wonder why she does not use subtlety to express these themes. I can see a glimpse of performativity coming through but these moments are cut short and stifled by the more typical structure of the piece…

<div align="right">

– From my notes (2007)
On Lia Haraki's solo, *Eye to I* (2005)

</div>

Though somewhat disappointed by the emotional excess and overstatement of the theme, I was also moved by the similarities between Haraki's performed identities and my own recent day-to-day encounters with my self and selves. There had been a lurking uneasiness since my dis/relocation to Cyprus nine months earlier. As Haraki shared with me during a subsequent informal interview in 2007, her solo did, in fact, depict her personal struggle with her own identity at the time. She was tackling issues of a modern woman in a traditional society, such as both the urge and pressure to bear a child, and embarking on an alternative artistic career in a society that did not fully accept contemporary dance as valid. Haraki's *showing through hiding* behind her cloaked scream powerfully embodies the challenges of dwelling in a space akin to a 'cultural in-between' coined by Homi Bhabha, renowned scholar in the field of contemporary post-colonial studies (1996). Cypriot women are often in this liminal space due to rigid hegemonic paradigms, and find it difficult to make themselves present and heard within the predominant discourses (Vassiliadou, 2004). Dis/re-location unlocks new uses of language and pockets of expression that ensue from the lost feeling and lack of being felt in the 'in-between' (Bhabha, 1996).

Soon afterwards I began watching more work by Haraki and other seasoned as well as then-emerging Cypriot contemporary choreographers and movement artists such

as Arianna Economou, Alexander Michael, Christodoulos Panayiotou, and Chloe Melidou. I regularly attended performances, rehearsals and works-in-progress of Cypriot contemporary dance in the cities of Nicosia and Limassol and digitally viewed many works made before my arrival in Cyprus; in addition, I conducted several informal interviews with choreographers and dancers.[6] During this endeavour I recognised a repeated, and at times almost collective, search for identity. It appeared to me that often the theme of identity manifested without the conscious intent of the choreographer or performer, as the title indicated a different subject; these works frequently portrayed an inner, intrapersonal identity conflict, more subtly than those that intentionally set out to dissect, probe or subvert.

An example of an inadvertent yet potent reference to identity is a piece I viewed in March of 2007 at the 7th Annual Dance Platform in Limassol entitled *Nothing*, performed by the troupe *Jeunesses Musicales* and choreographed by Milena Ugren Koulas.[7] As a newcomer to Cyprus and the Cypriot dance scene I knew little about the background of the cast or the piece; I was an observer unaffected by personal information and relationships. For instance, I was unaware that the choreographer had recently relocated – or dis-located – to Cyprus from Serbia. What I recall as impressing me then was a riveting and mesmerising opening, performed brilliantly by Dara Milovanovic. Later my colleague at the University of Nicosia, Milovanovic subsequently confirmed that the presence of identity in the piece was not intended by Ugren-Koulas but was rather an after-effect:

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[6] I have kept notes of these performances and conversations or reflected upon them in my journal for the purposes of this study.
[7] This information is taken from the programme of the 7th Annual Dance Platform at the Rialto Theatre. Limassol, 9-11 March 2007.

A woman on a pedestal, under flickering lights, dressed in a halter top and hot pants with her back to us, is pulsing her curvy hips and round bottom side-to-side to techno music. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom; I feel the music and her pulsing in my body. The woman continues this strong, rhythmic, sexy movement for a long time, almost putting me in a trance. Gradually it becomes bigger and stronger and transfers to other body parts. The lights become brighter, and I can see the repercussions of the pushing and pulsing in the rest of her body, even in her skin. Her head follows, turning swiftly side-to-side to the beat, her hair flipping fiercely. A leg and arm intermittently flail outwards; her upper back contracts repeatedly, almost involuntarily. She continues, until she seems thoroughly spent; then, she steps down and exits casually, as if all this never happened.

There are, of course, a number of possible interpretations to this solo; I will offer mine, as I feel it is significant that I connected it then, and still do, with the difficulties in negotiating mainstream, personal and defiant feminine identities in Cyprus. Objectification, disembodiment and over-sexualisation are the first words that come to mind. The woman on stage initially invites voyeurism; however, as her movements become uncontrollable she subverts the image of woman-as-object. Of equal significance is the labour toward closure evident in this solo – the exhaustive persistence, repetitiveness, and gradual loss of control as the movement climaxes as ultimately comes to rest – perhaps symbolising the need to express the unexpressed or oppressed aspects of one's self. The glamourous, trendy image resembling a young woman dancing provocatively in a club, perhaps for the pleasure of others, is disturbing yet appealing. This superficial persona, however, is accompanied by a rather sophisticated disclosure of gradations and tensions between self and other, a confirmation of the ability of the minded, aesthetically moving body to pose, explore and challenge sociocultural concerns and constructs for performers and spectators.

After several years of viewing and analysing contemporary dance performances in Cyprus, I suggest that an initially somewhat muffled crusade to locate identity taken on by many Cypriot choreographers has settled on a prevailing aesthetic: bodies off-balance, writhing and twisting into themselves, dancers vigorously repeating movement phrases to exhaustion, performers whispering hopelessly or screaming desperately, trying to say something that is ultimately lost or misunderstood. This aesthetic was prominent in the University setting as well, frequently appearing in student-choreographed works as well as those set on students by instructors. As a spectator of contemporary dance in Cyprus for over a decade I have often felt, due to my kinesthetic compassion, that I am called upon during performances to participate in, rather than passively watch, a mass corporeal struggle to find answers, to (sometimes rhetorical) questions of identity. The growing endeavour to expose identity issues within the current realm of dance-making further ignited my own desire to investigate identity within a framework of lived bodily discourse.

The recurring declarative embodiments of identity I encountered in Cypriot theatres and dance studios spurred my curiosity vis-à-vis how the personal and collective histories that form our notions of self and other, our multiple identities, could be divulged, explored, challenged and re-inhabited more deliberately through the performing body. What ambiguities and possibilities emerge when contemporary Cypriot sociocultural identity is performed by the self-conscious and aesthetically astute moving body? What happens when we improvise to the layered and unstable geography of the self? Can alternative or transgressive choices regarding identity be prompted by engaging in collaborative improvisation as the basis for choreography?

II

<u>A Re/Evolving Methodology</u>

In this section I will return briefly to the development of the methodology of this thesis. In the fall of 2008, at the onset of this project, this research was conceived as primarily theoretical with a related experimental fieldwork component. Groups of dancers, artists, and non-artists were to attend improvisation workshops exploring Cypriot sociocultural identity, culminating in informal performances with post-performance sessions for performer and audience feedback. This structure was to provide firsthand information that would enrich or challenge relevant literature and shake up the status quo regarding identity stereotypes in Cyprus. Issues of gender, ethnic background, religion and class would surface during our workshops, and be debated inside the safe, constructive and reflective environment of the dance studio, with or without the presence of an audience.

However, as the practical work was brought into the writing as a resource through reflection and evaluation, the research methodology altered into an integrative project that involved a stronger reliance on the movement practice and took on a more formal choreographic and performance scheme. This transition, discussed at various points throughout the thesis, was an organic outcome of the interrogative process, of the collaborators' contributions, and of environmental circumstances that influenced the overall direction of the project. The role and structure of the methodology underwent several more transitions in driving and presenting the research, ultimately settling upon the form of an integrated and co-formative approach, where ideally one aspect – theory or practice – does not lead or the other.

The research methodology itself has therefore become a point of analysis and reference, a type of parallel discourse within the project, its metamorphosis symbolising the phases of the unraveling of Cypriot sociocultural identity. Consequently, the research and outcomes are approached throughout the writing from a dual perspective that continually strives to assimilate artistic practice and reflective writing with theoretical research and academic writing in order to illuminate the lived experience of identity. It is hoped that this method will portray how a practice-integrated approach progressively narrowed the scope of research from the broader field of sociocultural identity to conceptions and sentient realities of gender, genderised cultural representations, and feminine identities.

The predominance of certain areas of scholarship over others was influenced by the input and selves brought forth by the collaborators/performers, my own included, during the making of *Identity Project*. Issues that emerged were re-considered in subsequent rehearsals and alternatively examined through theoretical frameworks. As a result, in addition to drawing upon the fields of sociocultural identity, and identity in terms of body, gender and culture (mentioned above), I turned to feminist ethnography and critical auto-ethnography, such as the perspectives of performance studies scholar Tami Spry (2001, 2011) and sociologist Allison Rooke (2009), as well as the work of anthropologist and artist Ruth Behar (1996, 2003), all explored in depth in Chapter 5. Behar's focus on the value of embodying an emotional, self-reflexive ethnographic practice as a 'vulnerable observer' (1996), has been influential in my choreographic methodology as well as my post-performance analyses, also addressed extensively in Chapter 5.

Additionally, the fields of critical and radical pedagogy have been especially significant in reinforcing my intent to initiate moments of visceral transformation in both performers and spectators through *Identity Project*. The extensive scholarship and activism of pedagogue and philosopher Maxine Greene (1988, 2000, 2001) resonates with the dialectical process in our studio work as we ventured toward what she calls a 'practice of freedom' (1988). Author bell hooks (1994, 2000, 2002) offers critical feminist approaches to pedagogy regarding gender, class and race in her compelling, self-divulging style. As noted earlier, Denzin (2003) proposes a genre of performance at the juncture of pedagogy and agency; this union reflects a principal intent of my chorographic/performance process. Giroux (1979, 1983, 2000, 2001, 2012) proposes the practice of pedagogy as democracy, arguing that education should operate as a hub for critical thinking and egalitarian social transformation. The pursuit of education as freedom has been vital in the practical work; as most of my collaborators were students or colleagues and our practice often spilled over into the classroom or office, creating a vibrant yet challenging dynamic. I will engage in a discourse with the theories of the above-mentioned scholars in Chapter 4.

It is also important to note that the above-mentioned scholars in the fields of art education and critical pedagogy have been influenced by the pioneering writings of education philosopher John Dewey. Though Dewey's work dates back to the early 1930's, I deem that his theories, and as mentioned earlier, his notion of the 'esthetic experience' (1934), still remain unique an unmatched. Dewey's concepts regarding the interconnected relationships between art, life and education have influenced my practical intents and structure. Furthermore, Dewey's detailed description of the

'esthetic experience' has been influential in discerning and charting the characteristics of the performative moment or *performMent*, as well as the pedagogical applications of such a performance genre. Dewey's analysis of the *esthetic experience* helped shape the *performMent* into an occurrence with essential, evident components, discussed in depth in Chapters 2 and 4.

Another fundamental research area embedded within this project is, of course, that of Cypriot identity, particularly in relation to the dancing body. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, the field of Dance and Cypriot identity is extremely under-researched. An invaluable resource in this area is the work of scholar and dancer Stavros Stavrou Karayanni (2004, 2006). Karayanni primarily investigates embodiments of male Cypriot identity in Oriental dance within Cypriot culture and the accompanying implications, employing the body as a landscape for the complex politics of gender, sexuality and ethnicity continually re-negotiated in post-colonial Cypriot society. Karayanni (2004) clarifies the use of the term 'Oriental' in his book, *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance,* stating that he employs it deliberately to provoke the reader's questioning of popular notions of certain dance forms. With this term he places both the dance and its accompanying identity embodiments within the context of predominant sociocultural implications, such as sexualised exoticism, western vs. eastern value judgements, the post-colonial acceptance of oppression and the post-invasion stifling of foreign influence. Karayanni's premise of male sociopolitical identity embodied and re-formulated through the dance can be applied to all moving bodies affected by Cypriot nationalism, colonialism, freedom and globalised modernity:

> If our bodies are organic vessels that carry our personal history, our idiosyncrasies, our emotions and frustrations, signs that mark our national, gender and class identity, then when we set that body in motion the entire microcosm of the individual is on display; a microcosm replete with contradictions such as control and resistance, compliance and oppression. In other words, in dance, the body resonates with its history, thus becoming a site where various meanings manifest themselves and cross paths with each other.
>
> (Karayanni, 2006: 252)

This portrayal of identity as simultaneously intertwined with both sociopolitical constructs and lived, emotional states supports the hypothesis behind this research. The body dances a learned history and antithetical perspectives all at once, allowing for the creation of meaning in the presence of uncertainty and enabling the emergence of alternative identity constructs and self-realisations. Female social constructs, also located in the dance, are as rigid as confining as male constructs.

Moreover, a wealth of scholarship on Cypriot identity, approached as both an outgrowth of ongoing political tension and from the daily mediation of opposing paradigms in a post-colonial, modernising nation, is found in the related disciplines of anthropology, sociology and politics. Social anthropologists Vassos Argyrou (1996, 2002, 2006, 2017) and Yiannis Papadakis (2000, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2018) have contributed to the understanding of nationalist and constructed Cypriot identities. Myria Vassiliadou (2004, 2006), scholar, activist on women's issues and EU anti-trafficking coordinator, focuses on women's issues, inequality and the 'otherness' prevalent in within feminine spaces identity constructs. Maria Hadjipavlou (2004, 2006, 2010), feminist scholar and expert on conflict resolution, is devoted to the investigation of gender constructs and dynamics that affect women in both the north

and south of a conflicted Cyprus. I engage these and other sources to connect the corresponding fields of choreography, performance and identity politics in Cyprus.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this project investigates how a collaborative, improvisation-based choreographic process can reveal and locate questions and manifestations of sociocultural identity that embrace the idiosyncrasies and complexities of Cypriot culture. In implementing a movement-based creative process and performative discourse to reflect and re-define identity issues specific to Cyprus, this study seeks to dwell in what Bhabha (1994) terms 'the cultural in-between' and evoke, as anthropologist Ruth Behar decribes, a type of empathy and vulnerability in the observer, spectator, or reader (1996, 1997). It is with this intent that verbal and embodied representations of sociocultural identity are shared by the participants as raw material for improvisation and choreography. The performers act as spectators for one another; self and other are merged, swapped and reconstructed through intense collaboration. As I have explained above, relevant theory is expanded and challenged as it is brought into the space of the moving body through corporeal acts. In turn, the results of the movement process are re-integrated with theory to illuminate nuances and paradoxes embedded in the lived reality of Cypriot identity.

I have also underscored in earlier sections of this chapter that women's sociocultural realities, feminine voices and spaces and the performance of the feminine become quite central as the research progresses. After the completion of *kouponi allagis*, the masculine is present only with respect to personal and collective feminine experience. Practically, these themes are investigated through dialogical exchange, collaboration and the telling of personal narratives.

III

Positionality: An Intricate Balance

While identity itself can be characterised as fleeting and transient, the collaborative exploration of identity often produces intimate interactions and lasting relationships (Rooke, 2009). Such was one of the outcomes of the ethnographic, integrative methodology of *Identity Project*. My positionality within this work, largely determined by the input of my own sociocultural identity, has adapted to the changes in the process itself. Initially my intent was to favour the experiences of the subjects, remaining as detached as possible from their choices, reducing my power as a director to a mere facilitator 'vaguely present but not addressed'. This subjectivist approach would ideally allow subjects a centrality and neutrality where, as described by anthropologist and performance studies scholar D. Soyini Madison, 'their voices carry forward indigenous meanings and experiences that are in opposition to dominant discourses and practices' (2012: 7).

However, by the second segment of practical research during *ap'to plevro enos andra*, it can be said that my positionality had converted to an 'activism stance', though not deliberately, in which the researcher or ethnographer 'takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives' (Madison, 2012: 7). Indeed, for reasons related to equality, advocacy, and potential agency, I began putting forth my own identity issues within the creative/dialogical research process, as a self rather than a manager of the project, in a manner resonant with certain ethnographic approaches:

> …critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others' worlds.
>
> (Madison, 2012: 10)

This dynamic approach revealed that the act of bringing oneself into a more authentic state of *being* was actually a type of *becoming* through the dialogical discourse between self and other. Madison (2012: 9) states, 'the wonderful paradox in the ethnographic moment of dialogue and otherness is that communion with another … and, in doing so, opens you to know others more fully'. This process is addressed comprehensively throughout the thesis; yet I will take a moment below to impart my relationships with my selves, or personal identity constructs, that arose during this project and helped shape and were also challenged by the methodology itself, contributing to shifts in my positionality sense of being.

Throughout my life I have often been defined and defined myself as a 'white', middle-class woman, as a contemporary dance artist and educator, as alternately Greek or American, as a diasporic, first-generation Greek-American, as a preserver of tradition, a cultural rebel, a passionate feminist. Notions and perspectives regarding identity that are sometimes at odds with one another, perhaps arising from the sociopolitical conditioning, privilege and bias inherent in these labels, have tinted the choices in my life and work. I have been in variance with the limitations or fissures inherent in these and other categorisations, since my lived experiences extend and interact beyond the limitations of the borders perpetuated by these constructs.

The issue of race clearly reflects this gap. In referring to race I deliberately employ the empty label 'white' because I have been compelled so often, like many others, to

tick that box on applications in lieu of a more well-suited description, and one that is not a colour. My skin is perhaps 'whiter' than some other Mediterranean people, particularly during the winter months; however, I have also been taken for a Latina by strangers upon returning from summer holiday. What if race were presented as a shade, like tubes of make-up? Though a broader palette would clearly still be nonsensical as a classification system, I would probably choose 'light to warm beige', depending on the recent amount of sun-exposure. I am not sure what that shade might signify, either genetically or sociopolitically; it would certainly, however, be more accurate and less loaded with meaning than 'white'.

The term 'Greek-American' (or 'GA', as commonly abbreviated in the United States) is another problematic tag that was ascribed to me quite early on in life. Objectively it denotes that I partake of both Greek and American cultures in a very specific way. The implication is that ethnically I am Greek but culturally American as well; that I am also a product of the diasporic Greek-American subculture at large; and, in my case, that I am of an even more particular diasporic group from New York City, where I lived most of my life until 2006. My visceral understanding of the term is that it attempts to package an ethno-cultural background in order to more comfortably hold a place within a type of 'unified-in-diversity' American culture. Deepening further into my own subjectivity, I find the label quite smothering, as it is an overarching attempt to homogenise and simplify a vast and rich cultural interplay. An underlying assumption is that, like all sub-cultures, the Greek-Americans share a cluster of unique customs, holidays, celebrations, and family values, slightly different from those of 'typical Americans' or Greeks from Greece; this flattens the individual

experiences of being simultaneously Greek and American. Being called a 'GA' feels like a very tight girdle; while wearing it my sense of identity cannot breathe.

More pronounced identity discrepancies materialised upon my relocation to Nicosia, Cyprus from New York City in the summer of 2006. My previous identity issues, mainly arising from my bi-culturality, suddenly felt minimal compared to the confusion that pervaded. It was as if each moment of my day encompassed an antithesis: tradition vs. modernity, male vs. female, colonialism vs. freedom, Greek Cypriot vs. Turkish Cypriot and so on. I was all but too aware that I had moved to a country that had been tragically cut in half by a violent invasion in 1974. I saw that traditional elements were still driving Cypriot society. Though the population of the entire Republic of Cyprus (approximately 1,150,000, according to the most recent 2014 census) was smaller than that my home 'town' of Brooklyn (approximately 2,650,000 according most recent US census in 2015), I had never before experienced the fixedness of the contradictory labels I experienced in this society where the personal and political seemed inseparable. Being Greek, or American, or both, meant something completely different here, more weighted, as did being a woman, a dancer and a feminist. I began noticing that pushing the boundaries of the status quo prompted a reaction that can be best described as a disapproving silence.

It is important to stress that the impressions shared above are part of my subjective experience of Cyprus. In this work my personal identity influenced my positionality but did not *constitute* my positionality. Though provoking my deep interest regarding Cypriot identity, my self-perception was continually questioned and changed by my interactions within and outside this project. Madison clearly makes this distinction:

> Subjectivity is certainly within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or subjective selves. We … are subjects in dialogue with others. We understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my exclusive experience … critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others' worlds.
>
> (Madison, 2012: 10)

In sharing my own discomfort and aversion regarding imposed social constructs I built a platform for open exchange with my collaborators. Since my subjective experience as facilitator emerged from the same reality as that of the participants – and included them as students, friends, and collaborators – a dialogical exploration was initiated. Madison (2012) emphasises the often desired and effective outcomes of ethnographic relationships; she refers to anthropologist Dwight Conquergood's interchangeable terms 'dialogical performance' or 'performative dialogue'. Madison argues that this method is 'open and ongoing' or a 'reciprocal giving' as opposed to a fixed 'timeless resolve' where one's positionality traverses 'multiple expressions that transgress collide and embellish realms of meaning' (2012: 11).

IV

<u>Why Identity?</u>

I must admit that in reaching the end of this journey the theme of identity began to lose its luster. As I questioned the concepts 'Cypriot' and 'identity', both initially adopted with little doubt, I wondered whether the study of identity has become a primarily a self-consummating endeavour rather than one with a valid sociopolitical

impact. I turn to cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall who focuses on the subject of identity to further problematise the issue. Hall (1996:15) poses a fair and provocative question that implies the exhaustion of identity, referring to a recent dead end in a long stream of ambitious scholarship: 'Who needs "identity"'? As an initial response to his own question, Hall outlines various phases of identity research, halting at the perpetual but ever-shifting point of connection between the personal and political:

> The critique of the self-sustaining subject at the centre of post-Cartesian metaphysics has been comprehensively advanced in philosophy. The question of subjectivity and its unconscious processes of formation have developed within the discourse of a psychoanalytically influenced feminism and cultural criticism. The endlessly performative self has been advanced in celebratory rituals of postmodernism. Within the anti-essentialist critique of ethnic, racial and national conceptions of cultural identity and the 'politics of location' some adventurous theoretical conceptions have been sketched in their most grounded forms. What then is the need for a further debate on 'identity'?
>
> (Hall, 1996: 15)

This excerpt summarises a series of approaches to identity that also emerged during this project, echoing my sigh of frustration in moments where gaining a grasp on identity seemed pointless and impossible, particularly in relation to decades of exhaustive research. The subjective, inter-relational complexities emerging in the practice often obscured matters; it felt there was no basis, no solid ground. Hall concludes that the issue of identity still bears great political significance, ideally when 'the necessity and "impossibility" of identities, and the suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution, are fully and unambiguously acknowledged' (1996:29). If we take Hall's view as a suggestion to pursue yet another study of identity, then which 'impossibilities' were the impetus for *Identity Project*?

At the beginnings of contemplating Cypriot identity I was motivated by two related questions: First, *what is it that holds Cypriot identity together?* In probing to get an insider's glimpse of what it means to be 'Cypriot' back in 2008 it seemed to me that the dynamics of the pushes and pulls of the diametrically opposed aspects of Cypriot society, such as tradition/modernity, male/female, colonialism/democracy, Greek-Cypriot/Turkish-Cypriot, and west/east, played a key role in superficially suturing the various parts of individual and collective identity. The detection of these and other opposites, even further particularised within the sub-categories listed above, came at first from my own observations as a newcomer to Cypriot society and were later confirmed by anthropologists and social theorists that focus on Cyprus, such as Argyrou, Hadjipavlou, Papadakis, and Vassiliadou (noted above), as well as Cynthia Cockburn (2001, 2004), and Rebecca Bryant (2002, 2012). These writers analyse the polarities at play in Cyprus that extend from historically based sociopolitical discourses, further addressed below and in later chapters.

My second question was twofold: What is missing, lacking, underrepresented – what shines beneath the outer strata of identities during daily interactions and activities? At the same time, what image might represent the self that is perhaps shielding a deeper sense of self? Again, the idea that something was missing or unexpressed initially arose from gaps and discrepancies I detected in my everyday life in Cyprus. Despite my intention to implode prevailing static, superficial identities through the practical work, my search of Cypriot identity was initially pursued rather naively, along the lines of what Conquergood (1985) dubs 'The Enthusiast's Infatuation'. In this approach there are several performative stances toward the other; the

ethnographer sometimes unknowingly generalises and blurs differences through the ethnographic performative act in an effort to affirm identity. Alternatively, Conquergood argues that 'good performative ethnographers must often play the oppositions between Identity and Difference' (1985:9).

It can be said that Bhabha (2006) takes Conquergood's view further, advocating for a notion of difference that dwells beyond the dualistic notions of self and other; this view challenges the array of oppositional elements at play (mentioned earlier) in embarking upon *Identity Project*. Bhabha (2006:155) argues that 'the enunciation of cultural difference problematises the division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address'. In line with this, it can be suggested that fixed, and often antithetical categorisations of identity are standard representations typically utilised and propagated, rather than transcended, by social systems to maintain order and control. This phenomenon is evident in situations that obligate us to refer to ourselves by name, passport number, race, etc.; failure to do so jeopardises not only the completion of the given task (passport renewal, loan application, and so forth) but our validity as a live existence within the given socio-political system.

An example of the social confines described above is a desperate parody of the strict and binding Cypriot social code created and performed by Eric during the *I AM Improvisations* of *kouponi allagis* (see in Chapter 2). Eric begins his movement-accompanied monologue centre stage, standing tall and introducing himself loudly and confidently in Greek, in the manner of a young male reporting to a higher institution, such as the Army or Immigration Services:

'Όνομα: --------------
Διεύθηνση: Ευαγόρα Παλλικαρίδη, Διαμέρισμα 101
Ταυτότητα: 867344
Χρώμα ματιών: Καστανά

Translation:
Name: -------------
Address: Evagora Pallikaridi Building 3, Flat 101
ID number: 867344
Eye colour: Brown[8]

Mark, the other male performer, interferes with Eric's attempt to present an intact, confident self by initiating a tense, kinetic contact duet with him. Eric tries to repeat his text and maintain composure despite the unexpected interference; he is unsuccessful as his body is progressively manipulated and maneuvered by a much larger and taller Mark. Ultimately Eric gives up trying to remain intact, physically and verbally; he abandons fragmented labels and gestures and fully joins the duet.

I suggest that this proactive capitulation, a result of collaborative improvisation, is a performative act. It is the moment of stepping beyond the oppositional elements which psychically separate performers from one another, or performer from spectator, into a collaborative space. This leap into the unknown followed by the spontaneous, performative conjoining between Mark and Eric characterising this segment as a performative moment, or *performMent* (analysed in the following section of this chapter), one of the first I recognised as such in *Identity Project*. Both performers' personal histories are challenged as their internal discourses are made available to one another in the act of jointly performing them. In struggling to maintain contact during his duet with Mark, Eric challenges his relationship to rigid,

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[8] All personal information of the performer has been altered. As mentioned earlier, all performers' names have been either changed for the thesis for ethical purposes.

pre-determined labels and their associations regarding male identity in Cyprus, such as that inherent in obligatory military service. His narrative alters from a dry declaration and stiff movement to a self-reflexive account ridden with emotion and breath, accompanied by softer, more fluid shapes, that took the other body into consideration. This can be seen as a transformation, a new version of his male identity, as well as that of the other male performer.

V

The Performative Moment

A description of the 'performative act' somewhat resonant with our version of the performative moment/performMent and the act of *performMent-ing* in *Identity Project* is found in a very interesting volume entitled *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe* (2010) co-edited by historian Jay Winter. Winter located the performative act at the intersection of present life and past memory, imbued with the inherent affect and residue that remembering contains:

> What we see in love stories is the essential performative act: to say 'I love you' is to perform the emotion and the state of mind it reflects. The act leaves a trace because of the affect it brings, the power of which thereby changes the existing emotional landscape. This is why, paradoxically, performance reiterates and innovates at one and the same time.
>
> (Winter, 2010: 8)

Winter analyses the historical performative moment, pointing out both the connections and crucial distinctions between history and memory. Unlike history, that is based on facts, memories in the form of what he calls 'performative utterances' are 'beyond simple verification' (Winter, 2010: 12). Revisiting the past

through memory entails adding and subtracting from the original occurrences. This process does not diminish the truth value of the events for it is another valid way of knowing and conveying; the emotional and penetrating aspect of remembering and re-telling history renders it both a performance and a performative act:

> The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form. The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in it its sticking power, its resistance to erasure or oblivion. Hence affect is always inscribed in performative acts in general and in the performance of memory in particular.
>
> (Winter, 2010: 12)

The act of re-memberance that Winter describes – literally meant as re-membering or re-assembling pieces – corresponds with *performMent-ing* individual and collective histories in *Identity Project*. Vigorous and passionate, *performMent-ing* stimulated compassion and deep emotion in the collaborators and spectators. Many of our *performMents* were reported to have the 'sticking power' referred to by Winter by the cast and audience members, who were moved and taken back into their own histories during those segments. It has been suggested by Cypriot spectators that the connection between emotion and identity buried after tragic historical events like the Turkish invasion is re-ignited.[9]

In spite of this, there is an inherent difference between day-to-day manifestations of performative acts as Winter defines them and those that stem from aesthetically oriented intentions, as in the conscious representational practice that took place in our work separately from, albeit rooted in, daily life. Our words and movements

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[9] Comment based on audience feedback after *kouponi allagis*; from my notes, 2012.

were extracted and concentrated in order to emphasise, de-stabilise and re-form[10];

in our acts of re-membering the emotional content, although authentically felt, was

consciously summoned each time and re-directed to provoke a response.

It is equally important to note that there is both similarity and disparity between the

performative moments in *Identity Project* and the notion of performativity referred

to in most performance theory. It is philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler

that has been credited for the view of gender as a social construct and performative

act as well as the codifications and widespread use of the terms 'performative' and

'performativity' in subsequent scholarship (1993). In her well-known argument,

Butler contests that 'within speech act theory, a performative act is that discursive

practice that enacts or produces that which it names' (1993: 13). When applied to

gender, for Butler there is no core or default identity; as such, the politicised

naturalisation of heterosexuality is an unwarranted fiction. This parallel subversion

and consummation of gender within the sphere of performativity has made a

permanent and significant mark on many fields, namely feminist theory and

performance studies. In enriching theory with the concept of performativity, Butler's

work has provided an arena for the combustion and re-birth of previously exhausted

subjects. She has offered ways to deliberate and unravel gender issues that exceed

the boundaries of previous discourses.

Conversely it can be argued that Butler's theory of performativity (1993) is lacking in

expressive corporeal presence. Her voice and approach is somewhat bodiless; while

the body is central to her theories, a schism between the discursive and the material

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[10] I have purposely separated certain words such as 'destabilise', 'reform' and 'displacement'
in order to give emphasis to the root word and the deviation or lack generated by the prefix.

prevails, and we rarely sense the writer's experiences or text as lived by her in a corporeal way. Butler (1993) seems to exhibit a resistance to anything real, material or significatory as a precursor to a performative 'act'. Who or what is acting? Perhaps in her effort to resist ontological versions of gender the presence of the body eludes us, as described by gender theorist Julie MacKenzie (2008):

> Matter appears in *Bodies That Matter* only as negativity, as the absence or loss that impels signification. But how does this understanding of the referent as that which impels signification tally with Butler's contention, regarding embodiment, that the conception of a prediscursive body that exists outside of and prior to signification is actually the performative product of the signifying process?
>
> (MacKenzie, 2008, online)

In proposing the notion of the *performative moment/performMent* I acknowledge the need for a new perspective and term within relevant discourses that address identity representation and construction; however, I also respond to the necessity for an alternative performance *genre* regarding identity. What if performativity were viewed neither in a constructivist or linguistically-based light, but as a natural human or lived activity? In this space the body is not necessarily engaged as a subversive vessel or a post-structuralist tool (although that is a possibility) but rather as an eager, narrative body that forms itself in the moment of the dialogical re-telling, and prompts the analogous kinesthetic participation, and consequent completion, of the recipient or spectator. I am suggesting something different from a passionate or earnest performance (the relationship between emotion and performativity will be elaborated upon in later chapters), or from the abstracted symbolism and linguistic mechanisms of the avant-garde. Rather, I propose a measured but conscious

upturning of running discourses grounded in the emotional materiality of the re-living and re-shaping of personal narratives that are the core of the performative act:

> A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. [I]n ironic contrast to the misconception that would equate performativity with a form of linguistic monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve.
>
> (Barad, 2003: 802)

The role of performativity discussed within the context of pedagogy is similar to the posthumanist perspective offered above by feminist theorist Karen Barad; in both cases the performative act dynamically challenges familiar ontologies and discourses. According to Denzin (2003), a performative pedagogical act is one that radically transgresses; and, according to Giroux (2000: 135), in a pedagogical arena the performative manifests as a dialogical 'act of doing'. Both in the framework of a formal or every-day performance situations, in all performative moments the performer is at one with the material and fully present in the moment through an immediate, emotionally abundant 'act of doing'. At the same time, I argue that the performative moment emerges from a place of instability rather that solid intention. As Butler (1993) contends, it is consummated in a process of becoming rather than completion. In this manner, identities are able to exist in a state of perpetual re-forming rather than completion. The personal narrative aids this process as it emerges from the inherently powerful yet malleable place of memory. Performance studies scholar Kristin M. Langellier delineates the conditions of personal narrative through women's storytelling (resonant with the conditions in *Identity Project*):

> Personal narrative performance gives shape to social relations, but because such relations are multiple, polysemic, complexly interconnected, and contradictory, it can do so only in unstable and destabilizing ways for narrator and audience … a story of the body told through the body which makes cultural conflict concrete.

<div align="right">(Langellier 1999: 208)</div>

Creating art based on the exchange of personal narratives – telling and listening and then re-telling through words or movement – further de-stabilises. When someone else receives our story we no longer control it. In that unsteady space, personal histories, transgression and performance intersect and the performative moment is born. Denzin (2003) asserts that the performance of personal narratives is an overthrow of contentions and a liberating pedagogical act, inspiring critical thinking, awareness, and change. I saw analogous potential in the *performMent*.

VI

***PerformMent-ing* Diaspora**

… in sea-girt Cyprus, where it was decreed
By Apollo that I should live…
>> – From *Helen*, by Giorgos Seferis, 1953
>> (Translation, Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, 1967)

Were that nostalgia had a body
I would push it out the window
To injure that which cannot take place!
>> – From *Photodentro/Tree of Light* by Odysseas Elytis, 1971
>> (My translation)

The word 'nostalgia', derived from the ancient Greek 'νοσταλγία', is comprised of the words νόστος (nóstos), 'a return home' and άλγος (al'gos), meaning 'pain' or 'suffering'. Commonly defined as 'homesickness', I employ a definition closer to the root of the term: a sentimental longing, both painful and pleasurable, for something lost or unobtainable; an endless journey in one's memory of a place or person that represents a sense of home or habitat *(Cambridge Etymology Dictionary*, online).

Nostalgia does not have a body. With dis-placement as its home, located outside real space and time, its outline is ghostly, unclear. Like identity, nostalgia is a string of elements that are repeated like a mantra but do not solidify. As Elytis' excerpt above connotes, the unattainable nature of nostalgia it is the source of the bittersweet, and often unbearable, longing. I will now share a personal narrative with the intention of inviting the reader into my own nostalgia, an internal landscape that bears inscriptions of personal, historical and sociopolitical realities. In one sense, this is where this project originated, before merging my stories with those of others.

My interest in Cyprus and Cypriot identity goes a long way back; in fact, my fondness of this kindred culture can be traced to my early childhood in New York. My elementary school years were spent almost entirely within the insular Brooklyn community of the Greek parochial school I attended. There I was taught, along with many other first-generation Greek-American children, the New York State curriculum alongside Greek language, history and religion. My Greek teachers happened to be from Cyprus, and they did not seem any different to me than Greeks; we shared the same religion, traditions and language; they we were viewed as Greeks in our diasporic community. In fact, I believed for many years that Cyprus was a large Greek

island, like Crete or Chios, until I heard my teachers conversing in what sounded like another language (that I later discovered was the Greek-Cypriot dialect) while chatting in their office or in the presence of students. When I conjured up the courage to ask what language they were speaking, they smirked and answered, 'what do you mean? It's Greek'. Why, then, could I not comprehend a word?

During those early years, as young students, we experienced Greek history through reciting famous texts of Greek poems and singing national songs but also through performing historical moments and traditional dances – again brought to our diasporic community via Cyprus through our teachers. As we passionately acted out scenes in commemoration of Greek heroes in past battles for independence, we performed our collective memory, evoking strong emotional states in our parents and grandparents who watched us; as suggested by Winter (2010: 20), engaging in 'performative acts' coloured by our own perceptions would permanently shift our notions of history (discussed further below and in later chapters).

More than once I was given the role of the wife/mother who received her husband wounded after the war. I sometimes come across photos of these theatrical skits. Paradoxical corporeal memories of the moment are ignited: the intense fear of loss of a loved one, the weight of the boy's body in my arms, the tingly embarrassment of holding him too close, and the suppressed giddiness as I acted this out – the boy playing dead and me feigning tears. Yet underlying the confusion, my deep sense of pride was like a rush of heat: I was fulfilling a duty to my heritage, my 'real' country, my identity; the identity I was taught to partner with as a child of the diaspora, the one I rejected vehemently during adolescence, the 'self' I currently barter with daily.

Sociologist Avtar Brah (1996) challenges the typical notion of diaspora and diasporic memory based on a solid geographic location in proposing the alternative habitat of 'diaspora space' that embraces the journeys of migrants as well as those who have stayed behind. This inclusive perspective is particularly relevant to the diasporic Greek and Cypriot communities, as well as certain home-based Cypriot communities:

> Diaspora space as a conceptual category is "inhabited" not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put."
>
> (Brah, 1996: 181)

As an adult I became further intrigued by the co-existing diasporic spaces and other shared characteristics I found between Cypriot culture and the diasporic 'Greekness' deep within my identity. It was as if there were something of *me* to be found inside Cypriot culture, and I explored it, through personal relationships, travel, dance and literature. Cypriot-ness lay on the cusp of two cultures – as Bhabha (2011) suggests, on 'culture's in-between'. I experienced my self as 'same yet distinct' or 'in-between' when venturing to align my identity with either Greek or American culture. Cypriot culture symbolised a tragic yet noble dis-placement, cloaking 'authentic', lost aspects of 'Greekness'; within this space I imagined finding misplaced parts of my self.

Similarly, in his work on the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, Hall depicts the strands of a diasporic culture as bearing a 'similarity but difference', as a 'play of difference' within a culture implies a 'common origin' that is perpetually unsettled and re-envisioned by the various groups (1990: 228). The negotiation of real differences within one's experience of identity central, and obstructs a sense of unity:

> … as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side.
>
> (Hall, 1990: 225)

Hall challenges the oversimplified view of the diasporic effort to establish identity. Attempts to designate common ground are necessary in order secure a context for real, sometimes tragic, historical events that have led up to one's 'sense' of cultural identity. Yet these structures are unstable in the face of difference, and also against what is or what is becoming, however strong the 'imagined community' that is, according to political scientist Benedict Anderson, unavoidable in 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact' (Anderson, 1983: 49).

VII

In Search of Origins: Mother Country, Stepmother Country

I suggest that the phenomenon of 'similarity yet difference' coined by Hall can be applied to a Cypriot identity upturned due to repeated colonialism or other instances where, as Hall puts it, 'history has intervened'. Two recent examples are the era of British rule, where Cyprus was under military occupation between 1914 and 1960, and the violent Turkish invasion of 1974. Since, there have been attempts to close gaps and heal wounds by aligning Cyprus with western standards or disseminating an imagined nationalist identity (Papadakis, 2005 & 2006); these efforts are prevalent in in all facets of Cypriot culture, including the arts (discussed further in Chapter 2).

Historian Michael Herzfeld (1987) suggests that Cypriot identity at large as presented by the media, practised in international politics and conveyed within the public educational system, often links itself to a particular Greek nationalist identity that encompasses a historical period spanning from antiquity to the present and geographically spreads way beyond the current borders of Greece. Hellenic identity (the term Hellenic is derived from the ancient Greek word Ellinikón/Ελληνικόν, meaning Greek, and used interchangeably) or 'imagined' Greek nation links Cypriots to the origins of western civilisation (Herzfeld, 1982; Anderson, 1983). This notion connects Cyprus to a Greek 'mother country' and secures origins in an ancient site of immortal, timeless ideals. Such a monolithic construct renders the histories of Greece and Cyprus godlike and untouchable, like a rare, preserved archaeological artifact (Herzfeld, 1982). The frozen Cyprus conflict, perpetuated by these and other nationalist identity constructs, breed intercommunal strife (Papadakis, 2018).

I will not dispute the validity of this historical linkage or attempt to shed light on the socio-political repercussions of such a system of beliefs. Furthermore, I do not intend to undermine the authenticity of 'Greekness' experienced by Greeks, Cypriots or diasporic Greeks. The ethno-cultural connection between Greece and Cyprus since antiquity, such as the Greek ethnic roots of Cyprus going back to its first settlers, is still in debate (Budin, 2004). However, it can be argued that today specific cultural likenesses that sheath sociopolitical advantages, such as a connection with Europe as rather than the Middle East that are strongly promoted through some right-winged political organisations (Papadakis, 2008). It is important to draw attention to the effects of such an effort. Like any fixed representation of identity the umbrella of

Hellenism reinforces the very dualisms that it attempts to eradicate in featuring or favouring one aspect of an issue or trait over another, undesirable one, such as associations with western instead of eastern attributes. The inflexibility of such a model inevitably emphasises and upholds a series of opposing epithets mentioned earlier, such as tradition/modernity, conservative/liberal, and even self/other, as the other side is vividly present in its negated form (Attalides, 1981).

Such an undifferentiated, monolithic attempt to create a unified identity through selectively overshadowing prominent characteristics of a culture cripples any identity representation, depriving it of the articulation of nuance, degradation, subtlety, subjectivity. As argued by Bhabha (2006), these and other undesignated 'utterances' can occur in a 'Third Space' of language. Embedded ambiguities and subjectivities can never be 'uttered' within this enclosed framework as 'cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of Self to Other' (Bhabha, 2006: 156).

> The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places must be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot "in itself" be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation.
>
> (Bhabha, 2006: 156)

The expression of culture, or cultural identity, surely requires an act of stepping beyond ethno-cultural lineage; but, as Bhabha (2006) suggests, it also demands transcendence of the dualistic premises of identification and communication. Only

then can one arrive at a suspended moment of the logos – into performativity – of identity, self, other. This gentle annihilation of the common I/You or self/other binary structure is an act of liberation; while often brief within the context of reality, these elongated moments are an organic outcome of *peformMent-ing* identity.

If the rendering of one's identity coterminous with a collective diasporic identity comes with a desire to own past similar to that of others that influences one's present, then this effort also attempts to justify differences from that same group to prevent alienation. For example, diasporic Cypriots living in multicultural cities like New York, London or Sidney refer to themselves as Greek, while in Cyprus there is controversy surrounding the ethnic label 'Greek'; a political stance regarding the Cypriot divide is implied when distinguishing between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot, and also Greek and Cypriot (Papadakis, 2005 & 2006). Along these lines, Hall discusses the necessity of notions that offer cohesion or unity to the diasporic experience, 'imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas' (Hall 1990: 224). Trading such flattening constructs for dimensional and abundant versions of self and community is an on-going effort for those at the intersection of two (or more) cultures. Cypriots of the diaspora often identify with an imagined 'Greece' that includes Cyprus rather than a separate real or imagined 'Cyprus'. Many Cypriots living in Cyprus today also identify with this larger-than-life imaginary Greek nation reflecting an ancient centre of civilisation (Herzfeld, 1987 & 1997; Papadakis, 2005).

The complexity of Cypriot identity is by no means a recent phenomenon. Laden with multiple and diverse cultural narratives, and historically burdened by a string of

invasions since antiquity, Cypriot identity unavoidably navigates across borders, negotiates opposites and embraces the new (Karayanni, 2006). Although Cyprus has always defined itself culturally as Greek, the island has been an intersecting point for many ethnic, cultural and religious groups due to geographical location, trade and conquest. Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, Venetians, Franks, Ottomans, and British are only a handful of Cyprus' settlers and colonisers that have left permanent imprints on its culture (Christofides, 2007). As historian Andrekos Varnava (2010) highlights in his research on shared and separatist identities within various Cypriot communities, Cyprus and Cypriot identity currently embrace several ethno-cultural groups beyond Greek Cypriots, including Armenians, Syrians, Turkish-Cypriots, Russians, British, Maronites[11], southeastern Asians, eastern Europeans, Filipinos, Chinese, and diasporic Cypriots who have returned to live permanently in Cyprus.

While multiple cultures have managed to live together harmoniously for long periods there have been alternate phases of underlying and overt conflict, internal segregation and brutal upheaval often propagated by governing bodies, political parties or religious institutions. Varnava links the marginalisation of Cypriot minorities to 'the clash of foreign nationalisms (Greek and Turkish) and imperialisms (British, American, Greek and Turkish) in Cyprus' (2010: 205). He argues that internal political collision 'has resulted in the domination of the "Greeks" and "Turks" despite the historical presence of other communities' and 'in the failure to develop an

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[11] While this term often pertains to a Roman Catholic religious sect without referring to an ethnic origin, in Cyprus the Lebanese lineage of most Maronites affects to their 'foreign' status. Migrating to the northern (now Turkish-occupied) region of Kormakitis over a century ago from Lebanon and to southern Cyprus after the Turkish invasion, Cypriot Maronites have assimilated into Cypriot culture; yet they are still categorised as distinct from the Greek Cypriot majority in demographic studies and application forms (Varnava, 2010).

indigenous Cypriot identity, one that crosses religious difference and has as its base the idea of Cyprus as a secular homeland that includes all its disparate national groups who call themselves "Cypriots"' (Varnava, 2010: 205).

The violent military invasion and subsequent occupation by Turkey of the northern part of Cyprus in July of 1974 geographically and politically cemented the division of the island, while such an internal division may not have necessarily existed, creating sudden displacement, confusion and longing for what had been lost (Hadjipavlou 2006, 2010). Homes were ransacked and families were torn apart, tragically revealing the destructive potency of extreme views on identity rooted in the respective growing nationalism within predominant communities on the island that had begun decades earlier. Inflated, distinctly opposing notions of cultural identity – northern Turkish Cypriot and southern Greek Cypriot – were formed and are still celebrated. Whereas the 1974 date officially marks the political and cultural conflict that continues to the present, the underlying categorisations of self, identity and 'other' that fueled events leading up to the attack are often polarised and/or generalised. Much of Papadakis' work (2005, 2008, 2012) focuses on nationalist Cypriot identities, contends that many current perspectives on Cypriot ethnonational identity have been molded through individual narratives that make up collective historical memory. The resulting ideological splits that perpetuate separatist viewpoints continue to denounce the island's previous historical periods of co-existence and shared values, traditions, folklore, and language between Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots and other communities (Karayanni, 2006). This ongoing conflict with Turkey has exacerbated a schism within the Greek Cypriot community.

Many Cypriots have reacted to the political threat by identifying with virtues of an idealised Greek nation that link them to Hellenism and the West, such as strength, bravery, cleverness, and virtue; eastern or Ottoman characteristics such as 'laziness, hedonism and unrestrained sexuality' are under-emphasised (Argyrou, 2006: 41). Others shun the idea of a Greek 'motherland' in favour of a distinct Cypriot identity that encompasses all of the island's past and present communities. Despite a shared sociocultural memory and habitual reality, these two groups are diametrically positioned politically; each supports a historical narrative laden with carefully crafted versions of sociopolitical identity and 'otherness' in which 'other' is the cause of discord and misfortune. Such constructs are reinforced by songs, poems, dances, and traditions incorporated into social, educational and governmental institutions. As annual commemorative ceremonies and parades glorify past victories and heroes, a collectively imagined, promised future for 'Greeks' preserves a false purity of culture (Papadakis, 2005). Similarly, nationalist Greek dances (discussed further in Chapter 2) are taught as part of the Cypriot public school curriculum (Karayanni, 2004).

Identification and promotion of a fixed culture rooted in a glorified past corresponds to social constructs promoted by diasporic Greek communities; it can be said that the dissemination and preservation of certain histories occurs in an effort to protect a culture; in the case of diasporic Greeks it is also partly because the nationalistic history and symbols of identity was transferred with immigration decades ago, remaining stuck in time. In my experience as a child of diasporic Greeks in a Greek American community, the general moral and historical education of young Greek Americans regarding exalted Greek ideals (mentioned earlier) shares characteristics

with that of many Cypriots. I am not suggesting that Cypriots born and raised in Cyprus experience or propagate their Greek identities in the same manner as diasporic Greeks or Cypriots who are geographically displaced from their homeland; yet I do propose that there are significant similarities between the current Cypriot experience of identity and a diasporic one. In both cases there is a dis-placement from place of origin, either a motherland (in the case of Greeks) or a native village, even within one's own country (Cyprus). The effects of loss and an attempt to retrieve missing elements, people and places are enveloped by a thick nostalgia; in response to the pain of loss, modern myths regarding identity are re-invented and cultivated. This the case for the 'other' culture as well. For example, many events surrounding the Turkish invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974 have been altered in Turkish history books and national holidays to show that the invasion occurred to reclaim a homeland; besides enforcing a political agenda this historical understanding helps cope with a painful sense of longing or displacement for Turkish Cypriots that lost their homes or Turks that were forced to immigrate to northern Cyprus from Turkey (Papadakis, 2005 & 2008; Sabri, 2011).

This systematic reconfiguration of events that congeals into a collective 'diasporic memory' can result in an alluring, potent re-telling of the past 'in ways which depart entirely from reality (as) some elements were never there in the first place' (Winter, 2010:20). Winter (2010: 11) maintains that the emotional content in these narratives is not unreal for the teller; rather, the emotion, or 'performative', is penetrating and deeply enticing to the listener, regardless of the factual verity of the adaptation. Unlike the more objective or factual, referred to by Winter (2010) as the 'constative',

the embedded, charged, easily transferable emotion embedded in the 'performative' invokes very real corporeal sensations linked to our personal memory banks and is partly what keeps these tales alive over time. He further proposes that 'performative utterances are simply beyond verification' since the 'act of remembering occupies both kinds of utterances, both the constative … and the performative' (Winter, 2010: 12). Both exist in most experiences of our memories.

The effects of displacement prevail in my personal narrative, my own nostalgic chronicle. Upon relocating to Cyprus in 2006 I was drawn to the idea of conflict resolution through movement practice, intending to reap from my background in the fields of dance and dance pedagogy, as well as my work in social reform and activism as a teaching artist in the public education system of New York City. One memory was very vivid that first year, living in a flat so close to the Green Line in Nicosia, the no-man's land or war-free zone designated and protected by the United Nations to ensure peaceful relations between the north and south of Cyprus. Every morning at daybreak I was woken, not by the church bells to which I had been accustomed during the summers I had spent in Greece, but by over-amplified chanting from the mosque on the other side. Just a few kilometers north of my flat, huge speakers provocatively bolted a hodja's loud, distorted voice through my open window. As my sleep was broken one morning, the stern, sad faces of my Cypriot grade-school teachers appeared as a vivid image. According to the research of social psychologists Charis Psaltis and Husseyn Cakal (2016) on social and historical representations in southern Greek Cypriot and northern Turkish Cypriot communities, accounts from both populations depict similar feelings of threat from the other side as well as past

ownership of the island. In my mind, the abrupt, invasive, politically-laden interruption of slumber was akin to the violent uprooting of my teachers from a homeland – appearing as fresh, raw nostalgia in their eyes.

VII

The Embodiment of Dis-placement

As I later dwelled in this intense recollection I was struck by several voices responding within me. The educator in me was impressed by the candidness of Mrs. Panaghi's and Miss Modestou's approach the day they spoke to the students about the invasion, inspiring me to seek such sincere and spontaneous moments as a future educator. As a child, I remembered being both shocked and moved by the account, in a literal sense as well, for my body had begun to shake. As a student I had been drawn to historical facts that needed to be divulged, however harsh, as my teachers' somber countenance permanently imprinted a political turning point in my mind. Their poignant narrative had passed into my reality; it became part of my own history: *I/they/I/we/I/all were so saddened by the division, by the loss*. *The loss.* The external or communal suddenly had become internally personal and connected me to a collectivism I had not previously known, in a rather permanent manner. In 2006, though aware of multiple perspectives regarding the Cyprus conflict, I was still the proprietor of anger toward this and other injustices that had been imparted during my childhood in the Greek diaspora of New York.

My Greekness, or identification with a common Hellenic identity, was another main factor that moved me to pursue the issue of Cypriot identity. Hall (1990) refers to

Africa as a virtual unifying point for diasporic blacks; in this sense Cyprus itself can be considered a diasporic branch of an imaginary Hellenistic centre-point. Myths that provide formative material for many social and political ceremonies, holidays, belief systems merge characteristics of Greek and Cypriot culture. The predominant sociopolitical discourses of diasporic and native Greek and Cypriot cultures present Turkey as the common enemy that conquered, enslaved and colonised both nations. This perspective is reminiscent of prevailing views on slavery and colonisation that serve to conceptually unify, in an imagined way, the displaced communities of diasporic Africans or Afro-Caribbeans referred to by Hall (1990).

My first inquiry concerning Cypriot identity was thus founded on this sense of loss, or nostalgia, and investigating what bridges gaps, heals the pain, or helps cope with the possibility of not finding the missing pieces. The sameness but difference within a culture and in relation to a kindred culture arises from a shared myth of an authentic version of that culture, of a collective identity. Embedded in this framework is the absence of a place that bears those elements – a utopia, literally meaning 'no place'. Can one ever then regain what has been lost, or must one's nostalgia be appeased only in creating stories of a homecoming? How is diasporic, or dis-placed, identity constructed and maintained? What interplays of power, authority, and privilege accompany these constructs, or our interacting subjectivities, within a Cypriot culture that is experienced as both homogeneous and separatist?

If we once again take Hall's view that cultural identities reside at the 'unstable points of suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture' (1990: 226) then cultural identity is something that is constantly reformed using more stable

material (such as language or folklore) as a base for adding and shedding. It also experiences moments of absolute disparateness and nothingness. Rather than a fixed 'essence', it is a 'positioning' that allows for the re-negotiation of power and privilege and the re-telling of histories (Hall, 1990: 226). The primary motivation for this re-creation is a break from a previous version of identity, stimulated by a 'turning-toward', as in the case of self-consciousness or re-claiming the past, or a 'turning away' – one of the undeniable effects of invasion or colonialism (Hall, 1990).

VIII

Trading your Heel for my Elbow: The Identity of Cypriot Contemporary Dance

As I have underscored in the discussion above, the notion of identity rarely escapes a sense of dualism between self and other that has historically driven identity representations in western culture. This isolated sense of self connotes a uniqueness or exclusivity. Opposites such as mind/body, self/other, or subjective/objective all imply that there is a steady source essentially describable and intact, disrupted by random contradictory emergences (Bhabha, 2006).

Yet quite contrarily, the term 'identity', derived from the Latin *identitas* meaning 'sameness', is defined as 'the relation each thing bears unto itself', characterising that 'thing' as a whole (*Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 2nd edition*, 1995). Besides alluding to a self-contained, discernable characteristic of someone or something, identity in the sense of 'sameness' can also be seen as a self-reflexive relationship that is experienced as having a more elastic nature, extending to encompass the internal and external 'other' or 'others' it implies, rather than

polarising them. Resembling a continually moving, Protean-type creature, identity can shape-shift from a stable form into more fluid, raw material, only to emerge after some moments bearing a new likeness. Cultural theorist Rustom Bharucha (2011) suggests that collective identity is the intercourse of a range of subjectivities, or selves, reflected within the 'self' and its shifting inner and outer borders.

Our personal, moment-to moment experience of our identity can also feel as if in constant flux, as we question, dissect, critique or applaud one version of self by another while simultaneously envisioning our next appearance. Notions of self and other, place and space, external and internal, intersect and transform within us as we cross the threshold of each of our identities. Perhaps linked to a need for validation of our self through acknowledgment by an other, these constructs, when affirmed, strengthen our sense of self (Press, 2002).

As mentioned, dance can be a catalyst for the effective discovery and performance of the essentially complicated matter of identity. The moving body, unified but never static, aids in representing our identity as self-contained, but can simultaneously communicate our manifold aspects or selves. As Albright states:

> As a representational system concentrated on the live body, contemporary dance can help us trace this interconnectedness of bodies and identities by foregrounding the cultural significance of somatic experience.
>
> (Albright, 1997: 5)

Contemporary Cypriot dance artists often tap into moments within the continuum of the unstable moving body that embody identities in order to subvert social constructs, posing individual perspectives against sociocultural paradigms of gender,

ethnicity and class. The relatively young and very exciting Cypriot contemporary dance scene, comprised of over fifty independent artists and dance companies, is by origin located outside social norms, cultural constructs, and the traditional arts of Cyprus. On the other hand, it can be said that the identity of Cypriot contemporary dance on the whole is under development, resembling Spain, Hungary and Flanders, as analysed by dance scholars Andree Grau and Stephanie Jordan (2000); as in these countries, Contemporary dance and ballet are not historical derivatives of traditional Cypriot culture. Unlike the gradual evolution and settling of traditional dance and music over several centuries, modern dance forms were recently transplanted on the island by foreigners or by Cypriots who have studied dance abroad.

The widespread popularity of ballet in Cyprus can be linked to Cyprus' history and status as a British colony. Often viewed as a valuable cultural commodity, it can be argued that ballet is sought after due to its association with wealth, privilege and a mythical aristocratic lineage. The connection of ballet to higher, European social status is reflected in a preference for classical art forms; over 300 dance studios offer ballet in a country with a population below 1,000,000 (statistics based on my own research). Interestingly, Argyrou (1996) contends that most Cypriots today associate the acquisition of education and artistic endeavours with obtaining higher social status and worth rather than inner satisfaction, inspiration or learning. Dance and education in the arts, as forms of 'cultural capital', are often viewed as assets such as cars, clothing, leisure, and property. Akin to the notion of 'cultural capital' coined by French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1984), non-financial educational or cultural assets promote social mobility, symbolising an abundance of financial capital.

Alternatively, the contemporary dance community in Cyprus intentionally challenges the paradigms that obstruct it. Contemporary dance is an arena where questions of Cypriot identity and other controversial topics can be openly pursued through the performing body. The existence of contemporary dance in Cyprus is in itself a political statement; its growth reflects a movement beyond strict, hierarchical or classical art forms toward more a democratic creative inclination and individualised expression. Themes present in Cypriot contemporary choreography embody a mounting alternative and humanist, rather than nationalist, sociopolitical stance; these efforts are supported by educational institutions, arts organisations, dance festivals and other venues that receive funding from Cypriot and European grants. This infrastructure has also played a central role in the pursuit of Cyprus's own identity within the broader scope of European contemporary dance, establishing history in its own right. Important examples include the annual *Contemporary Dance Platform* that began in in 2000; the creation of Dance House Lemesos (Limassol) in 2005; the launching of an accredited BA in Dance in 2007 at the University of Nicosia Dance; and in 2012 the opening of Dancehouse Lefkosia (Nicosia). The annual *European Dance Festival* (active for more than a decade) houses foreign and Cypriot dance companies and workshops and *Dance Gate Cyprus* fosters affiliations with contemporary European dance artists since 2008. Of equal importance, over recent years, local dance studios have begun offering contemporary dance for children, adolescents and adults, as well as choreography and improvisation workshops. This progress has also been affected by the increasing number of students receiving a university degree in Cyprus and abroad. It appears that the promotion of values such

as learning, awareness, artistic expression, personal development and innovation are pursued with determination by various branches of Cypriot contemporary dance.[12]

This recent institutionalisation (since 2000) of contemporary dance in Cyprus has resulted in a plethora of creative and experimental work, such as Haraki's solo described above, revealing new perspectives on Cypriot identity that no longer bounce between the stark polarities of a more fixed, traditional 'Cypriot-ness' and a Eurocentric, individualistic identity. Both the vitality of such a genre and the work that thematically engages with identity issues reveals new layers to Cypriot identity. Degradations of a developing, unique identity are conveyed, reflecting explicit and subtle aspects of the current sociopolitical reality of Cyprus. Moreover, the realm of contemporary dance in Cyprus serves as a meeting point for individuals of different backgrounds and cultures, forging valuable and strong connections between diverse sociocultural groups, offering a space for freer embodiments and choices regarding cultural identity and artistic partnerships. The dance companies and audiences of the contemporary dance scene are decidedly tolerant, progressive and multicultural.

For the purposes of this research I will discuss Cypriot contemporary dance at length in cases where institutions, venues, artistic works and thematic/aesthetic choices of the participants are intertwined. In addition, the environment of the contemporary dance scene and contemporary dance audiences will be addressed as it pertains to identity embodiments and the development of the research. A close relationship

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[12] This information is based on informal interviews with Cypriot choreographers Arianna Economou, Lia Haraki and Natasa Georgiou (all directors of dance companies and organisations), as well as my own experience as creator and head of the dance programme at the University of Nicosia from 2006 to 2014 and founder/artistic director of *Ekpnoi,* a collaborative dance company based in Cyprus.

between this study and the Cypriot contemporary dance scene inevitably pervades, not only since this project is geographically and theoretically located in Cyprus but because *Identity Project* was performed by collaborators and for audiences that dwell in the inbuilt aesthetic and sociocultural reality. This commonality has carved a secure space for the exchange of ideas, partly making this project possible. On the other hand, our deviation from current aesthetic trends by putting Cypriot identity in the forefront of our movement research sometimes challenged even the alternative realm of Cypriot contemporary dance (discussed further in chapter 5).

There are important reasons why the arena of Cypriot contemporary dance is of concern to this research. As mentioned above, since my project is located within Cypriot culture, the tight infrastructure of Contemporary dance as well as its place in Cypriot society has strongly influenced the choices available regarding *Identity Project*. The making of *Identity Project* has consistently intersected with other dance produced at the time. Performance venues, performers, audiences and funding have often been shared with other artists; movement choices, aesthetic style and conceptual perspectives of the performers were frequently influenced by their work with other choreographers. These factors place *Identity Project* within a spectrum in which it was analysed and critiqued according to prevalent trends and criteria.

Secondly, the advancement of the dance scene to the level of a publicly subsidised artistic body with social standing and growing popularity has directly affected the way my work was received. Moreover, the formation of the first Cypriot university dance course coincided with the beginning of my doctoral studies, placing *Identity Project* within a fresh climate of change and innovation. Through the above-

mentioned organisations, many resident dancers and choreographers were given an opportunity to impart their knowledge and foster collaborations with younger persons who would, in turn, contribute to artistic interchange. This unprecedented, blossoming pedagogical and artistic dialogue within a university setting, new for Cypriot dance, opened pathways for dance, pedagogy, performance and research, shaping choreographic approaches, theoretical perspectives and research projects.

The third area of significance regarding Cypriot contemporary dance is related to aesthetic approaches and choreographic methods. Despite the alternative streak in Cypriot choreography when compared to other classical dance forms that prevail in Cyprus, spontaneous improvisational risk or pockets of performativity were rare when I began this research in 2008. Again, I apply Judith Butler's definition of 'performativity' (1993), where performing is an act of doing rather than being. This view is based on my own investigations of Cypriot Contemporary dance, as mentioned earlier, through digitally viewing Cypriot choreography made from 2000 onwards and attending live performances since 2006. As in Haraki's *Eye to I*, a highly rehearsed, polished and chance-free method is often detected in final pieces, even if improvisation was a key part of the process. Conversely, since 2006 improvisation has made its way into many contemporary dance classes, onto the stages of Cypriot dance festivals, and into the work of some conservative Cypriot choreographers.

As I have delineated at length in this chapter, in integrating theory with practice this research aims to explore sociocultural identity by stepping outside conventional sociopolitical and related artistic domains into unchartered territory. At the same time, the dominant tendencies in the Cypriot dance scene have positioned our

experimental, improvisational, auto-ethnographic process slightly on the outskirts, both aiding and challenging my goal to subvert and transgress identity constructs. Though my early intentions were to at once delve deeply into experimenting with identity, in reality, agitating the norm began gently, and the intensity of the movement research increased as the research progressed (as explained in the following chapters). The significant question of improvisation perpetually remained at the forefront: will chance be preserved, or will we succumb to setting all movement for the final version of the pieces? This and related issues that emerged during the research process are addressed in the following chapter through the framework of *kouponi allagis*, the first work of *Identity Project.*

IX

<u>Epilogue #2</u>

> *…performing what you are, what you are not and what you could
> be; what you are when another has passed through you*

> *…who you are as distant versions of your self; or a self becoming*

> *…being in the moment even though your dance is about past
> states and future dreams…*

> – excerpts from collaborators' feedback
> *Identity Project (*2011/2013)

Chapter 2

kouponi allagis: Identity, Self and Other in the Process of Performance

I

<u>Changing Places</u>

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, the term *kouponi allagis*/*κουπόνι αλλαγής*
means 'exchange coupon' in Greek. This title was proposed by one of the performers
during a rehearsal and was embraced unanimously by the group. However, before
settling on this title, another collaborator had proposed the English title, *changing
places*. Indeed, our creative process during *kouponi allagis* was largely based on
changing places, physically, emotionally, verbally. We traded identities, perspectives
and roles, with others and our own selves. We challenged familiar representations,
our communicative comfort zones and our biases. We became so used to shifting
and swapping that our choreography evolved up to our last formal performance.

In this chapter I analyse the findings of *kouponi allagis* in conjunction with academic
scholarship. In order to vividly represent the live elements within our embodied
journey as distinct from theoretical analysis and reflective feedback, three different
character fonts have been used. The text in bold, also from my notes, represents my
subjective experience of the movement process; written in the present tense, it is
meant to place the reader in the reality of the moment as well as within my shifting
perspectives as choreographer, facilitator and spectator. A traditional script, as in
most of the writing, has been applied to the analytical, academic segments. In italics
are excerpts from process journals of members of the group, including my own.

II

<u>Finding Places</u>

> At places of crossing there is the potential for change and transformation in the folding of spatial perceptions and practices. Some of these folds create confusion and others a kind of palimpsest, an opportunity to see through a series of different spaces and ways of being in the world. In gathering to reflect upon practice in a strong place we are invited to experience the everyday as also extraordinary. … Perhaps this should be our vision of what a stage can be, a place of encounter where words, silences, cries, songs and gestures make themselves heard, a place where the performer can open his universe to the destinies of others. A theatre of necessity.
>
> — Carol Brown, (2003, online)

Early evening in late September 2010, Nicosia, Cyprus. The warm air in the studio is thick as the last scents of summer enter through the open doors. We are in the first few minutes of our first rehearsal for a collectively created piece that is meant to tackle contemporary identity in Cyprus. During our personal introductions I intentionally sidestep any reference to identity. After some small talk we are ready to begin exploring – and dissecting – our selves, who we are and *how* we are, through a series of movement tasks meant to provoke spontaneous physical responses and emotionally risky interactions. The dancers stand.

Four bodies, each alone, in a jagged quadrilateral formation between two walls that frame the space. Four bodies, standing tall, grounded yet floating, like columns, as if in support of a shifting architectural edifice: upright beams of a half-finished showroom, predicting smooth surfaces that will join to enclose the space; or proud but lonely remnants of a half-destroyed structure, exposed pillars of a temple or warehouse in ruins, embodying countless moments of a past soaked in human experience.

'Fresh', 'deliberate', 'stark' and 'a bit rough around the edges'[13], *kouponi allagis* is a collaborative dance work created between September and November 2010 in partial completion of the practical component of this research project. The first of three choreographies based on identity in contemporary Cyprus, *kouponi allagis* initially aimed to approach the subject of identity at large (a rather outsised endeavour that later obtained more precise dimensions) through the contributions and insights of four performers and collaborative partners: Mark, Eric, Chloe and Eva.[14] My choreographic input, discussed at length throughout this chapter, originally emerged from my role as facilitator. I designed exploratory improvisations based on the theme of identity, created initiatives to spark material from the collaborators and edited selected segments for performance. During the later stages of the process my personal identity had a stronger presence; I was more active in the development of the thematic content and movement material and relinquished some of my authority regarding decision-making. This led to a preservation of individual contributions and a collaborative approach to setting the final choreography and the structure.

The improvisation based choreographic process of *kouponi allagis* culminated in a loosely set twenty-minute piece. As mentioned earlier, the work premiered at the Pallas Theatre in Nicosia in early November 2010 within the context of the first *NoBody Dance Festival*. *Kouponi allagis* was received by the unexpectedly full house with enthusiasm and questions to follow by several spectators.

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[13] Comments are based on audience and performer feedback received after the premiere, October 2011.

[14] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of all performers and participants in this project throughout the thesis, except for myself. Some relevant information on the performers will be provided in this and in later chapters; however, the participants' anonymity will be solidly preserved. For more carefully selected, relevant biographical information on the performers please see *Appendix B*. The *Ethics Application* and *Participant Consent Form* can be found in *Appendix A*.

All aspects of *kouponi allagis*, including movement, text, voice, music and costumes, were created by the collaborators. The result was what I describe as a striking, awkward, inwardly focused and self-contained reality completely derived from the characteristics of the individuals that created it. Quite evident was an attempt by the dancers to communicate something significant to the 'outside world' via a performative vocabulary pertinent to 'their world' (performers' descriptions) that may or may not have been understood. The overall structure, as viewed by the performers and many spectators, can be explained as the evolution of identity from individual self to relating with an other to ultimately partaking of a community or collaborative identity. In this chapter I will discuss significant aspects of the process and findings of *kouponi allagis*, and how they enriched and redefined notions of Cypriot identity as manifested in the experience of the collaborators. I will also address current relevant literature and its relationship to our experiences of identity.

As emphasised in the Introduction, the inclusion of choreography as a research tool for this thesis, at first as fieldwork and ultimately within a practice-integrated structure, was a response to the complexities and ambiguities I denoted in both the literature and my personal experiences surrounding Cypriot identity. The gaps in academic research seemed to reflect the contradictions inherent in various social frameworks, including the rapport between genders, the use of the Greek language, and the relationship between traditional customs and the expectations of modern life. These and other elements, as I saw it, contributed to the maintenance and balancing of an outer construction of self and inner sense of an 'authentic self'. The idea behind *kouponi* was that the live body in dance, by subsisting within the field of

intersection between reality and theatre, could locate and be located in alternative spaces and versions of self and the realities of others, Carol Brown calls this a 'theatre of necessity' (2003, online). Through this approach it was also hoped that the parallel pursuits of improvisation and performance could challenge and expand mainstream notions of tradition, globalism, sexism, post-colonialism and other constructs that typically enclose and delimit representations of self/other.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, I designed original exercises combining movement and text with the aim of tapping into the performers' individual realities, and identities, as well as to the daily challenges and responses to modern life within Cypriot society. Along these lines, the choreographic material was derived from original movement created and inspired by the four performers' and my own subjective experiences of individual and collective identity on a day-to-day basis, as well as long term notions molding either a personal or collective sense of identity. Our initial explorations were reflected upon and reworked through more movement, written text, and lengthy reflective discussions at the end of each rehearsal.

In this sense, *kouponi allagis* can be seen as a small study of Cypriot identity through the prism of four individuals I chose as collaborative partners, primarily due to their openness in exploring identity through an experimental investigative process and their willingness to challenge the status quo. Additionally all of the collaborators, though born and raised in Cyprus, had studied and lived abroad and were professionally active in various arts beyond dance, including music, visual art, poetry and theatre. Through a rich and diverse background each performer offered unique insights, creatively and analytically. It is also important to note that the participants,

drawn to the autobiographic and collaborative aspects of the process, committed fully to this venture.[15] At the same time all cast members had minimal experience in research through embodied practice, leading to a journey that was somewhat potholed; alternatively this first-time endeavour can be seen as resulting in more uncensored, unique, and fruitful results (discussed in detail in later chapters).

My research approach during *kouponi allagis* can be described as three-fold. One aspect involved the embodied understanding and anticipated rediscovery of identity through individual and collective improvisational movement practices. The second strand was a reflective procedure that, together with the dancers, intellectually and emotionally contextualised the movement experiences in terms of the evolution of personal identity, consequently underscoring the stronger, more meaningful aspects of the work-in-progress at different stages. A third, all-pervading constituent was my own, shifting, agenda behind the investigations, embodiments and reflections that aspired to break existing barriers of self (as I perceived them at various points in the process) and arrive at novel expressions and expanding notions of Cypriot identity.

In implementing a choreographic structure, these three methodological facets – embodied practice, reflection, and transgression – often co-existed harmoniously but at other times collided. For example, it became apparent during the first few weeks of rehearsals that my ideas behind certain tasks were often *not* aligned movement and text that was generated or with the performers' impressions in reflections that followed. This gap was a source of tension and an arena for discovery, inciting me to revise my original questions and rehearsal objectives.

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[15] From my rehearsal notes, September, 2010

III

Improvising the Self

The exploration of identity and the final movement material in kouponi allagis was primarily based in a series of tasks that I call the *I AM Improvisations*, involving text and movement. During the first rehearsal the participants were given blank sheets of paper and asked to complete the sentence, 'I am…' as many times as the paper fit. In order to evoke spontaneous responses the writing was approached as a stream of consciousness, without pausing to think in between the phrases. Beyond that, the participants were not given any other restrictions or guidelines; they were allowed to fill in the blank regarding who or what they felt they were with as many words as they felt necessary. It is important to note that I did not participate in this exercise.

When the task was completed, and before they shared their full lists (*included in Appendix B*), I asked them to choose four phrases they felt most represented them at the time, and create accompanying pedestrian gestures symbolising their sense of self expressed by the words. The dancers were then asked to stand in the space apart from one another, and repeatedly perform the words and phrases without locomotion, gradually developing the movement. They were guided to begin with small gestures, whispered text, and an internal focus; in response to the others in the space, their gestures were to get larger and their words louder. When they felt they could not expand any further, they were to come to a place of rest, in a static shape. In that state they were invited to sense the other bodies in the space, feel their own body internally, pay attention to their breathing, and reflect upon the experience. Reflections and perspectives were shared in group discussions.

In subsequent rehearsals text and movement created in the first *I AM Improvisations* was exchanged by the performers in several ways. In one exercise while divided in pairs, they shared their full lists with their partner. Each chose two phrases from the other's list that drew them in, and the improvisation was repeated based on the borrowed phrases. The embodiments were transferred a third time, as the partner who had lent their text took it back by choosing one of the movement phrases performed by the other partner, incorporating it into their movement vocabulary.

We later engaged in a 'follow-the-leader' task that involved fragment of these movement-text phrases, where the group, standing in a line, had to repeatedly perform the movement and words of the leader while traveling through the space. I participated in the latter exercise, shifting my role in the group. This endeavour produced quirky, idiosyncratic movement that often led to laughter from the group. Performing in unison created a satisfying synergy within the group, later expressed by most during a group reflection. Moreover, the collective identity experienced during exercises such as this led to a request by the dancers to further explore collective identity through movement and include it in the final piece.

Finally, the dancers were asked to collaborate in creating duets by implementing token individual movement phrases. The instructions were to conduct a contact improvisation while maintaining gestures and shapes performed in the *I AM Improvisations*. This was a challenge for both couples; details will be discussed below in this chapter. The two duets were eventually set loosely, in collaboration with the performers, and retained an improvisational aspect in their final form. Underlying each duet is a theme that emerged from the merging of embodied identities.

In reflection, I consider the content and aesthetic of the final piece satisfactory; however, the process and emergent themes differ from my initial expectations. The resulting identity representations were more abstract and ambiguous than I had envisioned, and the feel of the piece darker. Major sociopolitical issues, such as the occupation and division of Cyprus, were addressed covertly rather than outwardly.

And so the atmosphere is also thick, with a hesitation that cloaks the eagerness emanating from the four dancers. A resistance to discarding the stiff outer layers of self to reveal more supple substrata to *others* – or *selves* – we do not know. The eyes look downward, shoulders absorb the density. Will the bodies begin to soften? The bodies begin to soften.

One dancer asks what her intention should be. I feel daunted, as I know this question emerged from a process she has experienced with another choreographer. I answer, 'exploration'. She asks me what she should be looking for. 'Exploration', I repeat with a smile. My answer is unsatisfactory to her, but I gently urge her to trust her movement. I try to alleviate some mental pressure by adding a task of tracing the surfaces and spaces of the body, stretching to the edges of one's kinespheres. Trust the body to create freedom and cohesion. Trust the body to break walls.

Discussion break and Eric has questions based (as he explains) on his extensive training in music and theatre; he has reservations about a structure that implements improvisation as not only a creative but a performance tool. Still in the first rehearsal and he is wondering how the final piece will obtain a form 'worth watching' and worries that there will be no 'climax'. He asks for my plan. His view evokes nodding from Chloe, who still needs an intention, and I now feel unsure whether my open-ended process fits with the group. Movement – no talking yet. We need to keep moving.

Occurrences such as the one described above exemplify the unexpected outcomes during *kouponi allagis* that, in reflection often became valuable sources of analysis and understanding. In this case, the performers' qualms regarding our open-ended process can be interpreted in a number of ways. One can argue that the skepticism was rooted in a lack of training in experimental techniques and participation in an improvisation-based performance structure; indeed, this was true for most, perhaps contributing to the doubtfulness. Some improvisational approaches I had practised in New York as a student and dancer may even have been new to Cyprus at the time. Negotiating the conditions surrounding this issue was a challenge I had not foreseen.

In choosing to make a piece using the contemporary styles of release technique and improvisation, I neglected the training of some of the collaborators in certain forms that had grown roots in Cyprus, such as ISTD Modern Theatre dance technique, Graham-based technique and combinations of the two styles.

Modern Theatre dance, included in the curricula of a large number of private dance studios throughout Europe, is defined by the ISTD – Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, formed in the UK in 1904 – as such:

> … a rhythmic dance style which originated in America before travelling to the rest of the world … often seen on the stages of musical productions and is known for its theatrical qualities. The style uses travelling steps, high kicks, leaps and turns which all need strength and flexibility … a highly energetic dance style.
>
> (official ISTD website, online)

'Graham-based' technique is a dance style derived from the original modern technique developed by Martha Graham; the degree of deviation/alteration varies according to the instructor. Graham-based technique is taught in numerous dance studios in Cyprus by dance teachers that have studied the technique abroad

(information derived from my own research). Characteristics of both Graham technique and ISTD modern technique are repeated frontal facings, performing long sequences in unison, a lack of emphasis individualised expression, and the absence of voice or text. As dance educator and author Jacqueline Smith-Autard (2002) explains, in most examination-based dance forms (such as those just mentioned) that are taught in private dance studios, there is a focus on product over process and literal themes, as well as an element of spectacle or entertainment.

Similar stylistic tendencies frequently surfaced during our rehearsals. Even though all of the cast members had at least some training either in contemporary dance (including release technique), improvisation, or experimental physical theatre, while plodding though our first few movement explorations they inadvertently settled into physical comfort zones. I noted that the dancers often faced forward, relied on cliché movement patterns mirroring conventional dance moves, and routinely omitted text from their improvisations. Once these habits were abandoned a freedom was achieved in their improvisational choices and in the crafting of individual movement and text sequences. Distinctive embodiments of cultural identity were unleashed that bore no resemblance to stereotypical motifs. It appeared to me that as the performers let go of the idea that movement should symbolise what they were supposed to look or act like, either as dancers or as attractive to the spectator, they instead carved a space for more emotional and internally derived movement that embodied what they could be, or who they really felt like they were in that moment. As the rehearsal process progressed, this liberating attitude transferred into collaborative work on shared identity, discussed later in this chapter.

From a sociohistorical standpoint, however, the two participants' request for a didactic structure that would lead to successful, socially acceptable results can be seen as arising from a post-colonial value system that still often prevails as a Cypriot sociocultural paradigm. Cyprus was subjected to British rule for many years, first under military occupation between 1914 and 1925, and then as a Crown colony between 1925 and 1960. During that era, Cyprus was infiltrated with British culture; moreover, governmental systems and social institutions were restructured by the new government (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, online). Cypriots were obligated to abide by the new laws, including property restrictions and a strict early curfew. Male Cypriots who spoke English, adopted British social codes, and dressed in a European fashion rather than the Cypriot vra'ka/βράκα (baggy breeches) and embroidered vest received special treatment, social privileges, and better employment opportunities (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, online; personal accounts from my own fieldwork).

Constructs and attitudes that attempt to equate Cyprus with western standards and practices are still prevalent in many facets of Cypriot culture, including the arts; according to Argyrou (1996), this is a result of the period of colonisation. At the same time, the affiliation between a currently liberated Cyprus and Cyprus' conceptual gateway to Europe via a former coloniser should not be oversimplified as 'colonised mimicking coloniser'. However oppressive in the past, when viewed as a discourse, this relationship can be better explained according to Homi Bhabha's notion of 'hybridity', defining the state of colonisation as a fluid, dynamic rapport, where power structures are unfixed and based on mutual dependency and collaboration between colonised and coloniser (Bhabha, 1994).

Alternatively, it can be suggested that Cyprus's link to Europe regularly relies on the codification of relationships, activities and representations employed to alter a postcolonial sense of self into one driven by status and worthiness (Argyrou, 2008). The tendency to view certain art forms as high art and therefore of greater value is one effect of this paradigm. Genres such as traditional theatre, ballet and classical music, rooted in a product-oriented creative approach, are embedded in a mainstream collective outlook as valid and elite artistic ventures, while more experimental forms are generally viewed with distrust and concern (Argyrou, 1996; Karayanni, 2006). The performers' doubt regarding my process reflected this predisposition, clashing with my certainty regarding the transformative capacity of process-based dance-making. Differing views within the group such as those described were a point of friction to the end of our process; although I sometimes felt daunted by the skepticism I did not change my rehearsal activities or structure.

It is significant to mention that no participant chose to volunteer perspectives specifically regarding the era of British rule in Cyprus and its possible effects on today's society; related yet general comments were offered. For example, during a discussion on the idiosyncrasies of Cypriot culture, Eric said, 'Cyprus has been occupied throughout history' and Eva at one point expressed, 'I remember hearing English spoken around me since I was a little kid'. Perhaps the lack of attention paid by the participants to the British period of rule is because it occurred several decades before they were born, unlike the Turkish occupation. Moreover, the British conquest ended and diplomatic relations ensued; currently the two nations enjoy a friendly relationship. Conversely, the conflict with Turkey remains unresolved.

In order to shed light on this particular identity issue, during group discussions I sometimes asked questions regarding the use of the English language in Cyprus, the abundance of signs written in English, the British army bases on the island, and the growing population of British tourists and permanent residents in Cyprus. Mark commented, 'They were here for a long time and they left their mark'; Eric, who attended a private British school in Nicosia as a child, said with a smirk, 'they built great roads and cleaned up our government institutions – Cypriots were villagers at the time, and still are in many ways!', to which Chloe responded, 'Cyprus is definitely much more organised than Greece. When I was a student there I couldn't take the mess!'. These comments definitively acknowledge the influences of British culture in Cyprus, clearly displaying characteristics that relate to language, land development, educational institutions, esteemed organisational ability and higher social class as connected to a British presence, past and current.

My concern at the time was how to entice the participants to express these and similar perspectives through movement without being instructive. I now, however, encounter a set of questions more distilled than those that manifested at the time of our creative process in November of 2010. Did certain embodiments of self emerge more fervently for each performer? If so, what caused this? Was there a 'patent' self called upon at the onset of the project by each performer, protected inside the shell of a seemingly unified habitual social persona? To what extent can this version of self be reflexively challenged? Alternatively, which manifestation/s of self did *I* favour in viewing the dancers' verbal and bodily language? What was my agenda, and what semblances pervaded as I watched attentively and filtered the movement?

While hindsight offers insight, responding to these questions by way of reflective analysis is precarious. On one hand, if the research was effective, answers to these questions must lie in the embodiments of self that were explored and represented in *kouponi allagis*. Contrarily, by subjecting experience to reflection and interpretation, the intentions and choices during the creative process are inevitably reconfigured and reframed. Anna Pakes (2004) raises a series of very important relevant questions regarding the classification of knowledge derived from a practice-as-research:

> What does art practice produce knowledge of and what is the mode of this knowledge? How is it produced and disseminated? Is new knowledge generated in the process of making, and then made manifest and shared through the verbal reflection on that process? Or do the artistic outcomes of that process – the artefacts created – have epistemological primacy as the embodiment of new insight? Are art works themselves the vehicles which make that insight available to a wider community?
>
> (Pakes, 2004, online)

In the following discussion I aim to weave embodied practice, theory and reflection while maintaining the autonomy of each to differentiate sources of knowledge. I also attempt to illuminate some conceptual motives behind the explorations and findings in the choreographic process. Embodied understandings will be distinguished from the participants' and my own reflective interpretations through descriptions of rehearsal segments, journal entries, and text created by the performers. This is a challenging endeavour; as Pakes argues, due to the dialogical and reciprocal nature of practice-based research, assessing which part of the research activates, secures and distributes the knowledge is complex. It is hoped that the exchanges generated through our somatic and reflective engagements will answer some of my questions, stated above, as well as Pakes' inquiries posited on practice-as-research.

IV

_I_-dentity Em-_BODY_-ments

> Becoming a dancer as a learning of embodiment is a process of
> deep knowing through sensations experienced as material
> becomings. Through moving, the body stages an intimate revolt
> against the enclosures of the logos.
>
> – Carol Brown (2003, online)

> There is no identity to a body without movement.
>
> – Erin Manning (2003, online)

As outlined in the Introduction, in recent decades dance research has validated and
expanded upon knowing through dance practice; within this spectrum, improvisation
and somatically informed movement explorations are often at the crux of practice-
based dance research. Much scholarship has drawn attention to improvisation or
somatics based investigational processes, as well as the qualities and characteristics
of the knowledge that can be perceived or generated through this type of corporeal
research. The condition of 'knowing through sensations as material becomings', so
eloquently described by Brown in the excerpt above, mirrors the effort behind this
shared pursuit, as well as my vision for embodying identities during _kouponi allagis_.

Such contributions include those of dancer and writer Cynthia Novack (1990) and
improviser and choreographer Steve Paxton (1979, 2003) who evaluate the effects of
experimental improvisation. Albright's work (1997, 2001, 2003, 2013) stresses the
potential of improvisation to suspend time and expectations, placing the dancer in
an unfamiliar space where anything can occur. Foster (2003) also refers to the
'unknown' encountered in improvisation:

> It is that which was previously unimaginable, that which we could not have thought of doing next. Improvisation presses us to extend into, to expand beyond, extricate ourselves from that which was known. It encourages us, or even forces us to be "taken by surprise."
>
> (Foster, 2003: 4)

Comparably, Novack (1990:191) argues that spontaneity is central to improvisation, 'signifying that the dancing is "real", "playful, and "natural" … in contrast to the worked-out, pre-determined nature of modern dance'. Similarly, dance scholar Danielle Goldman (2010) points to the possibilities of improvised dance as a practice of freedom as well as its implications regarding the creative imagination, pedagogical approaches and agency within the context of several dance styles.

The incorporation of somatically informed activities in movement research and dance-making has also been brought to the forefront in recent scholarship (Eddy, 2002, 2012; Rouhiainen, 2008; Pakes, 2011). Somatically-informed dance typically involves deep breathing, an internal focus on bodily sensations, reflection, and emotionally-initiated movement, as depicted in this dancer's reflection:

> I was outwardly quite still and tried to tap into a felt-sense or more internal awareness of my own body by becoming conscious of … my position and its relationship with the floor, and the quality and motion of my breathing. … My attention kept shifting between these different features of my immediate experience … and I reflected upon their nature.
>
> (Rouhiainen, 2008, online)

Beyond supporting well-being, the field of somatics plays an important role in the discovery process of a minded, aesthetically moving body. Rouhiainen (2008, online) argues that in including somatic dance can be 'a means of constructing subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and reality in a manner that strongly relies on the embodied and

experiential, as well as the pre-reflective dimensions of our being'. Rouhiainen links somatic practice to transgression and agency, suggesting that exploratory dance compels us 'to observe and address the socio-cultural norms and prohibitions that structure the behaviour, composure, and appearance of the body' (2008, online).

Finally, in a related manner, collaboration is pivotal in initiating inter-subjective empathy and understanding through the emergence of a multiplicity of voices and experiences (Barbour, 2008). The merging of bodies and identities in the act of collaboration can also be seen as a destabilising process linked to positive outcomes that include transgressive understandings of self and other through a shift of perspective (Brown, 2011). Along similar lines, Novack (1990) emphasises the significance of both collaboration and improvisation, suggesting that the union of the two renders alternative notions of cultural values and the ethics of creativity:

> ...improvisation proposes dance-making as a collective action, in which directorial and creative authority resides with the group as a whole. At the same time, improvisation is seen to unify the roles of the choreographer and dancer in each person, allowing the individual to make decisions in dance and to observe herself or himself in action.
>
> (Novack, 1990:190)

Paxton, cited in Novack (1990: 190) links the practice of improvisation to self-knowledge, contending that 'improvisation gives you a chance to glance at yourself sideways as you move through time and space and to learn about your own behavior'. In this light, it can be argued that the practices of somatics, collaboration and improvisation are related; they often share a common goal of exploration rather than expectation through an internal approach to the moving body that embraces the whole being. As I have illustrated above, it has been suggested that these

approaches, alone or together, can lead to fresh knowledge, new perspectives and unpredictable movement possibilities. During this project a combination of the three areas of somatics, improvisation, and collaboration typically form the basis of the movement practice; the various functions of the interface of these fields, central to the research, will therefore be revisited throughout the thesis.

Due to association with a deeper sense of perception and consciousness, exploratory perspectives regarding dance draw from philosophy and empirical approaches. As indicated in previous chapters the field of phenomenology (derived from the Greek phainómenon 'that which appears' and lógos 'study'), founded by German philosopher Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century[16], deems individual perception and inter-subjective experience central to knowledge generation and dissemination, inadvertently endorsing practice-based research methodologies. According to Ness (2005: 125), phenomenology has gained 'the most attention in the literature as the philosophical orientation best defining this new trajectory in cultural and cross-cultural dance research'. There is a strong basis for the shift toward phenomenology, for it honors both the proficiency of the intricately sensing body to obtain knowledge as well as its ability to distribute knowledge through its perception and interaction with all that is external to it, including other bodies. Merlau-Ponty (1945/1962) illuminates the role of the body in obtaining and assessing knowledge:

> We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as

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[16] Zahavi, Dan (2003), Husserl's Phenomenology, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception.

(Merlau-Ponty (1962:236)[17]

Writings on embodied practice as methodology based on a live, thinking body are informed by concepts of the body rooted in phenomenology, like those above. In her book *Dance and the Lived Body: A descriptive aesthetics* (1987) dancer and scholar Sondra Fraleigh expounds the value of a phenomenological approach to the body, asserting that dance, or what she calls 'movement with an aesthetic purpose', initiates an internal dialogue between aspects of the self. Fraleigh (1987: 26) argues that dance creates a unique state of liberation and 'avenues for self-knowledge':

> The self known in dance is indeed a performing self and is at its best as it moves toward such freedom. The self known in dance moves beyond the limits of one's own mental cogito. We dance to become acquainted with that which cannot be known by any other means – to find out what can be known through the body as a mental, physical, spiritual whole. … Forms of *knowing how* are forms of bodily lived (experiential) knowledge.
>
> (Fraleigh, 1987: 26)

Fraleigh (1987) further contends that when the self is experienced as a live, minded, moving body, it has the ability to unfasten, reframe, and unite the materialisations of self, either within a single gesture or a complex movement sequence. Within this phenomenological theory of the 'lived body', dance is not merely self-expression; rather, within an existential dimension, the self not only known and adjusted, but perpetually re-created. When one dances as one intends one engages 'movement powers as personal powers' (Fraleigh, 1987: 21). That leads to the rediscovery of the

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[17] The edition of Merlau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* referenced is the English translation of the original 1945 French publication.

self on a moment-to-moment, or *movement-to movement*, basis. As such, it can be said that all expressive movement, including everyday gestures and activities, engage the self's temporal reality by virtue of the minded moving body as creator and instrument, manifesting in ways that are distinct from other art forms.

It is important to note, however that Fraleigh neglects to address the potential of the body, or self, as it partakes in intersubjective interaction with an other. It can be argued that collaborative improvisation generates a singular relationship between performing body/mind/self and an other, newly discovered body/mind/self; this unique discourse between self as subject and self and object necessarily requires negotiation between partners and partial transformation of each to accomplish the task of the dance (as mentioned above). The awareness of one's self goes beyond a qualitative critique as dancer or performer, but rather resides deep within one's self as potential for discovering the unknown through a shared experience. Moreover, it is essential that other views concerning phenomenology are brought forth. Ness (2004) raises a strong weakness in a phenomenological approach to movement. In endorsing an isolated, in-the-moment experience of dance, phenomenology neglects the element of culture embedded in all movement practices. Ness problematises the resulting compression and neutralisation of the lived body in a phenomenological framework, often presented as enduring experiences unaffected by culture:

> … the characterization of the shift to embodied methodology as a shift toward phenomenological forms of inquiry, in the context of *culturally* focused research on dance, might seem problematic. The symbolic character of this cultural dimension would preclude a phenomenological approach or at least some phenomenological approaches.
>
> (Ness, 2004: 125)

In fact, the body is anything but neutral. As described by Helen Thomas and Jamilah Ahmed in their edited volume, *Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory* (2004),

> "The body" is a well-established component of social and cultural research. To a greater or lesser degree, it is an ever-present part of all interaction and indeed it is perhaps all that we can be sure of when there is no interaction and we are completely on our own. It is also the focus of many taboos, prejudices and judgments. How we move, dress, maintain discipline, and interact with our bodies determines our place in society.
>
> (Thomas and Ahmed, 2004: 1)

The presence – or absence of – the body as an active cultural vessel carrying modern and traditional Cypriot culture in my early research for this project is of significance. In seeking the hidden I underestimated the obvious – the power of tradition and the related social conditioning encrypted in bodily expression. During our movement explorations of identity in *kouponi allagis* a discrepancy surfaced between identity representations through contemporary dance forms and those rooted in traditional Cypriot movement practices. Since I had not approached the performers, or my self, as cultural bodies imbued with traditional Cypriot culture (as in subsequent pieces) I was not prepared for certain movement tendencies that emerged. In focusing the bodily practice on individual emotional and psychological states bodily expression rooted in collective, traditional cultural practices was neglected.

For instance, men and women do not make physical contact in traditional Cypriot dances, most of which revolve around the customary Cypriot wedding; only women hold hands with one another. The separation of the two genders is also seen at extended family dinners, where males and females usually sit at opposite ends of the table, or at different tables, and sometimes even in different rooms; conversations

between men and women are rare and reserved or conducted at a physical distance in order to preserve a woman's 'good name' and 'pure intentions' (Argyrou, 2004). Gender-separatist practices such as these are also found in the small communities of rural Greece. In her well-known book *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* (1990), anthropologist Jane K. Cowan recounts her extensive ethnographic research in a small village of northern Greece to analyse gender-specific issues that emerge within the social event of celebratory Greek dance. Cowan (1990) illuminates strict gender-related social codes via interactions that occur primarily within the context of dance celebrations. For instance, if a man and woman who are not married dance together publicly or when a woman finds enters a male-designated space, like the town coffee shop, the reputation of the woman is typically at stake (Cowan, 1990).

Social standards such as these resonate with traditional Cypriot customs regarding interactions between men and women. While these behaviours are not always overtly practised, strict social codes are often at work in an underlying manner (further discussed in Chapter 3). During *kouponi allagis* there were moments when the performers enacted gender separatism, especially at the beginning of our process, by their resistance to make physical contact with the opposite gender. In respecting this stance I included separate duets for the men and the women; as a result the dancers felt more comfortable experimenting with their own movement and took initiative in contributing powerfully and decisively to the material and structure; this anticipated dimension to the research challenged my positionality as facilitator/choreographer (discussed in later chapters) and I ultimately embraced a more 'hands-off' approach in the work, depicted in the following excerpt of a duet.

End of second month of rehearsals, first full run through. Chloe and Eva wait upstage center instead of off stage while men are performing their duet. Seemingly due to boredom, Chloe moves close to Eva and begins stroking and then braiding her long, dark hair. Aware that that this action has now become part of the performance, Eva turns to the left takes a step forward, and Chloe follows. The women continue walking in tandem, slowly enough for Chloe to continue braiding, unbraiding, and again braiding Eva's long, gorgeous hair.

My attention has left the men and is focused fully on the women. I am mesmerised by the simplicity and femininity. The unhurried, sensual moving image is butoh-like. At the same time it bears something Greek and dated, resembling young women in a Minoan wall fresco, a traditional Cypriot wedding dance, a pre-war photograph of schoolgirls, a morning ritual between sisters. After the run both women are ecstatic about their new duet. It is decided by all that the segment, though created at the end of our process and so different in aesthetic from much of the piece, will be included.

In this movement excerpt the clear reference to a traditional practice within the minimal contemporary style is evident. Both dancers turned to an everyday ritual between girls that goes back centuries in Cypriot culture. The task seemed to soothe them and unite them. However, at the same time it can be argued that in engaging spontaneously in this movement sequence Eva and Chloe stepped out of their individual histories as dancers of performing a series of learned steps as a form of entertainment and into a space of innovation and expression that perhaps included their personal histories as people, not only as dancers. As argued by sociologists Steven P. Wainwright and Bryan S. Turner in their research on professional ballet dancers, for a classically trained dancer, 'the steps are literally inscribed into the

dancer's body; in Bourdieu's terms this taken-for-granted aptitude in embodying choreography is the dancer's habitus' (2004: 103). Applying this notion to our movement practice it can be said that Chloe and Eva subverted their habitus by employing original movement vocabulary that was rooted in previous years of individual and communal identity embodiment. Moving into a territory beyond that of learned movement sequences and mechanical performance, into one in which they created their own new movement possibilities, allowed them to become 'reflexive about their habitus' (Wainright and Turner, 2004: 103).

The two women expressed joy and pride when I asked them how they felt about their contribution. In addition Chloe said, 'as we were standing there my body went toward Eva on its own; I started braiding her hair almost involuntarily, and when she took a step forward, I followed'. Eva said it was like being 'taken care of by the older sister she never had' and that she felt like she was 'in a trance'. They both said they were not trying to choreograph the dance, but at the same time they felt like they were fully participating in the performance, and that they were aware they were adding to the choreography. While they did not explicitly mention a conscious deviance from conventional movement, they did describe their sequence as 'different, natural, and unique' and as 'almost magically fitting into the piece'.

V

Choosing a Podium for the Self

Though often situated on a point of instability, loss, or pursuit, from a philosophical standpoint, the construct of self I initially put forth in *kouponi allagis* was not caught

in cyclical existential inquiry. The experience of 'self' in this project is not confined, like that of the isolated characters in Jean-Paul Sartre's classic existential play *Huis Clos* (1944); nor does it emerge from a Dionysian existential fervour, seeking being out of nothingness, as embodied by Friedrich Nietzsche's well-known protagonist, Zarathustra (1883/85)[18]. Moreover, the corporeal self in this work evidently bears no resemblance to the over-rationalised self in René Descartes' logical discourses[19] that doubts existence at large, positing the body as secondary to the mind; rather, as indicated above, notions of self and other in this work best reflect concepts found in phenomenology. The difference between Cartesian and phenomenological views as they pertain to dance is astutely summarised by Albright (2011):

> Generally speaking, phenomenology is the study of how the world is perceived, rather than the study of the essence of things as objects or images or our consciousness. It is a way of describing the world as we live in it – a philosophical approach that positions the body as a central aspect of that lived experience. Flipping Descartes's "cogito" ("I think therefore I am") on its (in)famous head, phenomenology, as developed by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merlau-Ponty, seeks to account for structures of our situated "being in the world."
>
> (Albright, 2011: 2)

At the same time, while a sense of incompleteness regarding Cypriot identity and an ardent desire for expression of the hidden prompted me to devise movement tasks that 'deconstruct in order to reveal' (as I explained to my collaborators), my purpose was not to arrive at a fragmented, eradicated self, conceived by deconstructionists

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[18] From Friedrich Nietzsche's (Translated by Thomas Common) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, New York: Dover Publications 1999.

[19] Here I refer to Descartes' questions on truth, being and existence found primarily in *Discourse on the Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (1637; Trans. 1998, Donald A. Cress, Hackett Publishing; Indianapolis, Indiana) and *Principles of Philosophy* (1644; Wilder Publications, Ltd).

such as Roland Barthes (1977) or Hélène Cixous (1975, 1976). These authors venture to break down the sociopolitically laden act of writing/performing through the very act of writing/performing, pulling apart dominant sociopolitical paradigms and leaving us with a self dis-assembled. In contrast my aim was to harness the fragments and ultimately unify them as a self re-invented. In this sense, the split and under-expressed self I perceived in the process was also an active, adaptable self, engaging wholly in its live-ness by generating through the moving body. The act of collaboration with other live, minded bodies aimed to heighten the transformative potential within individual and relational aspects of self, other and identity.

Dance educator, choreographer and writer Carol Press's description of what she has coined the 'dancing self' (2002) resonates with my perception of the self as it engages with identity during *kouponi allagis*, particularly as our process progresses. In her book *The Dancing Self: Creativity, Modern Dance, Self Psychology and Transformative Education*, Press (2002:1) presents an organically whole version of self through the expressive, moving body, connecting the creative act with a fundamental experience of self. Within the realm of 'creativity as a self-experience', Press proposes the 'dancing self' as a 'metaphor for an individual who feels vitally alive and creatively engaged in the world.' According to Press, 'the dancing self symbolizes the creative individual, supported by society and its educational enterprises, finding and expressing significant meaning' (2002: 15). I suggest that a similar sense of self was experienced by some of the performers, validated by statements such as, 'it's not only an original piece but it feels very meaningful to me to perform as myself', 'I love performing it, I want to keep doing it', 'I feel expressed'.

As Press (2002) explains, the concept of a 'dancing self' she proposes stems from psychological theory, based considerably on Heinz Kohut's contributions between 1959 and 1981 to the field of 'self psychology'; yet it is not a self-analytical or split version of self that psychology often advocates. Psychoanalytic self psychology is a school of psychoanalysis, psychological theory, and therapy created by Heinz Kohut (1901-1981), initially in the tradition of Freud. Concepts fundamental to self psychology include relational analysis, empathy, discerning habits, and mirroring gestures and social behaviour; self psychology recognises certain models of Freudian psychodynamic theory but interprets and applies within a new framework in order to develop an active, unified sense of self and self-worth rather than a passive, split view of oneself (*Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, 4th edition, 2015). In line with this, Press's notion of self is vibrant, whole and dimensional, embodying a range of human experience; the creative moving body is a channel toward an existent self:

> The self – this dynamic experience existing over time, consisting of one's ambitions and one's idealized goals and values, activated by one's talents and skills – leads the healthy individual to establish a program of action, a blueprint of agency, allowing one to feel one's actions resonate with, and enhance, one's sense of self. … The vitality garnered from lived experience depends upon the ability to respond to one's sense of self through action, to find fulfillment and meaning.
>
> (Press, 2002: 52)

Within her discussion of the self as defined above Press (2002) proposes that the creative act of dance should be extended to everyone since all people intrinsically know how to dance, regardless of their perception of that ability and access to opportunity. Importantly, a corresponding belief influenced my inclusion of two non-dancers in *kouponi allagis*. The less trained dancing body often bears more potential

for me in finding alternative expressions self through movement. My view was that a non-dancer would be less likely to rely on stylised, packaged movement and perhaps more easily embrace the idiosyncrasies of one's self. The outcomes and their implications for identity representation are further addressed below.

VI

<u>Self as (In)Visible Voices</u>

Like ancient columns, the performers stand alone, in any facing. They are weathered and bare; they are not to interact or make physical contact with the others; they are not to move from their designated spots, yet they should feel like they are supporting the same structure. Their gestures begin as breaths and develop as natural, pedestrian movement. By repetition of text and gesture, they will reach a peak, the movement bolder, the words louder and louder, talking between and over one another, echoing.

A series of personal declarations, beginning with 'I am...'. After writing several phrases and sharing them with a partner, each performer has chosen three. The short verbal placards are repeated, like mantras, until they extend into related repetitive gestures: 'I am a truck driver; I am OK; Eimai moria / *Είμαι μόρια* (I am cells); Eimai tachinopita / *Είμαι ταχινόπιτα* (I am a tahini pie)[20]; Eimai evlogimeni / *Είμαι ευλογημένη* (I am blessed)[21]; I am NOT THAT.' I try to imagine a natural landscape that embraces these disparate images, without forcing them to connect or complete themselves.

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[20] A large, spiral-shaped traditional Cypriot pastry made of tahini, flour and sugar.
[21] Aside from the standard meaning of 'I am blessed', Eric informed the group after performing his text that this phrase is also a reference to a line spoken by a female actress in a recent popular Greek porn film. The inclusion of the phrase in the piece was meant to be both humorous controversial, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

I notice a hand shifting a gear; a face behind big teeth being brushed; a gentle wave of the arms that, in turn, turns the body; a trembling upright figure falling repeatedly into a sleeping position. I envision individual very bright spotlights above each of the dancers' heads, rendering their bodies ghostlike, their features hollow. I know these four people, yet I am surprised by their declarations. I desire more exposure, utter vulnerability.

They continue the pattern until the phrases transform and move beyond a habitual self, suspended before settling on a something familiar. The dancers are asked to continue the repetitions with no diversions – until they are not the same bodies/words/selves anymore: *Den Eimai | Δεν είμαι | I am not* becomes Den eimai, fainomai. Den fainomai – eimai / *Δεν είμαι, φαίνομαι. Δεν φαίνομαι – είμαι'* (I am not; I seem. I do not seem – I am).[22]

The series of tasks above are from the *I AM Improvisations* (described in Section III; also see *Appendix B*) were practised several times during our rehearsal process. As indicated above, each performer's space was limited to the edges of his or her kinesphere; locomotion through the common space was not permitted. In addition, the dancers were asked to distill their original text to short phrases of up to five words that could easily be repeated and manipulated. A similar approach was taken to the movement, as they were challenged to work only with gesture; in this manner it was hoped that the dancers would each arrive at a series of original fragments that did not resemble a typical or familiar movement style. The resulting idiosyncratic movement and word fragments are symbolic of the parts of our selves that are inconstant, ephemeral and exchangeable, that do not appear as intact images. The *I*

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[22] Text for solo created by Chloe; more will be said on Chloe's text at the end of this chapter as it pertains to displacement and feminine identities.

Am Improvisations therefore offered a framework within which each performer had opportunities to create movement or text that was not reminiscent of typical personal movement tendencies and verbal expression, and then knead it over and over. The aim was to navigate past socially mainstream depictions of self and arrive at unknown and challenging self-images and self-representations.

It is of significance that while I set out to break the participants in *kouponi allagis* free from stereotypes, my expectations were not as unrestricted; as indicated in a series of questions earlier in this chapter, I had imagined that my collaborators would choose distinct, conventional Cypriot prototypes as primary identity molds to fragment and then reassemble. In reflecting on this research process, and having gained access to knowledges previously unrecognised, I can discern that I then viewed Cypriot identity itself as a sort of occupied cultural territory existing in relation to specific, problematic borders, teetering on the edges of a self subsumed by the political state of affairs. I had expected references and debates, in the form of images, gestures and language, about past and present sociopolitical discord in Cyprus. I envisioned references to gender, race and status. I anticipated that the corresponding polarities – Greek vs. Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot vs. Greek Cypriot, male vs. female, Christian vs. Muslim, rich vs. poor (see Chapter 1) – would materialise passionately as central themes in the work. Finally, I had foreseen individual and interpersonal discomfort within the cast in relation to all of the above.

More specifically, one of the topics that was of primary concern to me during the *kouponi allagis* process in 2010 was the hazy yet often unquestioned use of the label 'Greek' in classifying Cypriot culture and ethnicity, and the effects of this ambiguity

within lived Cypriot identities. As outlined in Chapter 1, historically Cyprus has, on the whole, defined itself culturally as Greek though demographically never actually part of the Greek nation. Despite the growing diversity in contemporary Cypriot society that currently houses several ethno-cultural groups other than Greek Cypriot (listed in Chapter 1), the majority of Cypriots still uphold social pillars and belief systems that solidify Cypriot identity as 'Greek'. Greek is the formal language of Cyprus, despite the use of the spoken dialect in everyday personal and professional interactions. The Greek language is thus dominant in all linguistically associated arts and cultural activities, such as literature, music, dance, film, television and social media. Schoolbooks are written in Greek and speeches are delivered in Greek, despite. In addition, Cyprus and Greece share the same faith under the Greek Orthodox Church, as well as religious holidays, festivals and traditions.

Although a historically-based sociocultural connection between the two cultures can be supported by facts it is still the subject of much debate. This political environment is partly the result of families maintaining negativity toward Greece due to allegiance to the leftist party that supports disassociation with Greek history (Papadakis, 2006); conversely, some right-winged groups opt for sociopolitical advantages associated with Greece, such as a European identity (Argyrou, 1996). Both promote their views through their respective political organisations and mainstream media. For the purposes of this research I will not address the origins and development of such relationships between Greece and Cyprus; I will elaborate on significant points related to this connection, such as language and religion, as they appear in the collaborators' shared subjectivities and collective experiences.

VII

The Art of Identity Construction

Certain comments shared by the collaborators in creating *kouponi allagis* seem to problematise Cypriot identity through the relationship between Cyprus/Cypriot and Greece/Greek. Regarding spoken language some cast members insisted that 'Cypriot is not a dialect, it's a language'; two argued that 'certain feelings and ideas can only be expressed in Cypriot' (as opposed to Greek); all agreed that 'Cypriots are Cypriot but also Greek;' and one stated, 'I don't feel Greek'. All four participants stated that 'our proper language (in Cyprus) is Greek.' Eric's decision to recite his text in the Cypriot dialect– rather than Greek or English, though he is fluent in both – may imply his support of sociopolitical outlooks associated with leftist politics (noted above) that reject the idea of Greece as Cyprus's 'motherland' (Papadakis, 2008). Mark's understated, tongue-in-cheek commentary of Cypriot society in his truck driver solo reveals friction between Greek, Cypriot and English spoken in daily communication.

In the view of social anthropologist Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2006) the term 'Greek', which inherently includes the culturally opposing term, 'Turk', belongs to a 'hollow category'. Expanding on the work of Herzfeld (1987) on identity constructs in modern Greece (mentioned in Chapter 2), Theodossopoulos's overall assessment of Greek nationalist identity in Greece, Cyprus and the diaspora is that it contains 'inexhaustible meaning and signification' (2006:2), and thus inadequate:

> So vast is the hollowness of 'Greekness' that it is able to squeeze three millennia of historical information into its timeless, imagined reality. In this respect, its capacity to incorporate new and old ingredients of culture is enormous.
>
> (Theodossopoulos, 2006: 2)

112

Theodossopoulos (2006:3) strongly proposes that, while Greeks, or those who call themselves Greeks, are demographically 'derived from various cultural, social (and, occasionally, ethnic or religious) backgrounds' they 'could be citizens of Greece, Greek Cypriots from the Republic of Cyprus or Greeks, members of the Christian minority on Turkey of the diaspora'. He argues that the term 'Greek' still cannot contain and express all of these realities; fashioned against the permanent backdrop of an opposing other, this category is hollow and flattened, devoid of nuances, individual experience, meaning and meaningfulness (Theodossopoulos, 2006). This empty space also allows for the convenient addition or removal of attributes, either positive or negative, according to situations that arise. Theodossopoulos offers examples of identity symbols often applies to fill the hollow space, such as the notion of sharing the 'same blood'; Theodossopoulos argues that the bonding value of 'blood' in familial relationships as well as in the formation of collective histories is founded on the notion of an 'unchanging eternity' (2006: 4).

These and other 'hollow' categories have been further polarised by Cyprus' ongoing conflict with Turkey, exposing a schism within the Greek Cypriot community. Many Cypriots identify with characteristics of an idealised Greece, a link to Hellenism and the origins of Western Europe, symbolising 'strength, bravery, cleverness, and virtue', and reject or de-emphasise 'eastern' aspects of the culture, that imply 'laziness, hedonism and unrestrained sexuality' (Argyrou, 2006: 41). As mentioned in Chapter 1, nationalistic Hellenism is reinforced in Cypriot society through songs, poems, dances, commemorative rituals and traditions that have been incorporated into educational and government institutions. Hellenism is further disseminated via

annual commemorative rituals glorifying Greek heroes and won battles of the recent past. These performative rites promote a collectively imagined, promised future that links Cyprus with an idealised and heroic Greek nation (Papadakis, 2008).

Karayanni (2006) utilises the lens of institutionalised national folk dances such as the circular *Tsamikos* (Tsa' mi kos/ Τσάμικος) and *Kalamatianos* (Ka la ma tia nos'/ Καλαματιανός) to shed light on the ongoing construction of Greek and Cypriot national identities. Indigenous to the central Greek mainland regions of Attica, Epirus, and the Peloponnese, these dances are still enjoyed during weddings and festivals; however, they are also performed by Greek soldiers during parades, national anniversaries, and military ceremonies as they are symbols of nationalism. Karayanni (2006) argues that the posture and style of national dances kinesthetically embody the glorified Greek ideals presented above. The stature is upright and proud; the torso is straight; the gestures of the legs are gracefully bold; the steps of the feet are light yet strong. Movement patterns are circular or linear and travel in an orderly and symmetrical pattern, with little improvisation. The variations of the dances, usually performed by the leader, are strictly divided in terms of gender. Men are allowed large steps, high kicks, jumps, backbends, and flips, often accompanied by loud, enthusiastic cries of 'Ah!' or 'Opa!'. Conversely, when a woman is leading, she must keep her steps small, modest, and close to ground. Female variations consist of coupling with the woman second in line or performing reserved turns while waving a handkerchief. Strong, gallant men and dainty demure women dance in one circle but with distinct movement qualities. Proud, strong, men and proud, demure, women: ideal gender representations in nationalistic Hellenist culture.

With Cyprus's liberation from the British Regime, as part of the same nationalist agenda, many Greek dances were incorporated by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture into the public educational system. The agenda was twofold, both in an effort to solidify Cyprus's kinship with Greece and to reinforce Cyprus's Greek identity (Karayanni, 2006). The Greek traditional dances mentioned above, alongside some other Greek and Cypriot dances, are still taught under the Elementary School Physical Education curriculum; in fact traditional dance is the still the only dance form integrated into the school curriculum in Cyprus (information derived from the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture website, online). Since their use in national ceremonies, the nuances and dynamics of the dances have been distilled, particularly when compared to the livelier, more individualised versions danced at weddings and parties. As suggested by dance scholar Anthony Shay (2006), the dancer loses the individual somatic voice as the folk traditions are streamlined and marketed for mass consumption. The mandatory inclusion of Greek dances in the Cypriot public school system as a fitness genre as well as a cultural tool has further distilled the dances. They are commonly altered, taught without detail, or separated from their initial purpose. These Greek dances are often the only experience of traditional dance many young people will have in Cyprus; precisely for this reason, the value system at hand is even more poignantly solidified (Karayanni, 2006).

Karayanni (2006: 122) goes on to state than in accordance with Eurocentric values, 'Oriental'[23] dances, such as the *Tsiftete'li* (Tsif te te' li/Τσιφτετέλι)', a Greek/Turkish version of middle eastern belly dance, 'were excised from Greek national repertoire';

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[23] As mentioned in other chapters of the thesis, Karayanni's frequent use of the tem 'Oriental' is meant by the author to invoke the exotic, alienating, foreign, seductive and decadent implications inherent on this term (Karayanni, 2006).

Greece's eastern heritage was either buried or rejected as Ottoman/inauthentic, arguing that during the second part of the twentieth century, folklore – in the forms of music, dance and poetry – was employed in various governmental and educational institutions with a partial agenda of obscuring the Oriental and 'decadent' Greek dances. In this manner more value would be given to the noble, majestic and somber dances (described above) that are linked to ancient ancestors still equated with western social norms. As a result of 'westernised' Greek values, male folk dances that involve shoulder shimmies or hip gyrations were hidden or completely removed from the folklore. A similar fate has been endured by the female performance of *tsifteteli*; generally interpreted as exhibiting female sexuality or a woman's pleasure in one's own sexual expression, the dance is viewed as fostering behaviours that proper girls and women should not partake in publicly. Conversely, Karayanni (2006: 133) contents that a 'contemporary approach that wants to confine this dance to an exuberant expression of joy, or, more commonly, female seductive charm and sexual playfulness or coyness cannot be taken as absolute and needs to be challenged'.

There are a few key reasons why Karayanni's research on embodied male sexualities and identities in traditional dance is relevant to this project. First, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Karayanni is perhaps the only Cypriot scholar that approaches identity by situating the body at the crux of the academic research. Weaving literature from various disciplines with a somatic experience of identity drawn from testimonies of dancers (including his own), Karayanni points at gender stereotypes (as indicated above) that appear in certain dances. Such constructs not only limit one's personal expression within the dance but obstruct one's sense and ownership of embodied

identity, as well as the potential to re-define and re-discover identity in the course of the dance with other dancing or spectating bodies.

Secondly, Karayanni engages the dancing self as a prism for post-colonialism. Though Cyprus is in some ways isolated as a small Mediterranean island, it has been a nation exposed to repeated attack and conquest throughout several centuries (Christofides, 2007). A great many forms of cultural expression have been imported and transplanted into Cypriot society, both as a natural result of immigrant communities and also as a scheme designated to bring the culture closer to that of the coloniser. More recently, following the entrance of Cyprus into the European Union in May of 2004, an internal movement to modernise, or further westernise Cyprus in line with European and global standards has added to the existing confusion concerning the notion of 'cultural authenticity' (Argyrou, 2006). It seems that certain foreign cultural elements have assimilated into Cypriot culture over time; some are welcomed and rapidly incorporated into daily sociocultural reality; yet others are viewed as a threat and attempts are made by individuals or groups to extricate them from daily life.

Beliefs expressed by the performers during group reflection sessions depict various perspectives regarding these external influences. Some comments addressed the effects of post-colonialism on Cyprus: 'We are an isolated culture'; 'We have been conquered too many times'; 'Anything foreign/European is considered cool and anything English is seen as upper-class'. Other statements alluded to the tension between tradition and modernity: 'Women are discoursed to study dance because they will be viewed in a certain way'; 'Cypriots are largely conformists'; the divorce rates are out of control because young people are pressured to marry and have

children by a certain age'. Other feedback displayed a rebellious reaction to tradition and the status quo: 'We need art to open their minds'; 'I always wear ripped jeans on purpose to older relatives' houses to shock them'; 'I don't care what other people think of me'. This divergence regarding varying modes of personal and collective cultural beliefs and practices creates discord within one's identity and, in turn, one's relationship to the body as a means of self-expression and cultural embodiment.

A third aspect of Karayanni's work that bears significance for this research concerns the traditional dance forms that have been blacklisted because they embrace sensuality and celebrate sexuality. Shunning or shaming this characteristic of the dance lies in contradiction with the modern identity embodied by social dance forms that openly exhibit sexuality, like club dancing. This issue often came to the surface in *kouponi allagis* (and the two subsequent choreographic works, discussed in later chapters); some dancers feared that a danced identity that included sexuality would stigmatise them socially or render them morally inferior (see Chapter 3).

Lastly, Karayanni addresses the shifting, or absence of, borders concerning the incorporation of new and external elements into Cypriot daily life and culture. Again, resulting from either colonisation or globalisation, Cyprus historically has been put in the position of having to absorb the other, or the coloniser. Imported cultural systems, beliefs and languages ultimately become both vital forms of expression for Cypriots as well as points of inner schism. One such 'imported' movement language for Cyprus is contemporary dance, as discussed earlier in this chapter; this dance form does not yet reside in the realm of the dancers' habitus, as they do not display a characteristic ease that, as Bourdieu states (1990:66), 'goes without saying'.

VIII

Mirror of the West: A Hazy Reflection

Bhabha (1994) presents the merging of identity with the image of self as a Western phenomenon that defines the experience of migrant and postcolonial identity. He argues that 'this image of human identity, and, indeed, human identity as *image* – both familiar frames or mirrors of selfhood that speak from deep within Western culture – are inscribed in the sign of resemblance (Bhabha, 1994: 49). I link this notion with my view that imitation – as opposed to a more organic practice of embodied integration – of Western ideals and semblances is the biggest blockade against the blooming of a more genuine or authentic Cypriot identity. As mentioned above, the conflict between tradition and modernity within the Cypriot sense of 'self' still bears the effects of a recent and rather lengthy postcolonial era. The near-century of British rule (1878-1960) has left a double residue on Cypriot identity. Quite common in post-colonial societies, the formerly colonised feel a deep-rooted intimacy and identification with the coloniser, not only because daily life was once affected by the coloniser's traditions, values and language, but due to a longing to be a part of the 'superior' culture. In the case of Cyprus, like India and other former British colonies, the longing to identify with a 'dream-England' or the West, as proposed by writer Salman Rushdie (1991) is silently implanted (Argyrou, 2006).

Simultaneously, however, there is contempt for the coloniser who has culturally and geographically 'raped' the homeland and culture. Consequently, as Argyrou (1996) contends, many Cypriots shun the dominant British, or, more recent European and global cultures, by holding tightly onto traditional customs and beliefs on an attempt

to preserve 'authentic' Cypriot identity and culture. Argyrou (1996) states that tugging in the other direction are the Cypriots who have cultivated access and allegiance to European cultures and value systems, either through travel, education or the media, exhibiting a strong desire to embrace 'modernity' and the West, and an identity based on mainstream bourgeois ideals; still others exhibit a mixture of the two behaviours. It can be argued that within both of these two opposing paradigms psychic freedom from the coloniser is unattainable. The desired foreign cultural commodities can never be fully acquired since they are still transplanted seeds that have not grown out of or fully into the culture. On the other hand, disdain for the former colonising culture does diminish its dominant force, but rather validates and perpetuates its presence (Argyrou, 2006; Theodossopoulos, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, some of the performers' feedback during *kouponi allagis* confirms the felt presence of a former coloniser. Some potent comments include: 'We are typically post-colonial; that's why we don't easily express our emotions'. Regarding a growing immigrant population in Cyprus, differing views were offered; 'Foreigners have more rights than Cypriots – they get all the government money' and alternatively, 'there is too much racism'. At the end of the discussion, Eric offered to sum it all up, declaring 'we definitely have an identity crisis going on'.

IX

Merging Languages: Words, Gestures,Touch

> A different language is a different vison of life.
>
> – Frederico Fellini (online)

Language is perhaps the most significant component in the making of *kouponi allagis*. Various languages were implemented, including improvised spoken text, set written and spoken autobiographical excerpts, as well as gesture, facial expressions, and the collaborative somatic language of contact duets and group sections. It is important to look at each language separately, as well as the interplay between the spoken, written and somatic languages, as each form of expression contributed in a unique manner to the exploration and representation of identity.

Several of the rehearsal excerpts reconstructed in descriptions above depict the imaging of self through the use of gesture as language, or spoken text that informs and is informed by gesture. Improvised gesturing was a central focus in *kouponi allagis* in an attempt to espouse what I call the 'inside-out' expressive nature of gesture, and its potential in conveying meaning in a powerful and simple manner.

> If we are going to look for the *in*ward movement tendencies of danced gesturing, we might do best to look at the mark they leave not on the space surrounding their actions or the eyes watching them but upon the bodies that are their medium. The dancer's body can be seen to form the "host material", a living, tissue, for the dance's gestural inscriptions. Its anatomy provides the "sites" or "places" where gesture can leave its mark in the rendering of a "final form" – that is, in a structure that bears an enduring and permanent signifying character.
>
> (Ness, 2008: 6)

In arriving at gestures and gestural phrases derived from every-day, pedestrian movement, the collaborators in *kouponi allagis* were given an opportunity to employ the language of gesture in building a vocabulary for their autobiographical vignettes. This resulted in very personal, original, and vulnerable gestural collages that served

as a basis for further inscription, and re-inscription, of personal identity. Through altering, sharing and manipulating their gestures, the dancers arrived at a 'new movement grammar'; within this framework, the performers' gestural phrases held meaning for their own lived identities as well as in relation to the concept and aesthetic of the work on the whole.

On the other hand, spoken language plays a key role in affirming and disclosing specific ambiguities in Cypriot identity. In everyday speech, most Cypriots alternate between three languages – Modern Greek, the Greek-Cypriot dialect, and English – often within a single phrase. English, of course, having gained prominence and prestige due to colonialism, now serves both practicality and privilege in the age of globalism. The Greek language, of course, has much deeper roots. According to linguist Lydia Sciriha (1996), who has conducted a unique study on the contemporary identity issues surrounding the Cypriot dialect, most Cypriots use the term 'Greek' to describe both Modern Greek and the native dialect, seeing few variations. The shared (official) language with Greece enables Cypriots to attend Greek public university and enjoy employment opportunities as well as other privileged exchanges that reinforce the kinship and idea of sameness between the two nations. While the view of Greece as a 'motherland' evokes pride and belonging in many, others experience Cyprus as a separate land and culture; still others identify with both Greek and Cypriot culture, as distinct but connected (Papadakis, 2008).

It is therefore significant to mention that while the syntax and vocabulary of the Greek-Cypriot dialect is, to a large extent, based on Classical Greek, resulting in both similarities and differences with Modern Greek, it has also absorbed words and

sounds from Turkish, Arabic, Italian, English and other languages (Sciriha, 1996). During the making of *kouponi allagis* we often referred to the Cypriot dialect as a language. This is not uncommon for Greeks, as many inconsistencies between the Cypriot dialect and the Greek language render the dialect incomprehensible to most native Greeks. For example, the sounds of *'sh'*, *'j'* and *'ch'* do not exist in Modern Greek, affecting both the pronunciation and intonation of certain words that, ehen written, look similar; in addition, the differences in grammar, syntax and vocabulary, the most prominent being the reversal of the noun and verb in sentence structure (as in Classical Greek), causes confusion for Greeks. As a result, most native speakers of Greek are not likely to discern nuances, behaviours and implied historical narratives in the Greek-Cypriot dialect (Sciriha, 1996).

Aware of the Cypriot ease in mixing languages I did not place any restrictions on the language choices of the performers at any point in *kouponi allagis*. Beyond enjoying the variety I considered the use of language a key factor in terms of a sociocultural, and often political, positioning of the self. This led me to wonder language affects Cypriots on a daily basis, whether having access to three linguistic routes – the Cypriot dialect, proper Greek, and English – allows for more accurate expression of what is being stated, or a way to evade or simplify uncomfortable topics, or both. In the *'I Am' Improvisations* I observed that language seemed to function as a point of disclosure, alternating between being a cloak sheltering the performers from over-exposure and an aid in honest self-expression.

Eric, for example, in speaking the Cypriot dialect, pronounces the word *tachino'pita* (ta hi no' pi ta/ταχινόπιτα) with the Cypriot pronunciation in which the *'ch'* is said as

'sh' /ta**sh**inopita - as opposed to 'h' / ta**h**inopita in Modern Greek. As mentioned above, this choice can be viewed as an emphasis on Cypriot over Greek culture, reflecting a leftist position that rejects nationalist constructs in the politics of Cypriot identity. In contrast to the traditional theme and pronunciation of the text, Eric's accompanying movement, though meant to literally resemble the round shape of the pastry he refers to, is quite contemporary. His extended arm gestures that circle symmetrically around his body in a wheel-like momentum coupled with his neutral stare toward the audience are modern and minimal. This contrast draws attention to the merging of tradition with outside influences, adding another layer to his subtle commentary. Mark's approach to language in his solo can also be viewed as a remark on the daily use of language in Cyprus. In his monologue as a self-proclaimed 'truck driver', he speaks loudly, in English, with a deep voice and a macho American twang; as this caricature of himself, he resembles a western male prototype, an American cowboy or truck driver. His overdone accent in combination with the deviation from stereotypical Cypriot male representations accentuates both the foreign aspect of English in daily speech and his ease in speaking English.

The female performers in the cast, Chloe and Eva, opt for more abstract, evasive statements, with corresponding movement in which they are facing down or hiding themselves with their own body parts. Chloe repeats the words 'ei'mai mo'ria (είμαι μόρια'/ meaning I am molecules) in Greek only three times during the entire piece; her face is, for the most part, behind her arm and her minimal gestures keep her in close contact with the ground. Similarly, Eva's core statement, 'I am OK', is spoken with an internal quality in a downward facing, as if there is no audience. She repeats

the phrase in rhythm with a gestural spiral that ultimately becomes stuck in a contorted twist. The meaning of her words is then gradually subverted by the increasing volume and intensity in her voice, altering into a series of a declarative and periodically choppy 'I am NOT THAT'.

Eva's use of English plays a different role than that of Mark; as she shared during a group reflection, English in this case protects her from being vulnerable, covering her emotions in a type of verbal shroud. This hiding is also evident in her movement choices, as she often looks down or away from the spectators, her arms gesturing around her body and face, in solace from the outside world. Interestingly, Chloe's use of Greek for her verbal phrase accomplished the same task; as she stated during a discussion, when speaking Greek she felt less like herself and also created a 'proper distance' from the audience. It seems that Chloe uses language to set borders to her identity and immediate environment, restraining disclosure. She discards the more literal text created during improvisations, such as 'I am my mother's daughter', and 'I am light' and opts for abstract phrases such as 'I am NOT/I seem' (translated from the Greek) that indicate she may not really be there, as if dwelling in the 'hollow space' of identity discussed earlier (Theodossopoulos, 2006).

In considering the dancers' self-designed solos it can be argued that some images and words in the gestural sections of the '*I AM*' *Improvisations*, if viewed as slivers of a greater whole, embody a merging of the opposing forces within Cypriot society, such as East/West and tradition/modernity. In using spoken and corporeal language to test and shift the borders between these and other polarised traits, mobility and closer proximity between representations of self are achieved. This transience was

also seen in the performers' empathetic response to the others' *'I AM'* solos, (see descriptions below). Our effort to locate and transcend the borders of self and other revealed both the difficulties and potential hidden in the notion of borders. Papadakis centralises this issue; in his extensive work on ethnic conflict, nationalism, separatism and social memory, borders are sites of incursion and transformation:

> Bhabha (1994) has spoken of the creative possibilities of "third spaces," that is spaces which do not conform with binary oppositions. Cyprus itself could be examined as a kind of "third space" between Greece and Turkey, Islam and Christianity, and a number of other, as self-evident and as rigidly defined, binary oppositions. Within Cyprus, the "Wall," the "Dead Zone," or the "Green line" is Cyprus's emblematic "third space" and this work is itself proof of the creative and constructive potential which such spaces can also offer.
>
> (Papadakis, 1997: 238-239)

The experience of borders not as only as a 'Dead Zone", as termed by Papadakis, but as a point that protects us from yet connects us to a simultaneously threatening and exciting other world is ever-present in Cypriot society. Papadakis (1997) employs Bhabha's term (2004) 'third space' to describe a zone where one can project and negotiate conflicting concepts. Not only is the 'Cyprus Problem' a main issue in the media, but the Turkish flag imprinted on occupied territory on the 'other side', lit up at night to be visible, physically reminds one of the presence of a foreign, possibly dangerous 'other'. All sentiments linked to the split, even contradictory ones, are evoked and re-lived on a perpetual basis. Borders like the Green Line[24], empty psychic spaces, emotionally and psychically symbolise conflict and reconciliation.

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[24] As discussed in earlier chapters, the Green Line is the demilitarised United Nation Nations Buffer Zone bordering on the Republic of Cyprus and the northern Turkish occupied territory.

> Borders are sites that embody different potentialities: division and contact, conflict and cooperation, security and anxiety, creativity and oppression, among others … they are sites of the paradoxical. Paradox … is the common overarching conceptual characteristic of borders but which specific potentialities are embodied in a border and what prevails as a result of the ensuing power struggles requires contextual specificity.
>
> (Papadakis, 2018:1)

Similarly, our internal and interpersonal borders vacillate from public/traversable and private/untouchable. They can demarcate a no-man's land, a shared, visible, lived space, or, as Papadakis and Bhabha suggest, a third space. Who designates the borders of our selves? Are they meant to be crossed in the journey toward identity? Perhaps a border exists only when it is noticed. As we settled into collaboration and contact during *kouponi allagis*, we ascertained that borders are both provocative springboards and transient spaces for redefining our selves and others. In one sense borders are necessary. Identities can be grasped and obtain form on a border, as the point of reference in the ongoing dialogue between self and other, internal or external. Around that stable point, interpersonal politics are more securely exercised and renegotiate; perspectives are altered and various vantage points are explored.

X

Identity as Collaboration

Eric's tachinopita suddenly leaps into Mark's arms, intent on maneuvering a huge, invisible truck. Eric is committed to his wheel-like pastry shape through flight and landing – a struggle for Mark. While Eric is lighter and significantly smaller than his partner, his stiff body is uncompromising. In order for the duet to continue in contact both sides must alter their course. This requires a shift – a collaboration.

As the improvised duet progresses roles are exchanged. Mark accepts Eric's physical invitation to contact-based weight bearing, allowing Eric to lift him. Eric accomplishes the lift with difficulty; a smirk reveals he is pleased with himself. Eric holds onto his control of the relationship, and ultimately brings Mark to the ground. Spontaneously, Eric decides to sit on him; Mark looks defeated. With a calm yet cocky composure, Eric continues his monologue. I am disturbed by the power struggle. This time, the subject of identity is tackled with a humorous yet confrontational style, directed to the audience.

As we combined the solos we merged and exchanged identities, as the title of the piece suggests, and it became evident that practice-based knowledge was now a discernable component of the research. Obtained through dancing or dance-making (introduced at length in Chapter 1), in which the collaborative act of creation and performance, either as practice-as-research or choreography, can lead to the acquisition of 'phronetic insight' (Pakes, 2009: 19); or, as Brown (2011) argues, corporeal knowledge emerges through subversive act of collaboration, challenging participants to be present in the moment and discard or accept pieces of themselves in the shared dance. Further along these lines, in her recent collection of essays Albright (2013) augments previous arguments regarding the link between cultural identity and bodily experience by advocating the importance of the materiality of dancing bodies as a basis for the discovery and development of new, critical theories in dance and identity representation. Our collaborative work explored the perpetual relational status of the body and the potential for discovery through interaction of relational bodies. In his keynote speech for the Dance/Body at the Crossroads of Culture Conference (Nicosia, Cyprus, 2011) entitled *Reconfiguring the Politics of Interculturality in Dance* Bharucha discusses identity as a 'physicalisation of culture':

> Culture is not a static thing but a dialogue. … There is no body that is not relational. So what, then, does physical isolation or restriction of movement mean? How is one defined in this manner? With respect to whom? …Movement offers the possibility of entering another's physical geography without the absoluteness that verbal communication requires or entails.
>
> (Bharucha, 2011, Nicosia, Cyprus)

Isolating movement may succeed in controlling movement, its audience, and to a certain degree, views of self and other. However, restriction of movement cannot stop the imagination; limitations often cause a self or body to seek interaction or union with an other. As revealed by the dancers' movement/text choices and feedback in *kouponi allagis*, restricted, minimal gestures and imposed isolation in the space led them to seek communion and community. Their choices were molded by a real or imagined other while dancing alone; they felt dimensional and transient knowing that they were sensed by others, as in the excerpt below.

Eva's place, the place she has chosen, is upstage left. She is half hidden by the other bodies on stage. She is crouched and contorted; an elbow protrudes upwards, a knee protrudes outwards, her face tucked under her arm like broken wing. A dry, flat voice is heard: *I am ok.* Pause. *I am ok.* She twists and repeats a bit louder: I am OK. Emphasis on *OK.* Twist, contort, repeat: *I am OK. OK.* Much louder, with strong breath: *I AM OK.* Twist again: *I AM OK!*

Suddenly, as if she has located a peephole under her arm, Eva adjusts her rhythm and shapes to the other bodies in the space; she mirrors gestures and fills in the gaps. As her movements become sharper and quicker, her face emerges, accompanied by a new declaration: I AM NOT THAT. Panting, she cries I AM NOT THAT over and over, as if pleading to be understood by the others.

Eva seems to exist in a space of 'non-being'; she does not tell us what she is, or even what she is not. By desperately repeating 'I am not that' she indicates that the thing she is *not* is negative, undesirable, or even shaemeful – that she is not what people think she is, and she wants us to know that and accept her. Alternatively, Eric's phrase, 'I am what you want me to be' followed by 'είμαι ευλογημένη /ei'mai evlogime'ni (again, meaning 'I am blessed', in a feminine voice, with reference to a female porn star) Eric plays on the desire of the audience by offering to be what they want him to be. He also portrays himself as desirable, or 'blessed', generating chuckles with the gender switch. At the same time, like Eva, there is an invisibleness in the identity representation, brought forth by Eric, an open-endedness. The verbal content and sincere performance quality of his phrase also demonstrates a need for acceptance by a greater whole, a community, contrary to the arrogance and consciousness of power he enacted in his duet with Mark.

Within a shared physicalised realm, sociopolitical and cultural issues tend to appear much like interdependent, organic counterparts, supporting or debilitating a greater whole, like a limb or a breath. Typically heated topics do not bear the same weight or commitment as they would in verbal dialogue, for they fluidly vacillate and modify along with movement, gesture, breath, contact. Feelings like desire, fear, love and curiosity repeatedly expressed by the participants during discussions call attention to the shared humanity of the experience, rather than a focus on differences of opinion on a political scale. The journal excerpts below written approximately five weeks into *kouponi allagis* reflect on the performers' thematic choices regarding identity, and their relationship to self and other, and their approach to sociopolitical issues:

As the weeks go by I am surprised to see that the performers are not overtly stating anything, either in movement or language, specifically relating to what I consider stark aspects of Cypriot society – a political position, an allegiance to a political party, or an opinion on the Cyprus issue; expressions reflecting the oppression of women/strict gender roles/marriage; loyalty to or rejection of Greek culture or Greece as the 'motherland' and all that implies; clear views on tradition vs. modernity in everyday life; relationship of Cypriot culture to a 'European' one.

26/10/10
While I am noticing subtle references to sociopolitical issues, like Eric's militaristic list of personal information or Mark's worn look as he states 'I am a father', what I am really seeing/hearing is a group of people that are affected by the circumstances that affect all citizens of today's world. Questions like 'Who am I? Is anyone interested in me? Can anyone hear me? Am I good enough? How can I resolve my mistakes? Will anyone ever truly love me? Does anyone really want to touch me or be touched by me?' are at the forefront of their written and spoken expression. Emotions like passion, fear, joy and grief are inside their movement. Maybe the aspects of Cypriot identity that I see as primary are secondary or even farther removed from what actually concerns the dancers. My views on identity differ from those of the people at hand...

Looking back now I discern an unanticipated plethora of live bodies, many more than four, interacting and self-expressing in a trusting manner, embarking on a journey toward a utopic, apolitical self, free of borders, constraints and labels. As they shared opinions and desires more openly, they carved their own path. Eva feels free to describe Chloe's movement as 'happy, warm and sweet, so sweet she almost fooled me; but I saw the inner turmoil'. Chloe describes Eva's in through a haiku:

spinal twisting,
shells surrounding curves:
out comes a lion.

Eric states, 'we are ready to explore collective identity' explaining that he has enjoyed working alone but feels the need to explore the topics with the others. Mark often sheds tears of joy and relief during practices as he is able to express himself in a welcoming space. Gently and gradually, the performers claim the right – within the creative practice – to their individual experiences, their identities. Their softer, open bodies and unique, ripe gestures reflect a sincere attempt to reach a way of relating to self and other that does not rely on social expectations or imposed canons.

XI

Filling the Hollow Space of Identity

> As a choreographer I search for those moments when gestures take on a life of their own, when they, rather than 'I' become the performance.
> — Carol Brown (2003, online)

> Why does the faintly penciled person fail to catch your eye? What is the secret of Invisibleness that enables the woman migrant to look without being seen?
> — Homi Bhabha (1994: 47)

Corporeal and academic research during *kouponi allagis* has led me to conclude that any *one* definition of Cypriot identity, even if based on diversity, and even when disclosing varying strands of representation within a group, is not only invalid but largely incongruent with the *actual experience of identity*. In daily life, identity is anything but static; rather, it is re-lived and re-situated on a moment-to-moment basis. A similar experience was evoked during *kouponi allagis*, in a compressed and intense manner through the use of gesture, and, as discussed above, in a form of minimalistic personal narrative.

In the case of *kouponi allagis,* if, as Brown (2003) suggests, the performers become their gestures, what does each self become in comparison to what it was? What do the gestures, as Ness (2008) proposes, symbolise in terms of the inner self? And if the stage is a place of transformation where the 'performer can open his universe to the destinies of others' (Brown, 2003, online) then the stage can also serve as a location where the performer can unleash unexpected encounters with his/her own plethora of others housed within the self. Assuming that this is the case, then various internal others may take on a form ranging between the idealised and grotesque, personifying fears and dreams; in sharing them or exchanging them through the embodiment of the other's movement each self may surpass their preconceived boundaries. In this way the hollow spaces of identity begin to be filled with new, raw material, and stereotypes disappear quickly, like shadows in the light.

As I watch the four artists before me following my cues I fear dictating their reality. Maybe I will move with them to see what it feels like, enter their space, become a fifth column. Or the walls bridging them, the memories inside. Perhaps it is time to remove some support and see what happens to the structure... yes, I can be a type of annihilating, destructive force – it would be expressive of my state as well. *Not to be me today*, oppressed by this small-town society. But that may be an imposition...

Switch tasks. Follow the leader. This time, I join. Several me's become me as I grow huge like an inflated monster and then shrink in to a slinky, sexy, frail body. I am hoping for change. Change me. (Ex)change me? Yes, please. Trade a leg for an arm, my lips for your breasts. Make me sweeter, freer, happier. Complete me. Make me into a complete version of me. I step back as dancers become even larger than me.

And as these live bodies continue to move/dance, I wonder, is all of this 'truly' them, or a self that is more safely expressed through the mask we wear on stage? Are they 'letting go'? Of what? Are they afraid of themselves or one another? Very likely, and this may change over time. But I am having trouble expressing my thoughts in words, and my internal dialogue unfolds as a type of self-defeating critical review, unintended and unmanageable. I have never done something like this before, use dance as research. The reason I have loved dance all my life is because, up until now, there were no words.

The questions 'Who am I? Where am I? How can I find the real/the rest of me?' that inspired this creative undertaking clearly presuppose that I/you, or a part of me/you, is *missing*. As such, the very act of seeking identity rests upon *the location of a lack*, or a break in the whole; the excavation for a hidden or invisible part of me/you/us is therefore launched. What generates an 'incomplete' perception of self or other? How does 'incompleteness' manifest in the context of performed movement? Can one ever be whole? What would that resemble or signify? Can many selves interact?

If an impetus for creating *kouponi allagis* was my curiosity regarding the prospect of finding missing parts of ourselves and our identities, can one locate the geographical, sociopolitical, and interpersonal borders that prevented one from being whole and original? It can be said that the phenomenon of 'a missing self' stems from a postcolonial and politically conflicted discourse. A self that feels incomplete obtains a form through a semblance of what one should be or look like. A flattened self such as this perhaps reflects a sense of cultural displacement or of residing 'in between cultures' (Bhabha, 1994, 2013). Interestingly, an allusion to being invisible appeared in the original text of all four participants in *kouponi allagis*.

In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha identifies the notion of the 'missing person', a perceived invisibility within a postcolonial or migrant paradigm:

> The familiar space of the Other (in the process of identification) develops a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject. There emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot 'see me', a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the Self.
>
> (Bhabha, 1994: 47)

Bhabha positions the uprooted subject inside a narrative of negation, disappearance, or *semblance of*. The subject is not aware of his/her invisibleness, yet he/she acts upon that state and takes advantage of being unseen in order to more fully see and become. In this adverse way he/she morphs into a semblance of what he/she is supposed to be within the dominant sociocultural discourse. The splitting of the self or the self unseen relies on the gaze of an other to sense its existence or become whole; this effort occurs several times in *kouponi allagis*, appearing in both text and movement, as in the case of Eva and Eric above. The following segment created by Chloe embodies invisibleness, in contrast to her confident and extroverted persona:

Δεν είμαι, φαίνομαι
Δεν φαίνομαι – είμαι

(Den ei'mai, fa'inomai
Den fai'nomai – ei'mai)

I am not; I seem
I do not seem – I am (my translation)

As she repeats these words several times, with breath and rhythm, Chloe revolves swiftly around herself in a standing or lying down position, the vertical shape flipped horizontally.

With each repeated verbal fragment, 'I am not/Δεν είμαι', she changes levels and facings, either falling or rising. It is as if something is happening *to* her, not *by* her; equally present in each facing, she seems to be dancing for someone opposite her. Relief is sensed by me as she retracts and begins falling toward the floor; but before she collapses on her back, Eva spontaneously runs toward her and inserts her head in the hollow space of Chloe's lower back, perhaps to break the fall. In line with their previous relationship, Chloe is on top, dominant over Eva.

Alternatively, the notion of seeming as opposed to being, coupled with Chloe's evasive movement, can be seen as reminiscent of Zen Buddhism, where the self is transended. As mentioned above, after about a month of working individually and in pairs, the desire to explore collective identity was expressed Eric; the rest of the cast was keen on the idea. The first attempts were awkward, both aesthetically and physically, as the dancers had primarily been working individually. Furthermore, the members of the group did not spend time together outside rehearsals or university courses, perhaps inhibiting making contact in the dancing.

Dance scholar Filippos Filippou's fieldwork-based study on collective identity focuses on Greek Dance performances in modern society. Although Filippou researches a different dance genre, his approach to collective identity is applicable to the live bodies in this project, as they are rooted in a very similar traditional culture that has recently been affected by modernity. He suggests that 'the collective identity of a group is formed over common experiences they go through as well as the global climate of the social situation that defines individual and joint activities' (Filippou, 2010: 216). According to performance theorist William Schechner (2003) identity

manifests as part of daily social life that functions as a type of theatre, and the confirmation of collective identity is dependent on the presence of the spectator. Regarding this perspective, Filippou argues that rather than the gaze or view of the spectator, important factors influencing Greek dance performed in more traditional communities are 'local geographical isolation, the particular historical background and local customs' and that 'in the fast-moving world … the formation of identity becomes more complicated and occurs at a personal level only' (2010: 216).

It can be said that that all of the above perspectives concerning collective identity were at play in *kouponi allagis*, dwelling at the interface of tradition and modernity in Cyprus. As the dancers performed their individual sequences, I acted as spectator, giving meaning to the process as receptor of what they communicated. In the duet framework identities were shared and molded, and validation occurred as mirroring, assimilation, and interchange of identity embodiments. Within the context of communal expression of identity, one requested by the dancers – perhaps due to a central communal aspect in Cypriot society – the bodies seemed to take solace in one another, shapes conformed to support other shapes, and the focus boldly turned outward. As the group experienced itself as a community, collaboration became smoother; choreographic initiatives and democratic decisions were taken to establish the presence of collective identity as parallel and of equal importance to individual identity embodiments for the spectator.

In this chapter I have shown ways in which the body and bodily expression serve as a crossroads for the multiple aspects of sociocultural identity in Cyprus. Through an intensive, collective choreographic endeavour, the four participants of *kouponi*

allagis and I, the facilitator, have identified ways in which the strata of socialisation, fragmentation and de-centralisation leave deposits on a live body. These same elements, experienced in a number of specific ways daily, simultaneously provide the material landmarks and diverse topography that make up the self in a physical, sentient world beyond that body. Identity, perpetually unfixed, marks the shifting borders of this corporeal map that can lead us toward the multiple facets and versions of our self and of others. The journey into one's identity, or multiple identities, through individual and collective inquiry, reveals an undemarcated and undiscovered habitat that challenges its very topography. Shared via a unique autogeographic language, each journey in *kouponi allagis* houses material and territorial elements particular to each live body and its relationships.

XII

<u>Epilogue # 3</u>

Πού να μαζεύεις
Τα χίλια κομματάκια
Του κάθε ανθρώπου
          – Γιώργος Σεφέρης

How can one collect
The thousand tiny pieces
Of each human being
          – George Seferis
          (my translation)

          – From *Sixteen Haiku* in *Giorgos Seferis: Poems* (1945/2004)

Chapter 3

ap'to plevro enos antra: Feminine Spaces/Women's Places

I

<u>A Bowl of Forbidden Fruit</u>

Under a dim spotlight appears the silhouette of a woman standing upstage center, her back to us. After a few moments it becomes clear that she is turning her head, in butoh-like slowness, her torso following. As her figure settles in full profile, we notice her midriff: round, smooth, protruding, wrapped in a red silk scarf. She continues to spiral, twisting as far as she can until her body snaps back, arms swaying as an afterthought.

Arriving at stillness she begins the sequence again, repeating it several times, gaining momentum and breathing more heavily each time. Reaching a limit, she suddenly runs toward us, frantically waving her arms up in a staccato rhythm, gasping as if trying to say something. No response, and she runs in the other direction; more running and waving, and she seems to hit a wall. Yet she goes back down the first path even faster, with a stronger desire to be heard, and a deeper frustration at the silence.

I worry that the exertion is taking a toll on her body, the body housing her unborn baby. I have seen this solo many times and I am still riveted – the sincerity of emotion does not wane with each run. What causes this woman to flail her arms so desperately? Why are her cries mute? She stretches her head to look up as if in prayer, arching her back as much as her belly allow; unruffled, she then walks toward a large wooden armchair centre stage. [25]

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[25] As in the previous chapter, all descriptions in bold have been reconstructed from my notes and are in my voice, meant to place the reader in the moment, from my perspective.

This solo opens *ap'to plevro enos andra*, the second choreographic work of *Identity Project.* As mentioned earlier, the carefully chosen title, offered by one of the dancers, is Greek for the phrase 'from the rib of a man' and alternatively, 'at the side of a man'.[26] A previous title that I had proposed, *of apples and other forbidden red things*, is also of significance and will be addressed below in this chapter.

The powerful segment described above was created and performed by Lily, pregnant at the time of our final performance. The material originated from an improvisational task in which the dancers were asked to make a short phrase incorporating three or more daily movements that expressed their 'personal reality of being a woman living in Cyprus'. The dancers drew from their recent and current experiences. Lily's evocative solo embodied longing and desperation, and involved holding and showing her pregnant belly. Interestingly, the other five women in the cast identified with it although none had ever been pregnant, and unanimously agreed to open the piece with it. During a discussion some participants shared that Lily's pregnant state represented a vital, essential aspect of woman yet it could only physically represented by her at the time. The frantic waving and silent screaming' repeated throughout the solo was mentioned only after the piece had been completed, though unease had been expressed about watching Lily struggle through it over and over during rehearsals. In retrospect, it is both ironic and uncanny that despite Lily's beauty, intelligence, warmth, and generosity, she faced challenges after the birth of her child; that her real-life pleas for communication and understanding in important relationships were silenced; and that a new life back in her native country was imbued with the frustration and longing communicated in the solo she created.

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[26]The word πλευρό/ple vro' means both 'rib' and 'side' in Greek.

Like the task behind the solo, a primary intention of *ap'to plevro enos andra* was to investigate the reality of being a woman in today's Cyprus through exhuming, reconstructing and sharing occurrences, feelings, relationships, and obstacles encountered daily in the form of movement-based personal narratives. This venture aiming to reveal a myriad of previously unheard voices, resonant with reflexive ethnographic practices (analysed in chapter 4), was based on my assumption that these young women, like me, lacked a forum to express and discuss deep feelings and confusing interactions they experienced a day-to-day basis. I saw their role as that of 'other' in a male-dominated Cypriot society, resulting in the silencing of their voices and a barring of their freedom. Yet my goal was not to perform a mass critique of the male population, but rather to share and embrace all of the women's experiences, including my own, and in this way re-activate their voices and dissipate the sense of 'otherness'. As Helen Thomas (2003) points out,

> Feminism scholarship has repeatedly shown that women stand as the 'other' in male accounts. As a consequence, feminists were forced to see men as the 'other' in relation to women. In anthropology, by contrast, the aim is … to remain open to the work and lives of people [and] include the other in the anthropological account to enable a multiplicity of voices to be heard so … the anthropologist's voice becomes one among many.
>
> (Thomas, 2003: 73)

Thomas further argues that while feminism proposes maintaining the notion of 'other' in order to discern and combat oppression, anthropology aims to create a relationship with 'other'; she contends that a dialogue between the two approaches would be most productive in affecting change (2003). Thomas's argument is rather progressive; perspectives that seem antithetical function in collaboration through a

dialogical relationship concerning both the notion of 'other' and the 'other' itself. I suggest that in locating the body centrally in the creation and exchange of personal narratives during *ap'to prevro enos andra,* a similar dialogical relationship can be created in which both 'other' and notion of 'other' are recognised and assimilated. In this chapter I will examine *ap'to prevro enos andra* in this light, as well as its development, relationship to pertinent literature, and sociocultural implications.

The creative process for *ap'to prevro enos andra* incorporated original movement, text, voice and music, much like *kouponi allagis*. However, this piece involved closer personal and working relationships between the six female collaborators, Sia, Ana, Rya, Rory, Eva, and Lily. It is important to note that Rya entered the process as an understudy but remained in the piece; in addition, Ana opted not to dance, preferring costume and set designing due to her visual arts background. The collaborators participated actively in choices regarding movement and structure despite the inclusion of set sequences; details are addressed throughout this chapter. All the women, between the ages of 19 and 26 at the time, were residents of Cyprus and students at the University of Nicosia; the piece focused on each individual's character and communal experiences to a larger extent than expected. As in *kouponi allagis*, my role was multifaceted, rotating between facilitator, teacher, friend, and colleague; yet during this project, relationships within the group became more intimate and intense than previously, and a focal point of the research (also discussed later in this chapter).

As indicated in the Introduction, *ap'to plevro enos andra* was created between January and May 2011 and rehearsed at the University of Nicosia studios. Versions of

it were performed at three prominent local venues in Nicosia during May and June 2011: *Castelliotissa Church*, a renovated medieval church in the 'old town' of Nicosia that houses dance performances and exhibits; *Melina Mercouri Hall*, a black box theatre space; and the *Pallas Theatre*, a larger theatre with a proscenium stage. According to the dancers' feedback, performances at varying stages of the piece fostered unity and communication within the group as well as personal confidence.

My desire to make a piece about women was novel for me since I had not previously been drawn artistically to either female or feminist themes. Despite my liberal education that included a strong feminist slant as well my own past activism, the issues traditionally problematised by feminism had since been neatly packed into a more rebellious, past period of my life. During my time in Cyprus I had come to approach feminism as a notion that best be avoided, as it seemed to unearth a residue of angry, overly idealistic academic debates or futile political pursuits not applicable to the 'real world' (in the opinion of most). The general outlook in Cyprus compounded this view; in Cypriot society the very word 'feminism' often evoked uncomfortable silences and a sudden sense of upheaval. In order to justify my inward silence in these situations as well as the outwardly imposed *silencing*, I reminded myself that I have rights in this society and can act upon them whenever I wish – there is no need to talk about them. Yet I wondered if, despite the egalitarian laws and the large number of women in the labour force, Cypriot women actually possess the same social liberties available in places such as my prior homes of New York and Athens, or other European capitals.[27]

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[27] Excerpt based on my notes and observations on living in Cyprus, 2008-2012.

As the years passed, I began to feel that more than any other society I had experienced, Cyprus did not offer feminism as a choice that benefits a woman. When I began working with the young women on *ap'to plevro*, the silencing of the women in the group regarding feminism was confirmed both by their initial silence on the issue and by their highly expressive movement material, as in Lily's solo above. As trust was achieved between the members of the cast, the women began candidly sharing their views during group reflections. It was stated by most that a feminist is seen, often by both men and women, as an 'unattractive woman', 'trying to be like a man', and a 'man-hater'; she is also perceived as a trespasser of forbidden territory, and her risky pursuit is one that she will later regret. 'Worst of all', as stated sarcastically by Eva, 'she may never find a husband!'. Declarations of this nature exemplify a simultaneous discontent with – yet a simultaneous adherence to – strict gender roles, a recurring issue in our process and in the respective literature, analysed extensively throughout this chapter.

According to feminist writer and pedagogue bell hooks (2000), the negative convictions regarding feminism that still exist in varying degrees worldwide are propagated by the media and have essentially undone what the early feminists fought to accomplish for decades. Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (2010), whose work largely focuses on the aesthetic presence and reactions of the body in relation to social constructs, delineates the original values of feminism I espouse:

> Concepts of autonomy, agency, and freedom - the central terms by which subjectivity has been understood in the twentieth century and beyond - have been central to feminist polities since its theoretical reeruption in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir.
>
> (Grosz, 2010: 70)

In considering the above notion that subjectivity is central in generating the basic concepts behind feminism, it can perhaps be said that Cypriot feminism is at an impasse. I suggest that this is partly a result of post-colonialism in conjunction with recent global demands for Cyprus to reform. Instead of Cypriot women creating the values of their own feminist movement, it seems as if a pre-determined belief system has been imposed or adopted by Cypriot institutions in order to keep in step with European and global progress, while the actual social reality is stuck in gendered and non-egalitarian paradigms, beliefs and practices (I elaborate upon this important issue later in this chapter). Consequently, in the case of Cyprus, feminism is not only frequently considered a 'bad word' by both men and women, but 'angry feminists' are usually shunned and silenced; I have heard a number Cypriot women, young and old, proudly recite phrases such as, 'I am not a feminist'; 'men are by nature one step above women, and we should keep them there'; 'there is no need to make a big deal for no reason – we know our rights'.

Maria Hadjipavlou (2006), political scientist, feminist, and conflict resolution expert active in political and community groups in Cyprus explores views of the label 'feminist' through comments shared during conflict resolution workshops she held with a *Bi-Communal Women's Group*, referred to by the author as *BWG*, involving 11 Greek-Cypriot and 11 Turkish-Cypriot women:

> On the one hand, all the women in the BWG described the social
> organization of their societies as patriarchal and hierarchical, but
> on the other…many (apart from four) said they were not feminists
> and that the conflict affected everybody irrespective of gender.
>
> (Hadjipavlou, 2006: 35)

145

In line with this, many women in the *BWG* expressed that war and protest are a male duty, while contending that a woman's role was to keep the peace, implying that talk of feminism can be viewed an act of dissent that would push them outside the realm of acceptable behaviour, resulting in the endurance of unpleasant consequences (Hadjipavlou, 2006). At the same time, the belief that women are 'by nature peace-loving and caring' was deeply contested, while 'many admitted that as women we are not trained in Cyprus to "challenge authority"' (Hadjipavlou, 2006: 35). Hadjipavlou (2004, 2006, 2010) further asserts that feminism is more complicated in Cyprus due to oppression and hardships women have endured during periods of invasion and conquest, as well as notions of 'other' perpetuated by the current divide; in order to aid in deconstructing patriarchal paradigms and practices, she openly discloses that women still suffer negative consequences when they ask, even covertly, for absolute equality. I, too, have often experienced such results when voicing objections to sexist notions. It was therefore not a surprise that I began equating the verbalisation of my beliefs with the loss of opportunities; conversely, I was perplexed and relieved by my shift toward the topic of women for this project.

II

Women, Identity and Dancing the Self

> Once we have acknowledged that the forming of a significant component of identity involves the drawing of a line of separation, two questions unavoidably arise. If there is a self, who is the not-self it defines? What kind of line is drawn between this self and that constitutive 'other' or 'others'?
>
> – Cynthia Cockburn (2004: 25)
> From *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*

As underscored in previous chapters, an essential, defining aspect of this project has been an unexpected course of events in the practical work that informed the choices and path of my research, converting a more typical academic study into a practice-integrated one. The trilogy of choreographic projects in *Identity Project* that initially intended to supplement the theoretical investigation on sociocultural identity in Cyprus quickly became more central to the research. Through the collaborative exploration of personal and collective identities during *kouponi allagis* (2010) it became clear that several facets of Cypriot identity that were disclosed through the process appeared to be under-researched or absent in the related literature. Of equal significance, references to the body – either inclusion of topics directly related to the body or the positioning of the body as a primary source – were scarce to come by in the academic research on Cypriot identity, while the aesthetically informed body, unique identity embodiments, and the collaboration of minded bodies were central to the outcomes emerging in the studio. As noted earlier, Karayanni's work (2004, 2006, and 2008) is an important exception, as it is rooted in the body and dance; a small number of other scholars that examine topics relation to women and the body in Cyprus, through have no relationship to dance, are also included in this chapter. The topics prominent in this body of literature are the notion of 'otherness' based on physical differences and ethnic background (Vassiliadou, 2004/2006; Hadjipavlou, 2012) and female sexuality (Vassiliadou, 2004; Skapoulli, 2009). The issues of sex trafficking (see studies by Archangelou and Ling, 2003; Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2009), sexual harassment, and domestic violence (see Vassiliadou, 2005), also related to the female body, though significant, will not be addressed for the purposes of this research unless they reflect outcomes from practice.

As a result of the academic studies available, there has surfaced a methodological discrepancy while making this piece in that relationships, communication and interpersonal dynamics often appeared quite different live than as described on paper. Moments of the process and choreographic excerpts from *ap'to plevro enos andra* will be used to exemplify this incongruity. This lack of affinity and synergy between practice and theory early on in my process in conjunction with the unsatisfactory theoretical findings regarding the real-life experience of Cypriot identity that includes the moving body prompted me to strive for a more far-reaching and detailed practical work than originally planned.

As previously mentioned, the hope was to encounter what was hidden in the gaps, and bridge the inconsistencies between theoretical definitions regarding identity that surfaced then bodily experience and interaction was involved. This intention is perhaps even more vital as it pertains to social conditioning regarding gender, the silencing of women's voices, and the overshadowing and exclusion of feminine identities in Cyprus. As Desmond argues, if we are to truly address the 'physical embodiment of social structures' (1998: 177) or what I propose can be viewed as the movement aspect of Bourdieu's (1984) theory of 'habitus', the body needs to be fully incorporated into dance research and cultural studies as a primary source with the appropriate language, tools and methodology:

> Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1984: 170)

The physical embodiment of social structures such as identity is, like the notion of habitus, an active, dialogical duet between social factors and personal choices that in turn influence our views on these experiences. As such, the inclusion of all forms of dance and artistic movement in the research – foremost by implementing the study of 'bodily texts' as a real language representing the whole being – is essential if we are to transcend dualistic notions regarding the body and social structures, expanding our perceptions regarding 'how social identities are signaled, formed and negotiated through bodily movement' (Desmond, 1998: 154).

As I again pursued my objective of placing the body at the crux of the research, I detected another significant incongruity between the literature on Cypriot identity and our work. Many in-depth studies on Cypriot sociocultural identity (including the work of scholars Argyrou 1996, 2006; Bryant, 2002; Papadakis 2005, 2008; Theodossopoulos 2007) approach the subject with a primary focus on an ethnic, social or political 'other', even in an effort to expose the fallacies and weaknesses in 'othering'. The 'other' is represented by a number of groups that are often positioned as a threat to Cyprus, such as the Turkey, Turkish-Cypriots and northern Cyprus, the male population, the nationalists, the Greeks, Europe and so on. As such, in much of this literature notions of Cypriot identity are derived from or referred to from a point of division; discussions of a 'felt sense of identity' based on self-reflexive constituents and embodiments of identity in motion, in action and in dialogue, as suggested by Thomas (2003) above, are generally lacking.

While this important mass of current scholarship, related to the fields of political science, anthropology, sociology, and gender studies is groundbreaking, proactive,

149

interdisciplinary, and invaluable for this project, it remains insufficient. In an effort to tackle and transcend the pressing political issues on the island stemming from geographic, interpersonal, and perceived partitions and borders, viewed by Papadakis (1997, 2018) as sites of paradox and potential (discussed earlier), many studies bypass or minimally address issues and lived realities that also contribute to Cypriot identity, such as a common language once shared by Greek and Turkish Cypriots, social and cultural rituals that unite diverse communities, personal and professional relationships, and, most importantly for *ap'to plevro enos andra*, current gender constructs and self-image. As outlined at the end of Chapter 2, communal and humanistic themes are central to the performers' contributions in *kouponi allagis*, whereas the presence and influence of an internal or external 'other' or reference to division, the 'Cyprus Problem', divergent communities, and related subjects remain obscure. Instead of reaping from a point of division, through collaboratively improvising and dance making the experience of disparity is sidestepped; rather, states of wholeness or unity, real or imagined, are reflected in the movement, text and final structure of *kouponi allagis* (again, see Chapter 2).

Alternatively, it is of utmost significance that in seeking to validate and cross-examine the discoveries during *ap'to plevro enos andra*, propelled by both feminine and feminist themes, I located an abundant niche of Cypriot feminist research that acknowledges and analyses the patriarchal hegemony and also challenges the dominant, dualistic approach to 'other'. This work contests the predominating social structure through basing a large part of the academic research on fieldwork that focuses on Cypriot women of varying backgrounds, includes multiple feminine voices

and spawns Cypriot women's groups and political activism regarding women's issues. Throughout this chapter I turn primarily (though not solely) to the work of three key feminist scholars who explore Cypriot women's real-life accounts, perspectives, and relationships, revealing possibilities for social inequality and identity stereotypes: Cynthia Cockburn, Myria Vassiliadou and Maria Hadjipavlou (referenced above).

Finally, as in Chapter 2, in this chapter I interweave relevant theoretical views, such as those of the authors above, with the process and outcomes of *ap'to plevro enos andra*. As noted in the Introduction, the cast of this piece includes only women; the themes concern feminine voices, female realities and identity representations of the feminine in today's Cyprus, first explored in the studio and then located in academic research. Again, I use the term 'feminine' rather than 'female' to indicate gender constructs rather than biological gender. It is important to mention that the collaborators' perspectives often matched some predominant findings in Cypriot feminist literature. This process and its focal outcomes are discussed at length.

III

Entering the Space of Other

If, as feminist writer Cynthia Cockburn (2004) argues regarding the Cypriot woman, it is ontologically impossible to omit the presence of an 'other' in any intact discourse regarding identity, then the question becomes about *how* the 'other' is included, referred to, and utilised in the argument – how much formative power the other is given in shaping the elements of identity and the overall discourse. Is it conceivable to set the other, or multiple others, within a series of intersubjective relationships, or

evolving identities, rather than positing the notion of other as a fundamental, polarising, or demarcating aspect of cultural identity? The first framework described includes relationships with people, nature, the environment, and even objects characterised by a fluid and perpetually shifting interaction with an inherently unfixed identity, whereas that the latter can be seen as burdening people and communities with the role of upholding boundaries that separate and restrict so-called divergent identities. To explore both notions a broad investigation of practices affecting Cypriot identity formation is necessary; however, political constructs must approached cautiously when seeking identity embodiments and representations that dwell outside the limiting rigidity of opposition. In this way, as outlined in Chapter 2, space carved for subtle and dimensional aspects of individual and collective identities and, as in the case of Cypriot women, the inclusion of previously silenced groups. The post-colonial, politically marked, multicultural history and current complex reality of Cyprus render this pursuit difficult, though all the more significant.

The inquiry regarding the notion of 'otherness' posited above can be partly addressed by integrating the Platonic[28], and later, Hegelian[29] notion that the existence of 'other' is necessary for the differentiation, and even existence, of the notion of the 'one' or the 'self', on abstract and self-conscious levels. Similarly, the Husserlian[30], phenomenological notion of the 'other' is based on an intersubjective

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[28] From *Philebus*, one of Plato's later dialogues, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (edited by Hamilton, Edith and Huntington Cairns, 1961).

[29] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), argues that the sense of self-consciousness is diametrically opposed to that of 'otherness' and in perpetual struggle; yet they require one another for recognition and existence (*Stanford Dictionary Philosophy*, online).

[30] As presented by Edmund Husserl in his *Fifth Cartesian Mediation* (1929), the existence and understanding of 'other' is necessary for understanding the self, generating the concept of a phenomenology of intersubjectivity (Zahavi, 2001).

experience of the world that leads to a sense of self, self-image and other. I include both views as they relate to my work. Moreover, like many dance scholars, I have drawn from the philosophy of Maurice Merlau-Ponty (1945/1962) that situates the body at the centre of perception, leading to the growing link between phenomenology and movement forms (discussed in earlier chapters).

I suggest that in addition to cerebrally embracing such philosophical concepts in a basic inquiry regarding self and other, we put forth our own subjective experience of self and other, positioning ourselves, as much as possible, neglecting a potential schism. Is it possible for each individual to sense the 'self' without including the 'non-self' or 'other'? Are there moments when we feel unified within ourselves, or with an other? During moments when an internal 'other' or sense of opposition emerges within, what are the potential emotional, existential and psychological experiences of our sense of self or selves? How are these and other issues regarding identity lived and reflected upon? Can the parts of the self be perceived as a perpetually evolving whole, also created by the individual, rather than a composite of by-products of an imposed sociocultural construct? Perhaps an embodied notion of 'other' can enter – or exit – this theoretical discourse more fluidly, as it does in day-to-day life or in the creative process of dance making. The presence of other, in this sense, transfers its influence as a complementary, formative element, rather than a dominant one. Can this apply to Cypriot gender constructs?

Again, the questions above allude to an intrinsically elusive, shifting, and complex notion of self rather than a fixed one. The similar characteristic shared by such a self with the act of dancing is the perpetual motion, the absence of stillness or solidity,

and the constant re-adjustment of the body and mind. As such, there lies a unifying power in the perception of the performed or dancing self, as well as a transformative capacity in this activity; as mentioned in Chapter 2, this potential is a focal theme in the work of Sondra Fraleigh who applies phenomenology to dance, arguing that the moving body has the capacity to transcend 'othering' by using the interactive relationship with 'other' to inform the creation of self or 'I' (1987:39). As previously indicated, Fraleigh contends that the re-discovery of the self on a moment-to-moment scale is unique to dance, as it engages the lived body in its entirety – body, mind, and environment – and 'unites *body-subject* and *body-object*' (1987: 49).

Fraleigh further suggests that dancing allows for consciousness to be expressed as distinct from movement; this deeper consciousness 'reveals the intent of the whole and its parts' (1999: 137). While there are other relevant studies of the connection between phenomenology and dance-based knowledges such as Pakes (2012), as well as the link between phenomenological inquiry and somatically informed dance (Rouhiainen, 2008), Fraleigh's perspective is especially resonant with our creative process as she describes an interactive, and even proactive relationship between self and other, continually renegotiated and re-framed through the moving body in an attempt to re-create the self and express meaning:

> While much of the male-dominated philosophy has striven for invulnerability through logic and reason, phenomenology took up the risky position of experiential description. But phenomenology does not rely primarily on the uniqueness of experience. Overall, it is propelled by a universalizing impulse … [and] shared meaning, recognizing that this world is indeed 'our world', that our being in the world is conditioned by the existence of others.
>
> (Fraleigh, 1999: 136)

154

Dancer and scholar Jenny Roche (2011) arrives at a similar conclusion by examining a dancer's multiple identities or what she calls a 'moving identity'. Roche (2011) draws from the concept of multiplicity originally put forth by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychiatrist and activist Félix Guattari (1887):

> A self is contextually triggered and is of itself insubstantial as it cannot be located in any single place. Although human subjects project a consistency of selfhood, this is in fact an accumulation of behavioural patterns and external stimuli rather than the reflection of a deep, essential self.
>
> (Roche, 2011, online)

In line with these perspectives I suggest that in connecting the notion of the instability or perpetual 'creation' of self to the exploration of feminine identities through the creative act intrinsic in improvisation, choreography, or performance, the holistic experience of phenomena on different levels of consciousness (i.e. mental, physical, emotional) in a continuous way is accessed, merging the fragments, as well as the 'before' and 'after'. Roche's focus on a self expressed based on learned behaviour rather than an inner, deeper self raises the question of whether some behaviours also become 'unlearned' identity is danced. This possibility is vital in terms of women in Cyprus, who have been conditioned to deny or hide aspects of their identity, and are often bound to histories that do not serve their freedom, autonomy, or happiness (Vassiliadou, 2004). The concept of moving or transformable identities through dance (Roche, 2011) acknowledges the histories and behaviours embedded in the minded body and at the same time allows for transformation of the self through that same realm of personal historical experience. Ideally such a process may result in transcending behaviors linked to oppressive social conditioning.

It is thus of great importance that examples of gender inequality addressed in this chapter were first seen in the studio, leading me to seek literature in support of the experience rather than the reverse. Since I had chosen the theme of feminine identities prior to convening with the group I designed tasks to evoke subjective female realities based on my own experience of gender issues in Cypriot society (exemplified in this chapter). Yet unlike the initial explorations in *kouponi allagis*, I did not set many improvisational limitations; I allowed for freedom in locomotion, contact, and influence by others during the exercises. This stemmed from my view of the women as a community as well as my aim to equate freedom of movement with liberation from constructs. For instance, in the task exploring the day-to-day experience of being a woman in Cyprus (that materialised as Lily's solo, described above), the dancers improvised in their own space but also responded to one another's gestures and monologues, as in the following description:

Sia is sitting on the floor, her legs out in front of her. Looking into an invisible mirror she styles her thick, wavy hair; nothing seems to work. She shuffles forward with her heels, dragging the rest of her seated body as if separate from her face. She stops, turns, rolls backward, changes direction, repeats styling and shuffling. Her impatience with her hair and limited mobility soon manifest as quick, angular thrusts of her knees and elbows.

Meanwhile Lily is flailing her arms in the air, desperately repeating words over and over, words we do not understand, head stretched back, her belly protruding. She is joined by Eva, as if in joint protest. Sia's focus shifts to the two women. In rhythm to Lily's words, Sia's movement grows bigger, stronger, more present. She stops fixing her hair; her kicks and punches become quicker; she shakes her head; her hair becomes wild and tangled.

There is an abundance of emotion in the movement of the three women. Lily's despair shows in her gestures and face; while Eva seems to support Lily through her choice to stand so close, she also embodies insurgence. Though Sia is farther away (behind Lily and Eva) she directly relates to the two women by glancing at them with a mixture of curiosity and vigilance and by responding to the development of their gestures. At the same time it appears that the three performers share the same reality, and are sentient of one another's experiences within that reality.

In her revolutionary book, *Women and Change in Cyprus: Feminisms and Gender in Conflict* (2010), Hadjipavlou addresses specific issues concerning Cypriot feminism specifically concerning postcolonialism, war, and conquest. She has conducted several studies of Cypriot women from various communities, including Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Maronite and Latin. Hadjipavlou (2010) challenges the discourse based on 'bicommunal' – Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot – conflict and resulting identity constructs, arguing that women's experiences are similar throughout Cyprus despite ethnic lineage. Much of Hadjipavlou's fieldwork focuses on Cypriot women's groups with participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds, like the *BWG* (Bi-communal Women's Group) mentioned earlier. Hadjipavlou claims that 'women from *all* Cypriot communities find themselves in a transitional context where modernity and traditionalism are mixed in both private and public realms of their lives' (online). In other studies Hadjipavlou (2004, 2006) determines that certain social constructs are perceived as natural by women; while some women 'are critical of their own oppression and were looking for ways out, others "internalised" the gendered understanding of their socially constructed roles … due to their biology'.

Hadjipavlou is one of the few scholars that treat the issue of gender and women's experiences in Cyprus with the seriousness it deserves, contesting the social trend of turning away these issues since legally provisions have been made for equality. Hadjipavlou emphasises that despite modernisation, all Cypriot women have been deeply affected by 'interethnic violence and war, displacement, rape, loss of beloveds and dignity, lack of opportunities for growth and economic hardship', connecting them to women in 'other conflict situations such as in Palestine and Israel, Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, etc.' (2006: 30-31).

In conducting my research I was hard-pressed to find views that challenged such notions. Political scientist and director of the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies[31] reports the slow progress of women's equality in and the continuing under-representation in decision-making, as supported by the following statistics:

> Cyprus is among the three countries in the European Union that have the lowest representation of women in politics (EU justice 2014, House of Representative 2015). Specifically, Cyprus ranks as 74th in relation to representation of women in the Council of Ministers and in 107th in relation to women's representation in parliament.
>
> (Pavlou, 2015:3)

Here the silencing of voices that begins on a personal level for most Cypriot females is addressed on a larger, institutional scale. The same patriarchal authority that instills a sense of 'otherness' or 'less than' in Cypriot women in relation to men perpetuates the exclusion of women in government bodies, despite the fair

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[31] 'The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, founded in 2001, has a strong affiliation with the University of Nicosia. 'The Institute's major aims are to act as a main contributor to the intellectual, political, and sociopolitical life of the region as this relates to issues of gender … through a multidisciplinary approach and in collaboration with other institutions' (from *The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies Handbook*, 2015, available online).

democratic laws in place. More factual information will be included later in this chapter regarding this issue. At this point, however, I would like to emphasise that most Cypriot feminist authors are in agreement concerning key issues, and implement one another as main references in their studies to support claims. Moreover, most feminist scholars are self-proclaimed activists that generate and partake in events to reform the status quo regarding women. For example, Myria Vassiliadou is EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator; Maria Hadjipavlou has co-founded the Center for International Conflict Resolution in Cyprus and the first international Cypriot Women's NGO, *Hands Across the Divide;* Susana Pavlou (mentioned above) is also a member of the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family and the Cyprus Women's Lobby, These endeavours can be viewed as a collective mission to trigger agency and social change in Cyprus.

Furthermore, in much of the research involving Cypriot women and gender issues referenced throughout this chapter I have detected a common methodology that incorporates fieldwork, individual accounts, and group exchanges as the basis for the study and outcomes. This, in my view, is a positive, and feminist, approach to the topics, endorsing proactive values such as collectivity, collaboration, empathy and understanding (further analysed below). At the same time, it can be said that even this type of research often draws findings by extracting and categorising the information obtained. Alternatively, corporeal experience can lead to intuitive awareness that momentarily manifests as non-categorical, non-periodic, and devoid of distinct boundaries. This process discloses embedded associations and relationships, perhaps filling gaps in more traditional studies such as those above.

As discussed in previous chapters, the acquisition of knowledge through the joint physical, mental and emotional engagement and reflection of the dancer or performer is analysed in the philosophical work of Pakes, who argues that 'practical knowledge, reasoning and wisdom might be relevant to choreography and dance practice-as-research' (Pakes, 2009: 20). According to Pakes, knowledge can be acquired through the act of choreography in the form of 'practical wisdom', or by reaching an 'awareness' that is 'a form of *phronetic* insight developed through the practice itself' (2009: 19). Pakes (2009) implements the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (Classical Greek: φρόνησις, phro'nēsis), meaning wisdom or intelligence derived from practical experience. Pakes (2009: 10) further contends that when this process of 'knowing through dance making' is coupled with traditional forms of research that incorporate analysis and reflection, new information and fresh forms of knowledge are acquired, as seen in the performers' contributions, self-understanding and feedback in *kouponi allagis*.

Phronesis also implies, however, the ability to discern between virtuous behaviour or excellence of character and the opposite (Pakes, 2009), as well as acting upon this knowledge. If we are to consider the ethical component of *phronesis*, can we perhaps relate it to the choices and behaviours enacted between the women in *ap'to plevro* as they shared and exchanged intimate personal narratives, such as trust, empathy, respect, support, and community? The platform necessary to impart and alter the highly personal information contained in the narratives, primarily through the dancing body, is perhaps founded on such virtues that Hadjipavlou deems 'female' (2006, 2010), revisited later in this chapter.

160

IV

Beyond the Borders of Self: Identity Representation in Cypriot Choreography

> *A line of five women downstage centre dressed in white crepe-thin nightgowns… lit only by a dim sidelight we can see their bodies silhouetted beneath the cotton fabric… bent over, their long hair brushing the floor…connected at the shoulders, arms hanging… Their silhouettes visible…swaying side-to-side, like a row of weeping willows doubled over in mourning, whispering something audibly but incomprehensibly… Are they telling us their stories? Are they sharing their secrets with one another? Their dreams perhaps…*

> – my reflection on Chloe Melidou's piece*, Enypnio/Dream (2008)*

As depicted in Chapter 1, sociocultural identity is frequently a strong underlying theme in Cypriot contemporary dance, appearing both as a clear subject as well as a veiled yet ubiquitous component in much recent choreography. Moreover, beyond addressing the identity issues inherent in Cypriot society for interested Cypriot audiences, this community of artists often extends into the context of European contemporary dance, sharing their sociocultural realities on European platforms, tackling the broader implications and challenges of embodied identities and contemporary culture on a more global scale. Below I will briefly outline a comprehensive portrait of some ways that Cypriot choreographers address identity issues in their work. I will first offer important specific examples of choreography concerned in a more general sense with identity, including individual and collective identity, and how they might represent or subvert aspects of Cypriot culture. I will then turn to two contemporary dance works created and performed in Cyprus that consciously explore gender identity constructs; I argue that they both deconstruct as well as offer alternative notions of masculine and feminine identities, respectively.

The question of personal vs. collective identity is often found in Lia Haraki's work. *Eye to I* (2004), analysed in Chapter 1, is a conscious exploration of female identities as they play out in today's modernising Cypriot society. A later work entitled *Party Animals* (2009), featuring two female dancers and one male dancer (including Haraki), explores the social pressures of collective identity and the loneliness that can incur when following a different path. *Giraffe* (2010) is an autobiographical piece set on a female dancer with a very tall, lanky body-type resembling Haraki's own; though satirical and humorous, the piece includes powerful moments that represent the social exclusion experienced by Haraki as a youngster and adolescent in Cyprus due to her artistic nature and physical difference from the other girls.

Women's voices and histories are explored through archetype and myth in Chloe Melidou's romantic pieces, such as *Enypnio/Dream* (2007) described in the excerpt above, and *Three Thousand Words* (2012). Both works share an airy, mystical aesthetic that she views as 'typically feminine', including the elements of continuous, flowing movement and indiscernible, melodic spoken phrases. Former Graham dancer Alexander Michael approaches collective feminine identity through a technically challenging contemporary aesthetic in *3 by B* (2004); community is formed based on motif and variation, danced to a mix of three work by singer Bjorn. Stereotypical representations of gender and erotic love are both celebrated and subverted in visual artist Christodoulos Panayiotou's radical *Slow Dance Marathon* (2002), a three-day dance marathon/performance during which strangers dance for long periods to popular love songs as intimate couples while spectators and former/future participants enter and exit the public outdoor spaces in Cyprus.

Overtly political mixed media works like *Lost in Division* (2009), a collaboration between choreographer Erica Charalambous and video artist Steve Strasser, and *Collateral Damage* (2011), another collaborative piece by Arianna Economou and U.K. based artist Dorinda Hulton take on the issue of daily oppression on each side of Cyprus' partition. Both of these works were performed outside, at politically marked sites near the Green Line (the UN marked line of division in Nicosia, mentioned in earlier chapters, dividing northern and southern Cyprus) addressing issues such as displacement, personal boundaries, physical borders, and psychological duress resulting from social, geographical and political division.

Conversely, identity is unraveled with more subtlety in works such as *Angel* (2009), a collaboration between Greek choreographer Machi Dimitriadou-Lindahl and German writer/video artist Achim Wieland. *Angel* focuses on grief, alienation and the challenging search for love in contemporary urban society through striking personal narratives. *Standchen* (2011) by Aelion Dance Company/Fotini Perdikaki conveys a struggle between traditional and modern identities. *Spiegel in Spiegel*/*Mirror in the Mirror* (2010) by renowned Cypriot choreographer Fotis Nicolaou takes up the controversial theme of masculine identities within the context of intimate love.

Spiegel in Spiegel premiered in November of 2010 at the *NoBody* Dance Festival in Nicosia, with subsequent performances in Cyprus and Greece. There are several ways in which *Spiegel in Spiegel* challenges Cypriot paradigms of gender, love and male-ness through the body. In addition to the theme, the structure of the piece is unconventional for Cypriot standards, as it is a twenty minute contact-based duet between two men. It can be argued that Nicolaou implemented physical contact and

163

the alternation between sharing and division of space to disclose unconventional embodiments of male identity, intimacy and sexuality. The continuous physical closeness of the two men during the contact improvisation segments powerfully represented intimate possibilities within male identity and male-male relationships.

The two male dancers, Fotis Nicoalou and Antonis Antoniou, initially wearing skin-tone briefs and later suits and ties, fluidly pass through stages of close, supported partnering, parallel solos, and combative sequences. During the legato 'nude' contact sections a video of the two men performing similar movement underwater is projected on a giant screen behind them, while in moments of discord the screen is white and blank. Alternatively, in the segments where the men wear suits and ties the movement turns robotic and even violent. The final moment of the piece is understated yet evocative: the men face one another from the ends of the stage, fully dressed again but mangled, and slowly stretch out their arms to embrace; as the overhead lights darken, a huge shadow of the impossible joining appears on the screen, accomplished 'virtually', symbolising the unattainability of their desire.

I was pleasantly surprised by the positive audience reactions to *Spiegel in Spiegel* as well as the general interpretation: gay love. I shared a similar view, leaving the performance with satisfaction and relief that a Cypriot choreographer had risked making such a forthright statement regarding male relationships and sexuality in a society that often buries the entire issue of homosexuality (Vassiliadou, 2004; Stavrou, 2006). Yet when Nicolaou presented his piece later that year in a lecture-demonstration at the Modul-Dance Conference *Dance/Body at the Crossroads of Cultures* (University of Nicosia, June 16, 2011), he expressed astonishment regarding

this mass reading of *Spiegel in Spiegel*, contending that this was not what he meant to communicate; rather he was interested in 'more general aspects of male identity found in contemporary society and Mediterranean culture'.[32] Nicolaou shared that his intention was to make a series of evocative statements regarding the socially imposed constructs of the male-male relationship: how men are forced by society to be competitive and even violent, how the dimensions of male friendships are limited, how emotional intimacy is thwarted outside the context of a sexual relationship. In the discussion following it was proposed that perhaps the audience's unexpressed need to accept homosexual love prompted the interpretation, as the identity struggles depicted could be deeply sensed through the body.

My own artistic work, as demonstrated in *Identity Project*, often deals with relationships at the interface of an outside force – such as another person, society, the divine. I am drawn to the prospect of the unexpected and where it might lead in the understanding of oneself, others and emergent issues. I was moved and inspired by the genuineness of *Spiegel in Spiegel,* in the performance quality and the persistence to maintain improvisation, as well as the effectiveness of Nicolaou's movement vocabulary as the basis of communication within the relationship portrayed. As mentioned, the inclusion of long segments of unadulterated contact improvisation in the piece as both exploration and conclusion on stage was unconventional in terms of Cypriot choreography; as the improvisation drove the narrative, facets of intimate male-male relationships including physical intimacy and violence were beautifully and honestly disclosed.

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[32] Excerpt is from my notes taken during the *Modul-Dance Conference*, 16-18 June 2011, University of Nicosia.

Untitled (2011), a solo created and performed by Serbian choreographer Milena Ugren-Koulas, explores women's realities and identities through a rather dark aesthetic. Like Nicolaou, Ugen-Koulas bases her choreography on structured improvisation; yet her use of space is quite different, as the entire piece is performed in a very small area, centre stage, and low to the ground. The main movement motifs I discerned in the very short, strung-together improvisational sequences included writhing, shaking, isolation of body parts, tense pauses, and a series of futile attempts to come to a standing position:

> *I struggle to see the dancer; I know she is a woman because I know Milena, but everything is so dark. I detect an arm, reaching up, exploring the limit of the immediate space around her body. The dancer covers her face and the limb appears disembodied. The arm pulls her up, as if tied to a cord – the dancer is now on her knees, but the weight of her body pulls her down, as she falls to the ground heavily. Several times during the 15-minute piece she repeats versions of this sequence, sometimes over and over, but never manages to stand; she must be in pain from the kneeling...*

I subsequently learned that the theme of this work was concerned with exposing and subverting the historical link between religion and prostitution, referring to the Cypriot temple virgins of antiquity and a current sect of virgins in northern Albania. When I later asked Ugren-Koulas if the material was also autobiographical, she replied, 'the piece has to do with the oppression of all women, everywhere'.

I have chosen to refer more extensively to Nicolaou's and Ugren-Koulas's work because of the intentional exploration of gender identity resulting in the disclosure of evocative and atypical identity embodiments (resonant with the effort behind *Identity Project*), as well as their alternative movement approaches in light of parallel work in Cypriot contemporary dance at the time. It can be argued that in both

pieces improvisation plays a dual role: that of allowing for exploration and also mirroring the subversive intent of the pieces as an alternative performance genre for Cyprus. My experience as a spectator in both cases was one of being drawn in at once; I immediately stopped trying to analyse the corporeal or attach words to the 'nameless' nature of the movement – a word used by Paxton (2003) to describe the ineffable quality of in-the-moment improvisation.

Along similar lines seeking the 'nameless' has played an important role in *Identity Project*, not only in providing opportunities in creativity and inquiry, but in allowing for an immediate and intuitive approach to subject matter. Despite my own solid experiences in discovering and knowing by engaging in improvisation as a process rather than a tool, I feel compelled to ask: how exactly does this process work and how are the 'results' assessed? Dancer and writer Kent de Spain (2003: 28-29), former student of Steve Paxton, suggests that the challenging corporal state of improvisation 'resides in the real-time translation of experience into language and the acknowledgement of such a translation can only approximate what is felt'.

De Spain further explains that after the in-the-moment state of improvisation has passed, the knowledge gained 'must be based on a kind of echo that survives' subjected to various forms of interpretation upon extracting meanings (2003: 29). A most significant outcome arose from an improvisation-based duet between the two female dancers, Eva and Chloe, in *kouponi allagis* (noted in Chapter 2). As shared by the dancers, the movement experience was emergent from the social condition of women in Cyprus, influencing my choices in *ap'to plevro enos andra*; the relationship between the two works is discussed in the following section.

V

Forgotten Voices: The Feminine Other

Go find yourself first, so you can also find me.

I am yours. Don't give myself back to me.

- Rumi [33]

My collaboration in *kouponi allagis* with the two female performers, Chloe and Eva, was a most fulfilling experience for me. As we worked to create movement and text for their duet, I observed that they acted differently in the rehearsals we had without the two male performers, whereas the two men conducted themselves quite similarly within the group and on their own. When not sharing the rehearsal space with Eric and Mark, Chloe and Eva could be described as calmer, more playful, and productive; they were also increasingly candid with their thoughts and feelings about the piece and their lives. This shift in behaviour when the women were alone was new to me; it had not occurred while working in other European countries and in the US with female artists in collaboration with or in the presence of men.

Moreover, the strong, confident, and sometimes conflict-ridden movement present in the women's duet process seemed to contain contradictory messages to the guarded, gentle, or evasive movement and text created by the same performers during group exercises. As I encouraged the dancers to improvise based on the more direct and emotionally charged expressions of self they had encountered, complex layers of feminine identities emerged as polar aspects of a relationship between the

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[33]From *Rumi: The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing* (2002). Translated by Coleman Barks. New York: Harper Collins.

two women. Their emotional and movement dynamic involved power struggles, need and dependency, attachment and abandonment, and identification with and rejection of the other (discussed during reflections at the end of each rehearsal).

Instead of returning to the lighter tone at the beginning of the process, I opted to continue gently pushing the performers out of their comfort zone. In order to achieve this I asked each dancer to create movement based on the other's text in addition to their own, a sort of kinetic biographical vignette of the other.[34] During this exercise the performers traded gestures and text, sometimes entire movement sequences. I also guided them to spontaneously dialogue with text and movement to evoke particular relationships and then work with long stretches of repetition to reach moments of climax and rest. I urged the performers to stay emotionally and physically committed to their movement, choosing clear intention and motivation, altering choices when necessary for immediacy and authenticity.[35]

As we deepened into their developing relationship both women felt uncomfortable at various points. Chloe expressed that she felt 'weird moving slowly as this made her more exposed'; she also voiced a concern that there was a 'lack of structure' in our process, and this made here unsure that the final product would 'look good on stage'. Chloe also resisted speaking her text audibly on stage, though in everyday life her voice is loud and clear and her demeanor strong. In addition, Chloe was not consistently emotionally expressive, in contrast to Eva, who seemed to relish the process as a type of therapeutic outlet, using rehearsal to be 'safely vulnerable'.

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[34]See chapter 2 for descriptions of the *I AM improvisations* and *Appendix B* for the full text of the *I AM Monologues.*
[35] See *Appendix B* for performers' text choices during exercises from *kouponi allagis*.

At times Eva's expressivity led to an over-abundance of emotion that set her physically off-balance, representing the challenging elements imbuing intimate relationships, such as dependency, need, and power, highly defined in the final section of the duet. The dancers had a chance to bring up any concerns during reflections. I embraced issues with compassion and understanding, and many were resolved. I reminded the dancers of their freedom to omit movement or text that did not feel right; while they used this option a few times they mainly persevered through the moments that were difficult for them, expressing pride regarding the 'emotional honesty' of their duet. The final movement sequences, loosely structured, emerged from weeks of improvising; facial expressions and emotional content came from the performers. Most sections turned out slightly differently each time.

Eva chases Chloe in repeated attempts to physically connect with her after being left by her. Eva manages to touch, grab or leap onto Chloe, but each time she is pushed away, sometimes violently. Chloe remains rigid and expressionless in these moments, while Eva looks increasingly flustered and pained. After a series of efforts, Chloe exits and Eva follows her path; suddenly, Eva has a change of heart and turns to walk in the other direction – it seems as if she has given up.

Just as Chloe reaches the wings Eve appears opposite her again and Chloe turns to face her. Eva runs and leaps onto Chloe in a clinging embrace. With one arm, Chloe reluctantly supports Eva for a few second; it seems as if their relationship has shifted, as if Chloe has softened. But Chloe drops her. Eva falls heavily, and the floor thuds loudly. Though Eva seems helpless and in need, breathing heavily in exhaustion, Chloe remains physically rigid, seeming cold and devoid of empathy. Chloe walks away.

It became clear in working with the women that they had inadvertently expanded the initial improvisational exploration of 'I AM' to include aspects of 'I AM A WOMAN'. In their duet they interfaced aspects of their feminine identities. As Albright (1997; 2003) brings to light in her work, when we perform our selves through our autobiographies, we inevitably include our relationships, histories and personal boundaries. When Eva and Chloe dance their selves in this duet, whose histories are they performing? Within their own relationship, where do personal boundaries begin and end? Are they perhaps moving beyond their own personal narratives, reaping from a collective history shared by many Cypriot women? If considering Albright's argument that 'autobiography, like dance, is situated at the intersection of bodily experience and cultural representation' (1997: 119), which cultural discourses are reflected in the women's interaction?

Furthermore, if autobiography, as derived from Greek, literally means 'self-life-writing' or 'writing one's life or life experiences' (my translation), autobiographical performance inherently connotes a 'reader' or a spectator/audience – including oneself. This creates a fragmentation of self in an effort to understand the content at hand and re-establish the whole, implying the necessity of an other and allowing for new possibilities and choices in representations of identity, society and history. A further exploration of autobiography and performance is included in Chapter 5; for now I will focus on the interplay between self and other in the female duet.

In the process of 'writing the self' Eva and Chloe can be viewed as the seeking of the self inside or through the other. Again, a common element perhaps runs through these efforts made during the duet with tenderness, austerity, longing: the absence

or exclusion of men. Even when the male performers are on stage, the women isolate to become closer to one another, gravitating to the edges of the space, as in the hair-braiding segment described in Chapter 2. In this case, it can be suggested that a feminine 'other' symbolises a secure sameness: one woman acts/exists in reference or on in reflection to another woman. As they walk slowly yet rhythmically in unison, Chloe behind Eva, they are physically and symbolically connected by Eva's hair; performing the same movement strengthens this unity. The refuge that Cypriot women often provide for one another even in moments of dissonance, shown by Vassiliadou (1997) and Hadjipavlou (2006), is mirrored in the dancers' movement choices. Despite Chloe's rejection of Eva's physical attempts to connect with her, when Eva leaps toward her Chloe supports her, as if empathising with Eva's desire.

VI

Domestic Activities: A Personal Statement

My participation in Eva's and Chloe's autobiographical vignette from both personal and artistic perspectives unleashed feelings about my own identity and sense of self since moving to Cyprus in the summer of 2006 (partly recounted in earlier chapters). Internal states such as confusion, suppression, silencing, exclusion, and dependency clashed with opposing sentiments of fondness, kinship, and excitement regarding the people and communities I encountered. I connected the influence of men to the social and cultural limitations rousing my more unpleasant feelings and experiences; this view was further compounded by the surprising patriarchal attitudes of many Cypriot women who, verbally and through actions, endorsed a Cypriot 'androcentric cosmology common to Mediterranean societies' (Vassiliadou, 2004: 53).

My workplace at the university could be considered a rather progressive community; my profession involved a female-dominated art form in an environment; at the university I was respected as an educator and supervisor by men and women. Yet in my personal and social life I was left speechless at least once a day due to lack of esteem and acknowledgment. Examples are many and constant: disregard by a waiter while at dinner with male company; unpleasant glances by a woman at a party during a brief conversation with her husband; criticism for proposing that men and women not sit at opposite ends of the table at my own parties; blank stares when inviting friends to petition to extend maternity leave in Cyprus. Years, later, little has changed. Leaving me off centre and wondering if I have unintentionally said or done something offensive, these occurrences are so disconcerting in their absoluteness that I usually do not dispute or even discuss them. This response contradicts my spontaneous nature, as I am silenced in a place where the listening is not the same, where it is not easy to be the woman I am.

Much has been written on the silencing of women exerted by the overriding discourse of the male patriarchy. I turn to poet Adrienne Rich who manages to encapsulate the profound imbalance provoked by hearing one's voice echoing in one's own head when attempting to express oneself within an empty or space:

> When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you . . . when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.
>
> (Adrienne Rich, 1986:199)

As I came across this passage while working on *ap'to plevro enos andra* I reconsidered the effort of the women in the group to communicate and questioned the path of the piece's development. What happens to the words of women when they are lost in transit, as Lily's have perhaps been, through the migration of her mother from Norway to Greece? Where do they go? Are they re-constructed or re-assembled in a new place, serving the new circumstances? What is our process of remembering them, when we decide, as Lily did in her solo, as I do now in my daily life, to stop being quiet? How are identities shared by Cypriot women rooted in their collective history expressed through the body daily, in society, or outside the safe space like that of our rehearsals? Can these same identities be challenged and transformed by re-membering and re-constructing them on Cypriot stages, as they engage the listening of the (perhaps also silenced) spectator?

In a powerful solo created by Lily that includes a series of *performative moments*, (analysed in detail in Chapter 5) Lily recounts childhood moments in a personal narrative. Although we do not know exactly where she is, her description of a mountain house surrounded by snow in winter is quite different from anything in Cyprus. As she tells her story, Lily is speaking to someone specific that seems distant yet very important to her; she asks:

How important are these moments for you?
How important is what I am going through now?
Outside it might be winter,
It may be snowing.

What does this house mean to you –
This house in the village?

As Lily recites these words, seemingly in a dream-state that has transported her to the past, her pregnant belly keeps us tied to the present; she moves, slowly at first, but then rather quickly, from one end of the stage to the other, frequently changing levels, and she is increasingly becoming out of breath. I don't know this part of her history, about this house, but I know other pieces of the puzzle and I fit it in.

Lily is part Greek and part Scandinavian, and has grown up equally embracing these two different cultures. Audience feedback after the show indicated that, although details were not revealed in her narrative, it easily transported them into her reality; others connected it to their own displacement due to migration or the Turkish invasion; still others were impressed by her courage to perform in the seventh month of her pregnancy (comments shared during after-party).

I, too, admired Lily's strength; it mirrored the power I was taught to embody, and also the power men had always had over me. Throughout my life I had been exposed to an egalitarian, empowering treatment of girls and women that usually, though not always, enabled me to bypass the overt sexism that exists in my native Greek and my recently adopted Cypriot culture. Though of Greek decent (both my parents immigrated to the United States in their late teens from small southern Greek villages), I grew up in New York City during the 1980s and 1990s and lived there on and off until 2006. Our house was in a Brooklyn neighbourhood with a large Greek-American community, but I was encouraged by my parents, along with my brother and sister, to attend a specialised high school in Lower Manhattan. Our years there changed our lives, exposing us daily to intellectual and spiritual stimulation and a new, diverse American culture, quite different from the ethnic sub-culture of our

more provincial neighbourhood. The creativity, learning and emotional richness of that time affects our choices to this day. Then it awakened something in us that can be described as a passion for questioning and discovery, changing us quickly and making it difficult for us to relate to our childhood friends and relatives. Looking back it must have been strange for them, as we consistently brought home radical ideas and a rebellious approach to life. I was labeled the 'weird girl' who 'was allowed to go to the city' and would 'get into trouble'.

Despite our deviation from the convention and conformity of our ethnic Brooklyn neighbourhood, our patriarchal Greek tradition had grown strong roots, deeper than we sometimes realised. I distinctly remember a holiday dinner at the home of my father's brother during my Christmas break from college one year. As I sat in the living room challenging my father and uncle during a political debate, I felt uneasy as I saw my mother, grandmother and aunt frantically running in and out of the kitchen to set the table, serve the food, feed the younger children, clear the table, and so on. Yet I stayed with the men; while fervently disputing my uncle's view, he interrupted me mid-sentence and said, 'Why don't you go and help the women inside?' In shock and anger, I contested his request by reciting all that I had learned in women's studies courses on patriarchal oppression and the atrocity of male domination. How had I not noticed these injustices as a child? I was going to change things, liberate the women in my family. It was one thing to see this double standard in a Greek village and another thing in the middle of New York City. I was further jolted by my uncle's answer: 'Well, this is how things are in my house, and if you don't like it, you can leave.' No one said a word in my defense.

What is of significance in this narrative is not so much the obvious clash it represents of old-world Greek gender roles migrating to the diaspora, but what links it to my experience during *kouponi allagis* and my subsequent choice to create a space for feminine realities in *ap'to plevro enos andra*. Although I was taught that freedom is a woman's inborn right (my mother's voice ringing), I was simultaneously conditioned (by the same mother's actions) that the silencing and oppression of women is traditional, acceptable, even necessary. Resonant with the encounters of the participants in *ap'to plevro*, the two ideal representations of woman were in direct opposition and in perpetual conflict. My investigation of this topic confirmed that I have always been between two cultures that often feel more like two selves: Greek and American; Greek-American provincial and Manhattan intellectual elite; Greek and Greek Cypriot; traditional woman and feminist. After reflecting upon the corporeal explorations of the cast, I could no longer circumvent moments in which my voice was similarly stolen from me; I also recognised the difficulty of the demanding social expectations of mother, wife, director, teacher, artist, and daughter. I realised that I had been trained to honour the anticipated gracious compliance and silent proficiency. In Cyprus, in obedience to quiet, oppressive patriarchal nudging, women were doing just that. Rory's solo, briefly described below, reflects the submission enacted by many women when they are challenged to voice their opinions and perhaps appear undesirable by breaking the silence:

Rory quickly paces from stage right to stage left and back, looking at the floor and talking to herself. Her voice louder, she stops herself, walks toward another dancer and embraces her. The embrace ends and she runs to another dancer and another, words still unheard.

The marginalised role of women in Cyprus – socially, economically and politically – the limited freedoms and opportunities available to them and the silencing of their voices (Cockburn, 2004; Vassiliadou, 2004) are occurrences of which I had not been fully aware until conducting academic research to investigate issues that emerged during *ap'to plevro*. Perhaps deceived by the high percentage of Cypriot women avidly pursuing full time careers and university degree courses (Pyrgos, 1993; Hadjipavlou, 2006) in addition to jam-packed social lives, I initially saw freedom and equality. Yet I later noticed that women express themselves more spontaneously and listen to one another more intently in certain contexts; I refer to these as 'feminine spaces', physical or psychic spaces devoid of men and their silencing effect (discussed in Section VII). Women of all ages create feminine spaces in physical places such as the home, the hair or nail salon, the elementary school playground.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, women rarely speak directly about being oppressed; instead they often refer to disappointments or even abuse they suffer from male partners as a necessary aspect of life, often stating that they 'have no choice' since they 'need a man' and this is 'how men are'. I have heard older women advising younger ones to 'laugh off the pain'. It can thus be argued that while in many nations, such as Sweden or France, feminism has reached a threshold, or may even be considered a notion of the past in need of periodic revision, feminism has a long way to go in Cyprus (Hadjipavlou, 2006). A full-on Cypriot feminist movement acknowledging women's needs outside the patriarchal hegemony has just emerged in recent decades (Cockburn, 2004; Vassiliadou, 2007; Hadjipavlou, 2010). This important issue is further examined in later sections of this chapter.

VII

<u>Sexy Housewives</u>

In line with the title that I originally created for the piece, *of apples and other forbidden red things*, the notion of the 'forbidden' surfaced early on in our process as we explicitly, even disturbingly, explored provocative subjects symbolised by red things associated with women: lipstick, flesh, nail varnish, roses, anger, lingerie, blood, stilettos. Conversely, we did not build upon these ideas, keeping only a playful distribution of red apples in the last section. While the undertones of the final work celebrated something undeniably female and independent of man, the stronger and more taboo content remained subtle, cautious, and abstract.

This title was therefore replaced as the cast members appeared to gravitate toward a sheltered, communal, or as they described, 'therapeutic' experience in our practice, avoiding the challenges of overt risk-taking and individual exposure. I, in turn, did not push them to push the limits, as I had done in *kouponi allagis*; I became drawn to this more fluid style and harmonic process, and also deemed it unjust to suppress the movement preferences of each young woman in order to accomplish our original idea. I became committed to offering them freedom of expression in a safe space that didn't exist elsewhere for them. In fact, the effort to communicate and be heard in such a space drove much of the material.

Yet in reflecting upon central moments of the piece together with the group it was denoted that 'forbidden' aspects of feminine identity were depicted covertly. Some movement choices and embodiments of the feminine did, in fact, surpass

performers' acceptable and comfortable range of female behaviour. For example, in a later section of the piece Eva 'turns against' the rest of the group by dominating the physical space surrounding Lily; her pregnant body was then dominated by all the dancers as they latched onto her belly and pulled her into another section of the stage. Eva interrupts this task by secretly grabbing onto Lily and pulling her away, 'stealing' her from the others. During a group reflection Eva called her own action 'selfish', stating that the safety she felt in our space has allowed her to become what she calls a 'bad version' of herself. Eva's movement choices reflect a disposition that betrays the code of loyalty and camaraderie in the ideal image of the Cypriot woman, despite the frequent presence of jealousy and betrayal in female-female relationships. As Eva further shared in a feedback session, representing a devious, scheming, self-serving woman was, in retrospect, an unforeseen turn of events for her, both as a performer on a Cypriot stage and a member of the close-knit society that would continue to be part of her daily reality outside the theatre. However, she also enjoyed it, stating, 'it gave me the opportunity to connect with a part of myself that I would not normally express, an aspect that maybe exists in every woman. It was a relief to do this in a safe, non-judgmental environment'.

As mentioned at the onset of this chapter, after reflection an academic research it has become apparent that much of what was revealed by the performers in personal narratives is reflected and legitimised by recent academic studies on women and feminism in Cyprus. This work has sprouted from a social and cultural history of Cypriot women, connecting it to currently unresolved areas regarding women's issues and rights. A number of poignant questions arise in *ap'to plevro*; only some

light is shed on them by the more controversial themes literature. What kept the performers from adhering to the initial, less comfortable thoughts and feelings that they themselves brought forth? Would pursuing a more adventurous process move us to uncertain subjective and interpersonal territory? What restricted us (I include myself as I followed their lead) from assertively expressing our voices, opting instead for softer, safer, and more subtle modes of articulation? This countenance is demonstrated in the dancers' movement choices: Rory pacing and talking to herself, opting to seek affection instead of understanding, 'trying to say' instead of saying; Lily silently screaming instead of shrieking deafeningly; Eva playing a deceitful character but also maneuvering carefully enough to maintain her positive image; Sia only looking on, albeit attentively. Is the dancers' practice of measure a grounded, typically female trait or rooted in the fear of confronting the audience? Was it the collective preference of this particular group of women, or a general inclination of Cypriot women to connect with one another in spaces that are not male influenced or dominated? The performers enter female 'otherness' through one another, but how does the male 'other' manifest in their discourse?

In answer to some of these pertinent questions, I would argue that most women, not only Cypriot women, tend to function well in groups. More specifically, the fieldwork of Cockburn (2004), Vassiliadou (2006), and Hadjipavlou (2006, 2010) based on diverse women's communities indicates that Cypriot women feel secure and productive in groups; furthermore, it gives them a private space to address issues concerning men they are perhaps afraid to express in their presence. Through the medium of movement, it can be said that in *ap'to plevro* the intense emotion and

literal narrative gesture embedded in the dancer's phrases – though not expressed at full volume – is an attempt to negotiate, assimilate and transcend the male 'other'. On the other hand, I detected a difference when these issues were expressed verbally in group feedback sessions, where views were clearer and more defiant.

Vassiliadou's fieldwork-based study (2004) on women's views and construction of a female 'other' within the patriarchal hegemony of Cyprus addresses restrictions women feel when it comes to putting their thoughts into practice:

> …women find themselves caught between their attitudes and practices. … The conflicts and contradictions they face are part of their everyday realities; however women deal with them in different ways. Some experience them unproblematically, others find them to be sources of tension and struggle, and yet others accept them despite their convictions because they feel there is really not much they can do about it.
>
> (Vassiliadou, 2004: 55)

It appears that similar challenges were met by the women in the cast, shared in group reflections. All expressed anger and sadness at the gender inequality. Two stated that they used their anger to 'get into character for the piece'; another said that she 'constantly thought about the issues as she noticed unfair things around during her daily chores'. When I referred to the possibility of change the responses differed: 'We need to start with our own boyfriends' (Eva); 'we shouldn't care what others think or say about us, but it's difficult in such a small place' (Sia); 'It's hard to change things; men don't like it when you get in their face and directly confront them. Sometimes it's better to find another way' (Rory).[36]

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[36] The comments quoted are from a group reflection/interview conducted on February 27, 2012. All the participants of *ap'to plevro enos andra* were present except for Lily and Rya.

Further in line with Vassiliadou's argument, the dancers exhibited a resistance to acting upon their views. Although they eagerly acknowledged the restrictive labels, constructs and practices imposed on women during our group conversations, most were inhibited when asked to openly incorporate their views or reactions into the piece. It is difficult to pinpoint the root of this discrepancy. Were they afraid to be associated with negative images of women? Did they feel embarrassed to depict themselves (even in character) as victims of the patriarchy before friends and relatives present in the audience, including their partners or spouses? Perhaps they were worried that if they told their 'true stories' they might be held responsible for attracting the negative labels and harmful treatment – much like a victim blamed for causing the act – as described by feminist sociologist Irene Gedalof (1999).

I did not probe these issues during our reflections as I felt the women would be pushed beyond their limits; but when these issues were brought forth in a closing group reflection eight months after the performances, many of the women said that they were furious and frustrated about the place of women in society when out in the world, yet that the anger was diffused when they came to rehearsal. Eva stated that the whole process felt like a relief, or therapy, 'healing past wounds'. Rory said she felt so close to the women in the group that working together just made her feel great, and helped her get through a very difficult period of her life with a boyfriend. Ana jokingly responded, 'it's because we are alone; next time, throw a man in the mix and you'll see the reactions you're looking for! This time there was no reason to get intense since there was such a feeling of harmony.' Rya, the youngest in the group exclaimed, 'This is why I have never had a boyfriend!'.

These responses may indicate that the differences between the performers' 'attitudes' and 'practices' in real life did, as Vassiliadou (2004) suggests, stem from restrictions they were afraid to confront; however, the dancers' choices may also mean that the empowerment they felt in our safe, alternative space allowed for a gradual *alignment* of attitude and practice. Discussions with the dancers revealed perspectives tautly wedged between tradition and modernity; alternatively the collective decision to engage in positive thematic and movement material at the end of the piece (discussed below) can be viewed as proactive. The conscious step toward indulging in a joyous, inspirational group dynamic to address the prevailing issues rather than avoid them rendered the women, as was stated, 'feeling stronger and better' about themselves and 'future relationships'. Self-expression allowed by the intimate dialogical exchange of personal narratives (again, elaborated upon in Chapter 4) and reflection upon this process aided in a *union of attitudes and practices*, offering the collaborators new options for forthcoming life events. In re-membering important experiences there began a re-arrangement of facts and meanings that, in turn, generated potential for the future:

> The new generations under the influence of their schooling and official narratives have formed an imaginary of the other and the inscription is often so sharp that realities were formed on assumptions that have never been tested. Once these images become complex and blurred as happens in conflict resolution workshops then the participants start confronting their own mental maps and with the help of a facilitator they start rearranging the mapping. It is usually a painful process but a necessary one if people want to move ahead beyond the conflict culture which dichotomizes experiences and uses hierarchies to politically manipulate differences and undermine any shared cultural experiences.
>
> (Hadjipavlou, 2006: 21)

Finally, since from a phenomenological perspective experience itself is inherently dichotomised, the notion of 'other' in the case of Cyprus is critically informed by the presence of political conflict and an enemy. This pervades all aspects of the culture (Papadakis, 2006; Hadjipavlou, 2010); as a result, notions of 'other' play a splitting role between genders as well as within the same gender, conceptually, socially, physically, legally and experientially, positioning individuals accordingly within a self-negating, policy-serving power structure and value system. Many men and women of all ages participate and promote this division, often unknowingly; as a result 'the distance widens amongst the people whereby the militaristic and patriarchal aspect of the conflict prevails' (Hadjipavlou, 2006: 21)

VIII

Feminine Spaces

> *You are beautiful…truly beautiful…and pure.*
> *Even though you're not a virgin.*
>> – Lily (text from *ap'to plevro enos andra,* 2011)

The notion of hidden oases of 'feminine spaces' within the patriarchy, like those inside our rehearsal studio, brings me back to the titles of our piece. An interesting component of both names is that while their purpose was to represent a work about women, both refer an other, male presence, to men. The title *ap'to plevro enos andra/from the rib of a man* is a twist on women's subordinate social position, in contrast to a string element in the piece that celebrates woman. The title's biblical reference reflects a pervading aspect of Cypriot culture: patriarchal Christianity. As indicated by feminist philosopher Nancy Tuana (1993, 1998), the Christian creation

myth implicitly testifies that a woman's body does not belong to her, intrinsically and eternally part of man, needing his body to generate her own. Just as a woman is not permitted to enter the altar in an Orthodox church, woman's inferior and impure body and soul are relegated daily restrictions. Adam's, or man's, body, the first body, 'unique and undivided', emerged directly from the divine, while Eve's female body came from his, eternally depriving her of a direct link with God (Tuana, 1993).

Social scientist Elena Skapoulli (2009) has conducted a unique study examining how patriarchally constructed gender ideologies affect perceptions of sexuality in Cypriot teen-age girls. Skapoulli makes specific mention of the Greek Orthodox Church as a male-dominated regime that controls Cypriot women's views and expressions of sexuality, stating that female sexuality in Cyprus is 'strongly tied to fertility and procreation' and 'being a Cypriot woman implies particular sexual prerequisites, especially the display of chastity; otherwise a woman may face social isolation' (2009: 86-87). Skapoulli interviewed young girls and boys in Cyprus of varying ethnic backgrounds on the subject, individually and in groups. She suggests that the results 'affirmed the binary frame of girls' gender practices' in which 'girls were placed on a fabricated and culturally widespread "virgin-whore" continuum' (2009: 90). The comments also indicated that virginity symbolises a desired ideal; the girls toward 'the other end of the continuum' were given labels such as 'loose' or 'whores' (Skapoulli, 2009: 90). Skapoulli further contends that girls viewed by boys as virgins but unattractive were undesirable, as were pretty or sexy girls that seemed 'easy', denoting that desirable females must have both sensual beauty and virginal purity.

The hidden or abandoned title, *of apples and other forbidden red things*, also refers the virgin-whore dichotomy as a core biblical reference – that of Eve eating the apple from the forbidden tree of wisdom in the Garden of Eden. Here woman is not only represented as morally weaker than man, acting on desire and more susceptible to temptation and evil, but as having lost her most precious virtue of purity, rendering her undesirable to man. Historically viewed as 'rationally and morally inferior to man', Eve's feminine or female weakness that led her to eat the apple must be controlled and restricted (Tuana, 1993: 79). The cyclical vacillation between virgin and whore favours, and even justifies, the patriarchal regime: If woman is not controlled (by man), her irrepressible desires will result in moral and other upheavals; her sexual expression and activity can therefore exist *only for the man to whom she belongs*. Within this representation of female sexuality there emerges a vast range of behaviour unavailable to her. She is pushed to one end or the other, she is either unthreatening, servile and virginal, or rejected due to her dangerous lack of prudence and overt sexuality. In both cases, she must be beautiful, for she is desired. In this sense, it can be argued that the woman's body is a terrain for moral conquest and levelling; it is through ruling her (through her body) that the larger social evils are put under reign, as it is through the unstable, fixed dichotomy defining her that religious and political conquests are justified (Hadjipavlou, 2006).

Thus we must ask: Who continues to forbid the 'red things' in Cypriot society? Religion? Man? Society on the whole? One answer perhaps lies in a statement by Sia during a group exercise, resonant with the outcomes of Skapoulli's study above: 'When a woman goes to a bar and looks sexy, a man is less likely to speak to her. He

may want her deep down but he calls her a whore to his friends.' In a comment made by Eva we can detect the prevalent sociocultural ideal for females in Cypriot society, despite the 'modernity' and 'freedom' claimed by the current generation of young adults. She states, 'my boyfriend wants me to be sexy, but becomes enraged if another man looks at me; if I ever bump into an old boyfriend we'll be arguing for days, and he might even call me a whore and then refuse to have sex with me'. Such comments were usually met with relief and agreement by the group.

Testimonies like these, all too common during our rehearsals, clearly reveal that a contemporary version of the virgin-whore dichotomy is in full force in today's Cyprus. Moreover, though the value of women is still regulated by an age-old decree, it must survive within a modern cultural habitat; this inevitably causes divergence. Men desire to possess a woman exclusively, one that is not touched or desired by another man; at the same time she must be desirable in a conventional sense, as in images promoted by social media, making her even more valuable. As suggested by Cypriot business analyst Eleni Stavrou (2007) the past role of woman as a good housewife and mother has been expanded rather than altered to include woman as a good and sexually attractive housewife and mother, full member of the labour force, and perpetually available to otherwise satisfy her husband. In light of these perspectives it is important to note that most of the movement performed in *ap'to plevro* portrays gendered female characteristics, such as flow, emotion, sharing and communication, as described by dance scholars Wendy Olivier and Donald Risner (2017); conversely, the participants did not include 'sexy' movement reflecting explicit female sexuality or bearing sexual connotations.

IX

<u>Women's Places: If the Kitchen Walls Could Speak</u>

Now you will have to
search for my words
into the caves of my maternal
language
in my obese
unsculpted vowels
hanging from naked Mediterranean trees
like overripe
papayas
　　　　　– From *Silver Bird*, Zelia Gregoriou (2012: 80)[37]

It is typical that a portrait of any modern woman would begin with a history of the

events that led to her modernisation. In the case of Cyprus the stages do not carve a

smooth, forward-moving path; the road is jagged, with missing points along the way,

requiring steps backward to locate and connect them. In summary, soon after the

violent Turkish military invasion and subsequent occupation of northern of Cyprus in

1974, many women's associations were formed, altering the existing patriarchal

social structure. Basic egalitarian treatment by the law was fought for and achieved

regarding wages, property ownership and custody rights.[38] In part this movement

was prompted by the sudden inability of many families to offer dowries to their

daughters due to lost assets, a tradition since the turn of the 20th century; previous

to this period the groom's family provided living quarters and resources for the bride

(Argyrou, 1996). As a result, in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a large influx

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[37] Zelia Gregoriou is a Cypriot poet from the region of Paphos; her writing mainly concerns women.
[38] Women's suffrage is not mentioned here as it was automatically granted at the end of British colonial rule and the establishment of the Cyprus Republic in 1960; Cypriot women did not have to fight for this right.

of women in the Cypriot workforce (Pyrgos, 1993). The push for social equality was reinforced by women's pursuit of higher education abroad and steady participation in international conferences and panels on women's rights (Hadjipavlou, 2004).

However, while the 1960s and 1970s marked an era of rapid, radical social change in most developed countries, Cyprus was still in the midst of a male-initiated, male-dominated military conflict that overshadowed other pressing social issues such as women's needs, voices and social equality. During this time many Cypriot women became war victims through their bodies as they were pillaged, raped, abused, and exiled; the effects were fear, silencing, trauma, low self-esteem, and underlying anger (Vassiliadou, 2004). As Hadjipavlou (2006: 23) states, 'victimisation of women in ethnic conflicts takes many forms (as) their bodies are turned into platforms for revenge and humiliation of the enemy'. To support her point Hadjipavlou refers to Radhika Coomaraswamy (2001), scholar, activist, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict:

> …rape, sexual violence and forced pregnancy are directly related to the male-dominated social systems and values that govern those who are fighting. A community's honour, especially at times of conflict, often rests on the bodies of women. To defile that honour is to humiliate the whole community. Women's bodies become the battlefield, the point of communication between men.
>
> (Coomaraswamy (2001) in Hadjipavlou, 2006: 349)

These same women had no say in military, political and legal actions, decisions and policies. Stereotyped as housewives born to support and submit to the male 'head of household' (Vassiliadou, 1997; Hadjipavlou, 2010), they suffered subordination and silence in public and private spheres, their needs severely marginalised:

190

> Women were excluded from the centres where decisions to launch an armed struggle or to later reach a peace agreement were taken. No particular attention was paid to gender equality issues or women's social rights in public life despite the fact that elsewhere in Europe feminist movements and women's issues were being promoted. Emphasis was put on the bicommunal nature of the Republic with the ethnic component … very strong.
>
> (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010: 248)

Within the context of the ethno-national conflict, women took on (and still frequently maintain) the roles of helpers and healers, pursuing the attainment of the basic staples of food, shelter, health and stability for their families and others in need, as well as providing psychological support to those that were wounded and traumatised by the political turmoil, putting their own wounds aside; men, on the other hand, have been the solders, fighters and protectors (Cockburn, 2001). Here, we see the genderised division between the private and public, the women's realm being the home and family, a job generally seen as a necessary one but not of high status, and where the major decisions were taken by men; alternatively men are free to be active members of society and hold male-dominated positions deemed socially important, such as mayors, managers, lawyers, doctors, etc. (Hadjipaclou, 2006).

According to Hadjipavlou (2006), the reasons behind the increase of separatism and violence during the political conflict were often neither comprehended nor discussed by women who cultivated close relationships as neighbours and friends despite differing ethnic origins and religious backgrounds. Women habitually shared food, clothing, and domestic chores; they enjoyed coffee together in one another's homes; their children attended the same schools and played for together for years. They collectively underwent the joys and sorrows of a joint daily existence. Conversely, in

this militaristic Cyprus men were in charge of protecting women and children from a parallel reality that to women remained vague, scary and painful. The gendered construction of human pain and suffering, where 'pain is feminised' and 'bravery is a male characteristic, are derivatives of military conflict'; in the case of Cyprus there is 'much evidence that national and ethnic groups use women and gender relations to pursue specific ethnic political strategies' (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010: 251).

The resulting 'stakes' in the conflict, as Hadjipavlou terms it, have also been posed in gender-specific terms. Masculine characteristics and responsibilities, such as status, stature, sovereignty, revenge, heroism, honour, and patriotism are of highest value (Hadjipavlou, 2010), as the society politically separated into nationalists (right) and liberals/taksim (left) in the years surrounding the Turkish invasion. Despite their shared social memory and mutual reality, these two groups are diametrically positioned regarding the actual historical events of the conquest and their significance in day-to-day life. Consequently, most of the women's organisations in Cyprus have existed within the dominant male-governed political arena, devoid of a feminine voice and position on women's issues, utilising the existing system to gain ground on social and economic issues (Hadjipavlou, 2010). This framework upholds the existing polarity, power-over relationships and enmity rooted in views and stereotypes of an internal 'other', either male or female (Vassiliadou, 2004).

It is therefore important to ask: What would the 'stakes', as Hadjipavlou puts it, or characteristics resulting from the conflict, be in feminine terms? Can we label them with characteristics such as harmony, cooperation, abundance, and creation? Do these typically female characteristics simply fit into the stereotypes we are socialised

to accept, or is there truth in the notion that women tend to work through conflict to achieve empowerment instead of using it to gain power over another? Hadjipavlou (2006) bypasses the debate of nature vs. nurture, focusing instead on the limitations of constructed and institutionalised gender roles due to militarism and nationalism, further complicating the effects of patriarchy, as well as the hope expressed by the women in the BWG for the ultimate transcendence of stereotypes that limit individual choices and social freedom for both genders:

> Militarised masculinity is not the only form of masculinity and these women hoped that with a solution and a new peace structure, gentler forms of manhood for men and boys would be constructed. The feminist values of tolerance, understanding, cooperation, empathy, acknowledging the other's truth and reality as well as building networks to highlight the absence of Cypriot women from decision-making levels are very much part of the bi-communal women's peacebuilding efforts and agenda for equality and fulfilment of their basic human rights and needs.
>
> (Hadjipavlou, 2006: 350)

Cockburn (2004) looks at the politicised Cypriot woman at large, also including women from both the north and south regions of the island. A main focus in Cockburn's work is women's cooperation in the service of political activism, often enabling voluntary and successful relations between the two communities despite continuing adversity rooted in what she deems a male-initiated political conflict:

> Like the state, the political sphere and the economic world, civil society as a whole was, and remains, male-dominated. To have a place in decision-making and to get their own issues on the agenda, women, it seems, need their own organisations. And in civil society, in contrast to the formal political system, gender separatism is possible, and tolerated.
>
> (Cockburn, 2004: 143)

As such, women create their own progressive spaces and networks secluded from patriarchally driven joint spaces, avoiding dissent and repression caused by a male-dominated power structure whilst collaboratively achieving autonomy and agency (Cockburn, 2004). As in Hadjipavlou's group, within these spaces women are free to create and actively pursue their goals, perhaps in order to gain overall freedom from the patriarchy or even from specific men. The research of these two scholars shows that women in Cyprus value cooperation and progress rather than the perpetuation of divergent paradigms and discourses (also reflected in my women's group).

The distinct male and female spheres I have noted in Cyprus are frequently delineated by physical spaces that can also be viewed as demarcating the public and private domains and their respective moral codes. The atmosphere and implications of exclusively male spaces can be exemplified by the *kafeneio*/ καφενείο (pronounced ka fe ni' o), a coffee shop rather unlike the modern café. A family owned shop, often in a section of the owners' home, it is a place where men, usually friends of the owner, drink, smoke, discuss politics, gamble and sometimes appear with a mistress. The *kafeneio* is almost entirely inaccessible to morally upright women, as are casinos, taverns after 11 pm, football clubs, and certain bars. Examples of predominantly female spaces are clothing shops, beauty salons, supermarkets, elementary schools, certain cafés, and the home. Hadjipavlou (2006) addresses the politics of gender-based division as a mutual concern for both northern and southern communities:

> In both communities the BWG agreed 'women are absent from
> key policy-making centres of power so they are not allowed to
> voice their concerns and views unless they behave like men or do
> as men say'. Thus the politics of space builds a certain type of

> masculinity and femininity whereby Cypriot men are viewed as pragmatic, tough, assertive and emotionally strong and women as emotional, home careers, and easy to give in, or, 'paying attention to the wrong things'.
>
> (Hadjipavlou, 2006: 41)

The dominance of men in Cypriot society thus means that men have easier access to female spaces than the opposite; usually, however, most do not seem to use privilege, deeming the female realm inferior, less important and containing less prestige (Vassiliadou, 2004; Cockburn, 2004). In joint private spaces, such as a dinner party or a celebration, I have witnessed the division again occurring, the male area in the living room or garden, while women gather in the kitchen. Even in shared public spaces, such as shopping areas, the cinema, parks, or the beach it has been noted that women and men tend to split into separate groups, activities and conversations.

So deeply embedded in daily happenings, the male-dominated hierarchy is upheld by both men and women with such assuredness that it regularly goes unnoticed. In addition to the habitual nature of social conduct, this shrouding of the daily reality of gender inequity and discrimination can be found on an institutional level and even in some of the research. A unique sociological study of 1000 Cypriot women between the ages of 15 and 60 conducted by the Psycho-Sociological Research Group (Cyprus) between 1978 and 1980 (Mylona, 1986) refers to relationships important to women, listing marriage, family, male-female relationships, sexual liberation of women, work, politics and religion. Yet there is no mention of female-female relationships, such as mother-daughter, sisters, friends, or colleagues. More recent statistical and news reports show that women's health issues are swept aside; there is no state support for domestic help when both parents are working (the woman is expected to handle

all issues of the home); and women's organisations receive the least government funding. In fact, the term 'she has a good mind, she thinks like a man' (εχει καλό μυαλό, σκέφτεται όπως τον άντρα) is still used by both men and women to describe women who are clever and think 'straight' (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010: 260).

Data regarding the Cypriot labor force, government, and higher education further reflect the enduring sexism. Despite recent steps to 'modernise' Cyprus, social and socio-economic restrictions placed on women, are still prominent. Today Cyprus has the highest wage gap in Europe with 25% less for women (*Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus,* 2008, online). In addition, women are still far less present in high level positions and government offices, with a man to woman ratio of 9:1. And while all young women currently have access to higher education, most still opt for lower-paying fields traditionally designated for females, becoming teachers, secretaries, nurses and beauticians (Pyrgos, 1993). Moreover, while many young women today hold a college degree, a full-time job, and contribute significantly to the family income, family life and the home are still often viewed as a woman's *real* place, given priority over career advancements by women themselves, regardless of age and class; women's professional pursuits are often regarded as a necessity to achieve economic security and social status for her family rather than an opportunity to develop her talents and interests (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010).

Leda Koursoumba, former Law Commissioner of Cyprus and current Commissioner of Children's Rights, states in a presentation she delivered in 2005 entitled *The Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Cyprus* that although 'the principle of equal treatment and prohibition of any form of discrimination, direct or indirect,

against any person on the ground of gender is constitutionally safeguarded (Article 28 of the Constitution) in the Republic of Cyprus', gender inequality in Cyprus is still of great concern as 'we have not managed to allow gender equality to permeate the fabric of our society' (online). Koursoumba lists all the positive egalitarian legal statutes that exist in order to protect women's rights, emphasising an impressive order of the Supreme Court of Cyprus:

> … the right of equality between men and women (as protected by the Constitution and international instruments) is a substantive right and should be effectively implemented, so as to give women the benefit of actual enjoyment of their legal, economic and social rights, to help them become independent and to eliminate their dependency on men; equal treatment should exist both in law and practice. At the same time it should allow for reasonable distinctions accepting the characteristics of the female sex.
>
> (Koursoumba, online)

However, Koursoumba follows by providing an equally extensive compilation of statistical information that depicts the highly uneven distribution of employment, salaries and opportunity in Cyprus. Koursoumba goes on to portray, again using statistically founded research, that despite the slowly increasing number of women in high positions and in politics, disproportion prevails:

> In today's Cyprus, it is evident that the participation if women in public life and, in particular, in the "decision-making" bodies and high level positions, is extremely limited. This holds true, not only for the public sector but also for the private sector. A recent research by the Employers and Industrialists Federation shows that though employers generally trust their women employees at least as much as their men (93%), only 14.4% of high posts are held by women.
>
> (Koursoumba, online)

A more recent depiction of the position of women in Cypriot society and on foreign policy is offered by Alexandros Zenon, permanent secretary of the Cyprus Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, in an article he wrote in honour of Women's Day in March 2017. His account shows that despite solid efforts toward equality of Cypriot legislature and Cypriot organisations that promote progress, the results are not yet sufficient:

> In evaluating women' status and achievements in the Cypriot Foreign Ministry, it is obvious that there is still much to be done to reach our goal of complete equality and a more female-friendly foreign policy. Nevertheless, I do see important progress towards the right direction. It is essential that we work towards a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality, where all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed.
>
> (Zenon, 2017, online)

As such, even with the social reforms and women's agency in Cyprus over the last 50 years vis-à-vis equal rights and women's choices, the professional life of both genders and ability to produce income continue to stem from an ongoing struggle. Argyrou (1996, 2017) holds a different perspective, suggesting that the gender imbalance is fueled by the desire of both genders to enter a higher economic class that symbolises western cultural norms, in which the notion of a 'better' job is equated with a higher salary and a more bourgeois/European status. Cyprus is again torn between tradition and modernity, as Cypriot culture is not culturally aligned with the western ideals or practices that drive its socio-economic pursuits.

Another issue to consider is that domestic jobs like housework and childcare are frequently not shared by both genders but rather fall on the shoulders of women who also have a paying day-job; this typically results in a difficult situation that compels traditional gender roles to co-exist with modern feminine opportunities and pursuits (Vassiliadou, 2002). The quest for social distinction and power conjoined

with the exigency for gender equality are therefore at the crux of the conflicting social expectations and criteria regarding the Cypriot woman. Moreover, according to Koursoumba (2005, online), in Cypriot society women are linked to the home due to learned traditional gender roles, but also because 'a woman in public is faced with more skepticism, with mistrust'; she continues by stating that if a woman in a public post makes even a minor mistake, she 'is treated with irony, often with a reference to her sex – which is not the case for most men!'. Koursoumba further contends that on the contrary, 'a man is accepted automatically as being competent, capable for any post; or, at least he is not challenged a priori because of his sex' (2005, online).

The information Koursoumba offers in her 2005 presentation is crucial to this work. Koursoumba builds her argument by implementing an abundance of statistical and factual research that depict financial, political and labour-related gender inequality; she then strengthens her case by boldly confirming the daily experiences of women in Cyprus regarding undermining and discriminatory attitudes, exclusion and inequity in the sociocultural domain.

As pointed out at various points throughout this chapter, it is both interesting and significant that the female participants in *ap'to plevro enos andra*, without being intentionally instigated by my coaching or by the nature of the movement explorations they were assigned, physically embodied and verbally expressed many of social, cultural and political the issues and theoretical stances regarding women brought forth in this chapter. The lack of a conceptual framework and equally important social context for the presence of women's voices and feminine identities free from androcentric paradigms perpetuates the exclusion of women from equal

participation in the public sphere. As evident in the material that emerged in *ap'to plevro enos andra*, many young women are aware of this dynamic, on a number of levels, even if they are afraid to expose, contest, or change it in a society where women's voices, concerns and practices continue to be invalidated.

The complex and contradictory nature of modern mainstream women's voices (and realities) in Cyprus can perhaps be encapsulated by the contents of a weekly periodical, first issued in February of 2012, entitled *Γυναίκα* (pronounced yi ne' ka) meaning 'woman'. Upon first glance the paper appears as a progressive publication concerned with women's rights, issues and agency. Crucial and controversial topics such as women's presence in legislative positions, the rise of domestic violence, sex-trafficking and prostitution, and empowering perspectives on divorce and single parenthood are found in the first few pages. Yet upon closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that the latest fad diets accompanied by photos of slim, young women, a 'stars and gossip' section and articles featuring stereotypical and glamourous images of women comprise over half of each issue.

A specific article struck me due to its title: *How (NOT) to Lose him in 10 (or less) Days* (Maria Andreou, 2012); it included several practical and cunning tips to help women keep a man so that they would not end up alone. This notion is quite contrary to the legal protection and support of women in their effort toward self-sufficiency and independence from men (quoted above). A current, unattainable picture of the Cypriot woman, in which she has to be 'everything', repeatedly confirmed by comments shared by female participants during *Identity Project*, is propagated and advocated in such publications, advertisements, and other media.

X

Biting the Apple: Feminine Identities Re-invented

During one of our early rehearsals Eva, acting as a spokesperson for the rest as she tenderly massaged Rory's back during a warm-up, asked: 'So are we going to have some set movement in this piece? We have three courses this semester that include improvisation…we just want to dance!' I will not discuss here the pros and cons of putting set movement in a work made for the purposes of research; I will however note that for the purposes of this research I did not deny this unanimous request. I considered that in light of the group's knowledge that this was an exploratory project about women their desire for set movement must mean something about their need to feel secure and as part of a group (later confirmed during a reflection). I created a traveling sequence to a piece of music entitled *Waltz,* by Greek composer Eleni Karaindrou; the movement included slides, leaps, turns, and floor segments. The dancers enjoyed performing it from the first run; it was expanded and included toward the end of the piece to communicate the group's sense of collective identity. It was danced with delight and enthusiasm, a clear transition from the despair and confusion at the onset of the process. This pleasure was evident in other segments depicting women's collective identity created by the collaborators parallel to rehearsing my set sequence; some have been described earlier in this chapter.

In addition to achieving a collective performance, the transcendence of personal and interpersonal boundaries can be seen as fostering a collective sense of spatiality, physically and conceptually. Sociologist Wendy Wolford (2004) who focuses on the role of space in social and geographical reforms suggests that social movements are

built upon 'spatial imaginaries' that include both collective and individual discourses based on the connection between lived experiences and intersubjective notions of space. Following the premise that dancemaking is a lived experience, the dancers' shift in perspective can be linked to the establishment of a communal physical space. Subsequently a communal conceptual framework was generated in which they could re-establish individual and collective embodiments, and re-set representations of empowerment, confidence, and freedom within a feminine space.

Five young, beautiful, and vibrant women, dressed in luscious shades of green and red, the colours of Eden, rejoice in their womanhood. With coy smirks they stand in line, playfully passing red apples to one another. Just before the curtain closes, Lily takes a deep bite into the last one. The pleasure, confidence, and elation in this collective expression of woman is a far cry from the opening – a crippled, worried, woman battling with her own image in an unforgiving mirror, or a pregnant woman muted by a society that refused to hear her.

I feel proud of these young women who are my students, colleagues, friends; this turn of events is their doing. They used the choices they were give in this piece to transform confusion and oppression into freedom, community, joy, and empowerment. Yes, she bit the apple – and by the look on her face you can tell it tastes really, really good.

In this chapter I have shown that within a safe space that sustained an exploratory dancemaking process, the emotional, intellectual and corporeal expression of self enabled six women to question and re-actualise their identities. The outcomes of this process both reflect and contribute to the current research on Cypriot feminine identities, Cypriot gender constructs, and Cypriot women.

Moreover, I have argued that the minded, aesthetically informed moving body can be a meeting point for divergent perspectives and identity representations regarding women, disclosing significant issues prevalent in today's Cyprus. The shifting platform of the moving body enables the dancers to intersubjectively engage in the sharing and exchange of personal narratives, allowing for multiple female experiences to co-exist, interact and transform. I hope that this venture can be considered a small proactive step in the evolution of Cypriot women's voices, female roles, and feminine sociocultural identities.

XI

Epilogue # 4

Now you will have to decipher
my silences,
the sealed wishes,
the imaginary departures,
my body wrapped
in sheets
of thorny thyme,
bemoaning,
I want to have a summer dress
like this, seamless,
flannel expenditure of skin.

      – From *Silver Bird*, Zelia Gregoriou (2012: 80)

Chapter 4

barely there: The Performative Moment as the Practice of Freedom

I

bare-ly there: Unexpected Disclosures

> … no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise can ever be finished or complete. There is always more. There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom. Much the same can be said about experiences with art objects – not only literary texts, but music, painting, dance.
>
> — Maxine Greene (1988: 128)

> 'I' is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself, *infinite layers*.
>
> — Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989: 94)

> *bare-ly there – a performative study about being and not being our selves, about our inhibitions and what exists in their absence, about stepping outside our selves and into an other, or others, even momentarily…*
>
> *bare-ly there – an uncomfortable pair of jeans, an itchy sweater, a road without signs, a long wait at the bus-stop without a mobile phone to distract, I don't know what to do with my hands, where to avert my eyes…what to you see when you look at me?*
>
> *bare-ly there, a historical discourse on the origins of our selves, my father's nose, my grandmother's hands, my hot temper, my bright smile, I am my mother's daughter. Remember: my sexy legs; remember: the war, remember: angry women are ugly women…*
>
> *bare-ly there: but we ARE here. We are sad and scared, mad and ecstatic, and we are not sure how to say all it is we have to say…*
>
> — excerpts from my process journal (May/June 2013)

As noted in the Introduction the third and last choreographic work of *Identity Project* underwent an atypical sequence of events in its making, particularly in comparison to the smoother development of its precursors. *Bare-ly there* began in 2012 as a study in the form of an autobiographical solo on Eva, a participant in both *kouponi allagis* and *ap'to plevro enos andra*. The piece became a collaborative group work in early of 2013, was performed as a work-in-progress that spring, and was paused. *Bare-ly there* spilled over into another process a year later with new participants but was not performed publicly until 2017. Details are discussed below.

From a practical point of view, a key reason *bare-ly there* was indefinitely suspended in June of 2013 was the withdrawal of some collaborators due to life changes prompted by the then-recent and sudden Cypriot economic crisis. The onset of the crisis, officially marked by the announcement by the Cypriot media of the bankruptcy and subsequent closing down of Laiki Bank/ *Λαϊκή Τράπεζα* in late March 2013 (one of the largest Cypriot banks at the time), was followed by its buying out by the Bank of Cyprus/Τράπεζα Κύπρου in May of 2017 (*Philenews*, online, May 11, 2017). It can be said that all residents of Cyprus were affected by the crisis both economically and emotionally. In our case, two performers left Nicosia (where our rehearsals took place) for jobs in different cities; another had increasing time constraints as he traveled weekly to four different points on the island to make ends meet for his family. One of the younger collaborators, a third-year student in the Dance BA at the University of Nicosia, transferred to another university course in Europe that was more affordable. Finally, the remaining four cast members were either looking for employment or struggling with other repercussions of this unforeseen set-back.

I was not an outsider to the effects of the financial strain. My application for a small grant to support the project (as I had intended to pay the dancers) was denied by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture quite likely due to the recent cuts (artists are never given the exact reason funding is denied). Moreover, our university salaries were heftily trimmed while our teaching hours and demands were considerably increased. It seemed as if art and artmaking had been reduced to frivolous luxuries overnight; the crisis made it difficult to continue requesting time and creative presence from the dancers, while my process still required both elements.

From an artistic perspective (insofar as it can be separated from the effects of the crisis), *bare-ly there* did not unfold as seamlessly as the other two works; perhaps this is because my intentions were more demanding. In subsequently inquiring into this course of events I have detected an underlying, vital pedagogical layer to *Identity Project*, most prominent in *bare-ly there*, often but not always conscious, and one which shaped the research and generated outcomes that could not have otherwise been achieved. The term 'pedagogy' has several meanings and interpretations related to the transmission of knowledge as ideas, information, and skills. The word is directly derived from the Greek παιδαγωγία (paidagōgia or pedagogy), and παιδαγωγός (paidagōgos or pedagogue), a synthesis of ἄγω (ágō), 'I lead', and παῖς (país, genitive παιδός, paidos) 'child' – literally meaning 'to lead a child' – connoting the transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge as well as virtues (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). In considering the elements of dancemaking it can be argued that all choreographic practice is pedagogical, for technique, original movement, and style are learned, interpersonal skills are refined, and kinesthetic facility is cultivated.

However, beyond meeting basic educational criteria, I propose that the collaborative choreographic process in *Identity Project* can be specifically situated within the field of critical pedagogy. I will first present the ideas central to critical pedagogy and then demonstrate the presence and significance of this approach throughout *Identity Project*. According to educational theorist Joe L. Kincheloe (2008), critical pedagogy challenges us to relearn what we know according to our own perspectives and in light of the sociopolitical influences at hand. Kincheloe's views (2000, 2008) expand upon the egalitarian, non-hierarchical theories and practices of pedagogue, activist, and educational philosopher Paulo Freire (1970, 1978) that espouse the notion that pedagogy can trigger social change. This outlook is based on the idea that knowledge is power, and that power is involved on the dissemination of knowledge; more explicitly, if a teacher uses his/her position of power to engage students in critical and original thinking, they will become active citizens that aim to initiate positive change in the world (Freire, 1970). Kincheloe (2008) argues that power is continually at play in the school environment and curriculum, operating within social categories of class, race, and gender that favour some students and marginalise others. As such, teaching and learning are never neutral, but historically shaped and always political; education should be practised as resistance and empowerment (Kincheloe, 2000).

Another aspect of critical pedagogy discussed by Kincheloe (2000, 2008) as well as cultural critic Henry Giroux (1983, 2001), another founding theorist of current critical pedagogy, entails the full inclusion of students' perspectives in the learning process and their active discovery of knowledge by making connections between curricular themes, their personal reality, and society. Within this educational framework

students usually carve their own learning path by creating questions and problems, often assessing their own progress; again, teachers deliberately use their position of authority to facilitate this journey instead of dominating it, empowering their students to build confidence, a critical mind regarding the material as well as social issues, and creative responses to problem-solving (Kincheloe, 2000; Giroux, 2007).

Mentioned in the Introduction, Denzin (2003:2) proposes a similar notion that interconnects pedagogy and politics within what he calls a 'practical, progressive politics of a performative cultural studies', where 'performance-based human disciplines can contribute to radical social change'. According to Denzin (2003) the performative act is both crucial and inherent in critical pedagogical practice; it is learning by being-in-the-moment, fully embodying the material transferred by a teacher to students or shared between individuals in a dialogical context. Denzin refers to performative acts within the fields of theatrical performance, teaching, and research; he contends that this new and 'emancipatory discourse connects critical pedagogy with new ways of writing and performing culture' (2003:2).

Denzin's interpretation of the performative and the central role it plays in qualitative research is delineated in the excerpt below addressing the 'reflexive interview'; in building his argument Denzin frames the interview as a collaborative, dialogical, and interpretive process, calling it 'a vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies' that can bring people together through their narratives but also criticise social injustices (2001: 24). In addition, he uses the words 'research' and 'interview' interchangeably, contending that both 'arise out of performance events' as they 'transform information into shared experience' through a 'dialogic

conversation that connects us all to a larger moral community' (Denzin, 2001: 24).

Denzin (2001, 2017) further suggests that within this framework, personal histories and narratives are performed performatively; the 'information' learned through this exchange is retold performatively by the one who absorbs another's narrative:

> The present moment is defined by a performative sensibility, by a willingness to experiment with different ways of presenting an interview text. The performative sensibility turns interviews into performance texts, into poetic monologues. It turns interviewees into performers, into persons whose words and narratives are then performed by others.
>
> (Denzin, 2001: 25)

This process is particularly relevant to the methodology in *Identity Project* where participants used their own interview questions and narratives as research tools to assess and relearn aspects of identity and then to create movement. Participants' interview questions include: 'Have you ever been in love?'; 'Do you believe in God?'; 'Do you ever wish you could fly?'; 'Who are you *really*?' Denzin contends that this type of autoethnographic interview process is performative; in our case the performative often extended into the choreography as we attempted to maintain the 'honesty' (as Denzin puts it) present during initial interviews or improvisations (further discussed below). Denzin (2003) calls the process of dialogically sharing narratives a 'radical pedagogical act' that fosters experiential learning and critical thinking via egalitarian platforms for exchange and social change for all involved (including spectators in the case of a performance). He proposes that a series of such individual acts can ultimately result in a mass social movement; for this movement to be successful we must 'unsettle concepts of what counts as research, evidence, as legitimate inquiry' and turn to 'transformative' paradigms (Denzin, 2017:8).

A definition and analysis of the term 'radical' as used in this context is necessary; for the purposes of this discussion I will delineate how this term is applied by the aforementioned scholars as well as and my interpretation of it within my practical research for this project. The word 'radical' can mean 'different', 'uncompromising', and 'revolutionary'; yet it also connotes 'profound', deep-rooted', 'far-reaching' and 'essential' (*Cambridge online Etymology Dictionary*). Freire's use of the term 'radical' (1970, 1978) encompasses both, as he describes a pervasive, grounded, non-violent social revolution that begins with individual awareness through inclusive education that fosters free and creative thinking. Kincheloe (2000, 2008), Denzin (2001, 2003, 2017), and Giroux (2002, 2007) expand upon these notions, emphasising that radical pedagogical acts can generate new, and often better, forms of knowledge, research, discourses, and sociocultural environments. My view regarding radical pedagogy follows all of the above concepts, with the addition of the importance of art-making as a transformative pedagogical practice (further discussed in the following section).

The pedagogical aspect in *Identity Project* is significant as it affects both the path of the research and the research outcomes. Reflecting principles of critical pedagogy, my investigation of identity was, to a great extent, based upon the participants' open-mindedness, critical thinking, and creative approach to the material and tasks they were given. My research outcomes essentially depended on how deeply and honestly the collaborators were willing to explore and learn about themselves in order to come to conclusions and possibilities regarding sociocultural identity. In this process the participants can sometimes be seen as reaching points of inner conflict; I propose that they manner in which they worked through them is 'radical' as they

reached beyond points of uncertainty toward identity embodiments that were new and different in terms of their own habitual representations as well as those fitting into the status quo. In addition, these new manifestations of identity were profound and deep-seated on an individual level, as the participants expressed during group reflections, challenging what they had previously taken as a given sense of self.

For example, Chloe's text in *kouponi allagis* can be seen as disclosing an inner state of tension between her social persona on stage and her inner self as she repeats 'I am/I am not/I seem/I do not seem; I am'. She couples this phrase with a repetitive down-facing spiral that quickly brings her to the floor but then suddenly bolts her back up again to face the audience; she does so momentarily but then turns her whole body to face sideways, avoiding direct contact with the spectating body. Another example is Eva's exploration of her 'evil side' in *ap'to plevro* (Chapter 3) where she embraces rather than tones down emotions such as anger, jealousy, and greed, usually looked down upon in Cypriot society (as stated by Eva). I argue that moments such as these embody a shift in perspective that is radical – different from anything previously experienced or deliberately communicated by the dancers in performance (drawn from dancers' feedback). The process, inclusive of the personal states and choices of each individual involved offered a space for their voices despite sexism, colonialism and other oppressive categories; this can also be viewed as radical. I suggest that this type of expression that leads to knowledge might be smothered by practices that do not consider the individual journey of each dancer.

It can thus be said that *Identity Project* engages a core idea of critical pedagogy in venturing toward an egalitarian approach to choreography, in which all perspectives

211

are embraced as research/learning and participants partake in the dance-making and decision-making. Further adhering to critical pedagogical practices, the participants re-learned and re-shaped typical identity paradigms through verbal inquiry, bodily exploration, and personal narratives, a new process in comparison to other Cypriot choreography taking place at the time (as exemplified throughout the thesis). Correspondent with the views of the theorists presented above, participants often carved their own learning paths within the choreographic process, their reflections functioning as a form of assessment. During group discussions participants confirmed the presence of an educational environment with statements such as 'I have learned a lot about myself through this', 'I am rediscovering my body' and 'it is unbelievable how much we have found out about women in our society I never noticed before'.

Finally, again in line with the basic principles of critical pedagogy presented above, our choreographic process was concerned with social issues. *Bare-ly there,* in particular, had a direct political purpose that challenged spectators about confining identity constructs in order to trigger social amendment (albeit on the small scale of performing the piece – see Conclusion); yet all three works had sociopolitical themes often presented in a manner that engaged the spectator, like Eric's solo in *kouponi allagis* (see Chapter 2). Another example is Lily's solo in *ap'to plevro*, where she in used her pregnant state in conjunction with evocative text to express her sense of displacement. Her quick, strong, desperate movement and her clear, confident tone of voice can be seen as dispelling Cypriot myths regarding pregnant women, often seen as weak, docile, inactive, and confined to the home (based on comments from participants and spectators). In guiding Lily I encouraged her to express herself as she

had chosen, supported her in moments of doubt, and allowed for rest periods when she felt she was over-doing it (more is said on ethics in Chapter 5). As such my interpretation of 'critical pedagogy', the term I use to indicate the theoretical field and teaching methods, informed by the explanations offered above, refers to alternative concepts and embodiments of identity achieved through questioning and performance possibilities that actively enroll performers in communal, creative, and reflective learning processes. Alternatively, the commentary on sociocultural identity in *Identity Project*, at times expressed performatively (analysed in later sections), can be viewed as an aspect of 'radical pedagogy', the term I will use to indicate a political/pedagogical act within art-making meant to evoke social awareness and/or change, as proposed by Denzin (2003, 2017) and Freire (1970, 1978).

In closing this discussion I will briefly refer to the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, a theatrical style founded by Augusto Boal in Brazil in the early 1970's reflecting the theories of Freire (presented above). Boal's practice aims to connect performativity, politics, pedagogy, and non-violent agency in an egalitarian theatrical framework offering voices to those oppressed by racism, classism, and sexism, thereby inviting audiences to challenge society. Pedagogy and theater scholar Warren Linds (I turn to writings on theatre as sources on dance and Boal are available only as workshop descriptions) points to Boal's notion that 'knowledge acquired aesthetically is already … the beginning of a transformation'; we learn about the world and ourselves using cultural tools (1998, online). The basis of Boal's workshops entail 'developing an awareness of the body, demechanizing daily rituals, exploring the nature of theatre, investigating the nature of power, and the particular theme of the workshop'. There

is a facilitator rather than a director, a collaborative creative process, and a tradition of confronting spectators with controversial themes (Linds, 1998, online). Finally, Boal (1992) approaches the actor-spectator relationship as inciting participation observation; his term 'Spect-Actor' denotes the process of learning about oneself through actively watching theatre. I will not discuss Boal's method further beyond its significance regarding this project: first, aspects of it resonate with mine (exemplified below) though I did not draw from his exercises and techniques as others have in recent decades (Gewertz, 2003, online); second, it is a living example of how politics, performance, and pedagogy function together within an arts-based discourse.

Below in this chapter, again by interconnecting analysis and reflection, I approach the circumstances underlying the unconventional development of *bare-ly there* as part of the research path and conclusions so far, and as directing new possibilities for the project unto completion. These dynamics and their outcomes will be investigated from the perspective of a still-evolving performance that migrates from a series of unique autobiographies based on personal narratives to an integrated performative ethnography in which the dialogical exchange and retelling of narratives become the premise (the ethnographic aspect touched upon in this chapter is discussed at length in Chapter 5). Within this context the performative moment, or *performMent*, will be discussed as a pedagogical, political, performance-based event with transformative potential for the performer and perhaps for the spectator. I will address significant *performMents* in *Identity Project* through their surrounding artistic conditions as well as pedagogical frameworks relevant to this work; I will also look at the relationship between radical pedagogy and performativity and the related research implications.

II

Background and Process: From Art-Making to Transgression

Bare-ly there initially involved eight artists, six women and two men between the ages of 18 and 48, all with some background in improvisational practice and contemporary dance.[39] As in the previous works, this first attempt at *bare-ly there* was rehearsed at the dance studios of the University of Nicosia, and the participants were either former or current students of mine. While this this process implemented improvisation, physical contact, voice and text like the others, for *bare-ly there* I created a particular series of exercises using what I then called *pure improvisation* (described later in this chapter) to incite spontaneous responses and liberated modes of communication, individually, with another, or within a group, provoking a disruption of their comfortable identity representations. As in *kouponi allagis* and *ap'to plevro enos andra,* improvisation functioned as a medium for surprising encounters with self and other, and a shift in the performers' perception and disclosure of personal and collective identities. As noted in Chapter 2, the phrase *kouponi allagis* corresponds with this notion, as *allagi/αλλαγή* means 'exchange' but also 'change.' Within a continuum of embodied exchange, alternative feminine and masculine identities would be played out, mainly as collaborative improvisations and inter-active bodily discourses. However, contrary to the first two pieces, the process of *bare-ly there* was less compromising. I was more intent on getting the participants out of their physical, mental, and emotional comfort zones right from the start; the tasks were more challenging and the political intent was a driving force from the onset. Finally, *bare-ly there* was to culminate in an alternative public performance.

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[39] As indicated earlier, relevant details of the artistic collaborators are provided in *Appendix B*.

Along these lines, the vision for *bare-ly there* was to embrace the outcomes of the first two works and reach farther, unearthing the less comfortable or known selves that reside within us. This objective was motivated by the lived experience of the unstable, reflexive, intersubjective 'I' in *kouponi allagis* as we failed to locate more fixed versions of sociocultural identity, or the 'real self' beneath artificial layers (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, while in *ap'to plevro enos andra* the female artists were offered a safe space to tell personal stories through the embodiment and exchange of their experiences as women (Chapter 3), in *bare-ly there* the performers were challenged to use embodied representations of multiple selves as triggers for social commentary and subversion (noted in previous section). In purposely destabilising notions of self/'I' and other/'you' in *bare-ly there* the status quo is confronted, yielding new possibilities for both personal and sociopolitical identity constructs.

This approach stems from my prior choreographic practice that has often applied elements of experiential education, an area related to critical pedagogy, in which dance-making is approached as learning processes for the dancers and for me, as facilitator. In this manner during *Identity Project* I aimed to generate an inner shift in the participants' perspectives as well as an external social commentary for the audience. Influences in this area include experience-based education in my undergraduate and graduate studies; the scholarship I turn to mainly involves the work of Freire (1968/1970[40], 1978), mentioned above; education philosopher John Dewey (1934); philosopher and dance educator Margaret H'Doubler (1959); feminist writer, pedagogue, and activist bell hooks (1994, 2000, 2002); and philosopher, educator and activist Maxine Greene (1988, 1995).

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[40] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was written in Portuguese in 1968; English translation, 1970.

Dewey, in particular, was the first to propose life-related art as an 'esthetic experience', a significant and often transformative moment in life (re-visited in later sections); Dewey also argues that art-making is essentially political as it partakes of real life, for art and life are inherently interconnected (1934). In this light, *Identity Project* pursues the transiency of improvised movement based on real-life as an arena for learning and change. As stated above, this process can result in politically relevant acts that, when 'viewed as struggles and interventions, performances … become transgressive achievements, political accomplishments' (Denzin, 2003:2). Moreover, my process implemented experiential investigation to disclose restricting and repressive identity constructs (specific examples will be provided in the following sections). Along these lines Denzin, like Boal (1993) emphasises the link between performance and pedagogy, proposing that 'as pedagogical practices, performances make sites of oppression visible' and 'affirm an oppositional politics that reasserts the value of self-determination and mutual solidarity' (2003:14). As such, *Identity Project* sought to probe identity via 'new models of performance, representation, intervention, and praxis', exploring how we achieve knowledge and its value in society (Denzin, 2017: 8). Though not always overtly pedagogical, the collaborative process often found itself the interface of art, pedagogy, and politics, taking form as a discovery process in contrast to 'forms of … knowledge that', as stated by Giroux, 'provide a mechanistic and deterministic view of the world' (1979: 262), often characterising product-based training in the Cypriot dance community (discussed in earlier chapters). The tasks in *Identity Project* were designed not only to help dancers 'generate their own meanings, but also to help them reflect on the process of thinking itself' (Giroux, 1979: 263). 'Thinking', within this scheme, prompts discovery.

III

<u>Art as Liberator</u>

> Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is.
>
> – John Dewey (1934: 17)

Education philosopher Maxine Greene (1998), whose work is largely founded on the education theories of Dewey (1934) links artistic pursuits and experiential learning, suggesting that the arts can play a central role in the acquisition of innovatory knowledge as the hands-on, lived, and expressive nature of the arts make accessible the most diverse and unique versions of human expression. Since in interpreting and making art value is given to subjective experience, divergent thinking, and shared emotion, collaboration, compassion, and understanding are generated, shedding light on obscure aspects of humanity (H'Doubler, 1959; Greene, 1988). In this vein, H'Doubler's then-pioneering words refer specifically to dance as a 'democratic art activity' that is 'as natural to the child as breathing'; she argues that when dance is pursued as a creative art 'adult life might reach beyond any results we can now contemplate' (1959: xx). Greene (1988) also suggests that as springboards for dialogue the arts can ground the learner in an environment where 'other' validates and shapes rather than threatens; creating a basis for a 'pursuit of freedom', they

> …have the capacity, when authentically attended to, to enable persons to hear and see what they would not ordinarily hear and see, to offer visions of consonance and dissonance that are unfamiliar and indeed abnormal, to disclose the incomplete profiles of the world.
>
> (Greene, 1988: 128-129)

Greene therefore proposes that the power inherent in the sincere pursuit of the arts can merge opposites and open spaces for the new and unidentified; as this creative pursuit of learning the arts can also activate transformation, as they

> … have the capacity to defamiliarize experience: to begin with the overly familiar and transfigure it into something different enough to make those who are awakened hear and see.
>
> (Greene, 1988: 129)

In applying Greene's notions to this research it can be argued that the experience described in the excerpt above outlines aspects of my exploration of identity through art-making. With specific reference to the exact words, the 'overly familiar' may refer to one's identity as it manifests as one's habitual, social persona; when we re-create our sense of self, or selves, through improvisation and performativity it can be said that we 'transfigure it into something different enough'; finally, when we 'make those who are awakened hear and see' it can be suggested that we have reached a moment of communication and transformation of what was previously a given.

Moreover, Greene's description above connotes that for the arts to have such an effect, active learning and creativity is involved, rather than inert absorption; this resonates with *Identity Project*, where art-making is at the crux of a pursuit for new knowledge regarding identity. Knowledge is not passively achieved; it is a creative act, a 'mediator of communication and dialogue among learners' (Giroux, 1979: 262). Within the 'openings' resides choice. In line with this, education philosopher Howard Gardner, (1983, 1993), creator of the educational theory of multiple intelligences, and music educator and scholar Charles Fowler (1996), suggest that using the symbolic language of the arts enhances the understanding of abstract notions and

emotional states. The significance of the arts in pedagogy, particularly in the face of mass oversimplification and product-based methods in education, is underscored by critical pedagogy theorists Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2000, 2017). Furthermore, it has been argued that the arts foster interpersonal skills such as compassion and collaboration as well as intrapersonal knowledge through the inner reflection prompted by art-making; both can lead to rediscovering and/or re-shaping aspects oneself (Greene, 1988; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, 2017). This concept was first introduced by Dewey (1934), as indicated by Greene (1988) below:

> It is, actually, in the process of effecting transformations that the human self is created and re-created. Dewey, like the existentialist thinkers, did not believe that the self was ready-made or pre-existent... The richness, the complexity of the selves people create are functions of their commitments to projects of action they recognize as their own.
>
> (Greene, 1988: 21-22)

As emphasised by Greene (1988), through examining and embodying the material at hand through experiential learning the self can be both located and re-created within that context. This perspective embraces the possibility of the perpetual re-creation of self has been vital to my exploration of identity; I argue that experiential learning, sustained by improvisation, personal narratives, and reflection, connected the artistic work in Identity Project with real life experiences leading to new, grounded knowledge that would not have been achieved otherwise. Dewey (1934: 55) suggests that the experience of art, either as an observer or creator, requires one to be 'receptive'; he seems this type of 'perception … an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive' as 'we steep ourselves in a subject-matter'. This notion particularly reflects the exchange of narratives, where the participants were receptive observers.

IV

Alternative Pedagogies: Transgression, Transformation, and Intimacy

> Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom.
>
> – bell hooks (1994: 11)

It has been suggested that the approach implemented in *Identity Project* (details below), though not always deliberately pedagogical, often reflects the aims of radical pedagogy, as I employed a lived reality in art-making that called upon daily activities to serve as transformative opportunities. In addition, I have proposed that as stated by Denzin (2003), this process is simultaneously moral and political (Denzin, 2003), offering 'versions of civic life, community and future, and how we might construct representations of ourselves others, and our physical and social environment' (Giroux, 2013:2). As such, radical pedagogy is a praxis-based pedagogical/political model distinguished as a living movement within the larger field of critical pedagogy, rather than a theoretical analysis or critique. Further noted above, central to critical pedagogy are egalitarian student-teacher and peer-peer interactions that differ from the well-known construct featuring 'teacher as powerful guru' at the head of the classroom. In a review of Freire's book, *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea Bissau* (1978), Giroux (1979) refers this notion in Freire's theory and practice:

> Unlike "banking education" that inhibits creativity and domesticates students, a radical pedagogy requires non-authoritarian social relationships that support dialogue and communication as an indispensable tool for questioning the meaning and nature of knowledge and peeling away the hidden structures of reality.
>
> (Freire in Giroux: 1979: 263)

Freire finds deep-seated racism, sexism, classism, and cultivation of subjugation within the structure and intentions of what he calls 'banking education' (above), in which authoritarian parties (educators) 'deposit' knowledge into passive recipients (students) that then memorise, file and mechanically utilise to subsequently achieve power over others within the existing system (Freire, 1970). Freire's relational pedagogical paradigm is in stark contrast to prevailing mainstream top-to-bottom, product-oriented educational model, in which teacher is intellectually and socially superior to student, possessing and exercising privileges that the student does not have in her reach (Giroux, 2012). Within the 'power-over' prototype exists an integral duty of teachers to dominate students and exert a type of ownership over them; this is accomplished either through a militaristic teaching style or teaching tactics that feign real friendship (Freire, 1978). Successful results, the absorption and regurgitation of the given material, require students' obedience and teachers' control, gained by maintaining students' suppression (hooks, 1994).

By upturning the familiar pedagogical pyramid in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1968/1970) challenges oppressive social, political and educational frameworks; in shifting the 'power-over' paradigm power is re-distributed. According to Freire (1970: 75) an educator's 'efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power' and they 'must be partners of the students'. In the tradition of other pragmatist philosophers like Dewey and H'Doubler who created a living foundation for egalitarian learning, Freire practised his beliefs as a teacher in local schools, deeming this an obligatory socio-political act; Freire's pursuits were candidly political (ultimately leading to exile) as he argued that a politically neutral' stance

implies allegiance to the oppressor (1970, 1978). While certain gaps between his theory and practice have been problematised by Giroux (1979) and others, Freire (1978) is still widely credited with the beginnings of critical pedagogy and linking the student-teacher relationship to social change; his concept of 'mutual humanization' entails the empowerment of student and teacher through an enriching, exploratory, honest relationship that precludes communal efforts and collective desires. Below I will expand upon this type of student-teacher relationship and its central role and significance in this project, again discovered retrospectively.

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), bell hooks refers to the theories and practice of her mentor, Freire, as she conveys her own experiences with critical thinking and unique classroom relationships and dynamics in the still-segregated school system of Kentucky in the 1950s and 1960s where she grew up. In her description hooks maintains that despite being subjugated to separatism and racism from the outside world, life within her community involved liberating and self-validating relationships that often traversed roles. One's classmates were often one's siblings or cousins; the teachers, all black women, may have also taught the students' parents; the town reverend might have been close childhood friend of students' fathers, and so on. According to hooks, the 'effort and ability to learn was always contextualized within the framework of generational family experience' (1994:3), and those years of schooling were wonderful. While women's futures were still relegated to mothering, homemaking, or teaching, female students within that close-knit community were treated with care and respected as individuals; talents were encouraged acts of empowerment for future generations:

> We learned early that our devotion to thinking, to a life of the mind was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance …
>
> (hooks, 1994: 2)

Conversely, hooks (1994) found the integrated junior school she later attended to be stifling, sexist, classist, and racist, as the values of the patriarchy dictated the type of knowledge esteemed and the ways it was acquired. Hooks came upon an analogous situation at university level, where 'white male professors who claimed to follow Freire's model even as their pedagogical premises were rooted in structures of domination, mirroring the styles of conservative professors' (1994:18). Hooks' exposure to Freire' work prompted a permanent shift in her perspective as a learner and future teacher. Hooks embraces teaching as the practice of freedom; within this construct the teacher's own growth and self-knowledge is a premise for her role as facilitator in her students' self-development. In line with this, a 'teacher' in this sense signifies a complete individual and, often, a type of spiritual mentor:

> Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy" is more demanding than conventional or critical pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. This means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. … In the United States it is rare that anyone talks about teachers in university settings as healers. And it is even more rare to hear anyone suggest that teachers have any responsibility to be self-actualized individuals.
>
> (hooks, 1994: 15-16)

Hooks' depiction of a personal rapport within a formal educational institution suggests that students may benefit most as learners and as people when they

cultivate several parallel relationships with their teachers. Reflective of our process, some scholars in favour pedagogical practices that involve friendships, including philosophers Søren Kierkegaard (1844) and Jacques Lacan (1960-61), and education theorists Seung Hwan Shim (2008) and James Stillwagon (2006, 2008, 2016), emphasise the student-teacher bond and the importance of emotional intimacy in order to keep the educational relationship functional, inspirational and intact. Akin to the Platonic mentor-student bond, the student learns through joint exploration of a subject with her teacher, both engaging as a whole persons (Shim, 2008), thus experiencing various aspects of human connection within a long-term relationship such as friendship, guidance, and vulnerability (Stillwagon, 2006).

Resonant with the above, it can be said that a close, sincere, egalitarian, mutually empowering facilitator-participant relationship prevailed in *Identity Project*. In line with the values of a non-hierarchical pedagogical model, and as stated by several participants during *Identity Project*, our rehearsals often felt like the meeting of friends yet also entailed overlapping relationships as colleagues, teachers/students, supervisors/employees, or family members. This climate, fostered by my aversion to upholding social labels and my aim to share authority, was quickly adopted by the participants. The results can be seen as positive yet complex. With trust established, this arena supports the exchange of conflicting perspectives, critical thinking, reconsideration of belief systems, and therapeutic dialogue. In offering the lead in artistic choices and decision-making to the participants I opened up possibilities that would not have been achieved in a more directive process. For example, the women in *ap'to plevro* created a therapeutic environment that allowed them to more safely

explore issues concerning women in Cyprus but also develop as individuals through the love and support felt for one another. The challenges of overlapping roles and other prevalent dynamics in the practice are discussed at length in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this chapter I will affirm that the intimacy in our dancemaking process led to the vulnerable un-layering of subject matter in the narratives as well as compassionate responses between the dancers. In implementing an egalitarian pedagogical model in all three works that allowed for the intersubjective exchange of multiple voices, a space was created for the *performMent* (further discussed below).

Before closing this discussion I deem it important to state that despite the above-mentioned efforts of Freire and his affiliates, however, it can be argued that much of the western world has again turned its back on the possibility of education as community, reform and social and political freedom (Giroux, 2012; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2017). According to Giroux (2014) under the current neo-liberal, corporate-run, test-driven educational policies that permeate much of North America and Europe (this includes Cyprus), the spheres of ethics and critical thinking have been subtracted from the learning equation; success is equated with exam-oriented, passive memorisation of disembodied facts in order to step up the ladder of standardised opportunism. Giroux (2013) further contends that within what he calls 'pedagogy of repression,' students and young working adults are comparable to automated zombies, unable to make new meanings out of learning situations, and 'conditioned to unlearn any respect for democracy, justice, and what it might mean to connect learning to social change'. In opposition to this growing suppression of true learning and intellectual and social streamlining, Denzin (2003a, 2003b) deems

'performative pedagogy' a potent form of agency. Similarly, hooks refers to honest, effective teaching as a 'performative act' in which teachers engage students dialogically, taking into consideration 'issues of reciprocity' (1994: 11).

Finally, what does 'performative pedagogy' in 'the pursuit for freedom' actually look or feel like? This is an important question to answer in light of the emphasis on experience and transformation within the critical pedagogical paradigm. Prior to seeking a literal description of the above, a conceptual context is necessary. I turn to Elizabeth Grosz (2010) for an applicable and evocative demarcation of 'freedom':

> … instead of linking the question of freedom to the concept of emancipation or to some understanding of liberation from, or removal of, an oppressive or unfair form of constraint or limitation, as is most common in feminist and other antioppressive struggles and discourses, I develop a concept of life, bare life, where freedom is conceived not only or primarily as the elimination of constraint or coercion but more positively as the condition of, or capacity for, action in life.
>
> (Grosz, 2010:140)

This notion of a pursuit and experience of freedom that is not dependent or limited by an 'other' goes back to questions of freedom that emerged in Chapter 3 regarding lived feminine identities and the influence of a male 'other' or patriarchal regime. The creative and proactive 'action for life', as suggested by Grosz above, detached from the oppressive 'other', is resonant with radical, or performative, pedagogy, where 'bare' freedom can be embodied, shared and transferred. Again, this may or may not be deliberate, but also may be a part of art-making, or even an aspect of living (Dewey, 1934). I suggest that the manifestation of a performative act such as this is unique to each individual experience, yet can be felt by the 'performer' and the 'recipient'; I call this the *performMent* (analysed in the next section).

V

Identifying the Performative Moment or *PerformMent*

As I have indicated in earlier chapters, the idea for pursuing the overt subversion of identity in *bare-ly there* came from a small but unique collection of what I have termed 'performative moments' that have stood out in *kouponi allagis* and *ap'to plevro enos andra*. I distinguished these moments as having a different nature to 'performed moments'; as spectator I kinesthetically experienced them as dialectic, revealing, intersubjective and transformational. They have been described as 'feeling different to perform than the rest of the piece' or as pivotal p*oints* by the performers executing them. Other comments shared by performers refer to 'feeling more like themselves' and 'losing a sense of time'. Interestingly, this feedback reflected my own experience in watching these segments, as well as some audience perspectives.

What are the specific characteristics that constitute these performative moments, or *performMents,* within a larger dramatic schema, within an artistic work or a longer string of life moments? Furthermore, what are the possible resulting implications of *performMent-ing* for Cypriot sociocultural identity, gender embodiment, and actualisation of self and other in formal performance and that of everyday life?

In this section and the next I will investigate the notion of the *performMent* by bringing to light the qualities of these distinctive movement/text narratives, both practically and theoretically, by turning to memorable examples from *Identity Project* then by looking at Dewey's concept of the lived, 'esthetic experience' (1934). I will also point to key similarities and differences, as I have identified them, between *performMents* and more typically 'performed' segments.

Also described in Chapter 3, the poetic text-movement segment that follows – an example of a *performMent* – was created and performed by Lily as part of a solo central to *ap'to plevro enos andra*. Lily first wrote the text for this autobiographical narrative in Greek; accompanied by movement, it was a response to a task to recall a significant memory relating to one's identity as a woman. As mentioned earlier, Lily was seven months pregnant at the time of our final runs; she recites the text as she bends down with grace yet difficulty to gather several spoons that cover the stage. These decorative wooden spoons from Asia Minor used in a traditional Greek 'spoon dance' called *konialis*[41] later act as percussive instruments together with stainless steel soup spoons; they are also symbols of femininity throughout the piece. The description below represents my experience in viewing the solo; Lily's perspectives and spectators' responses to this segment will be addressed in the next section.

Lily is alone on stage. She begins the monologue from upstage right, whispering, talking softly and repetitiously to herself, searching for something.

Wooden spoons
Wooden bowls
Big spoons hanging
It was you, me and one other
Me, you and another…
Remember?

She now speaks louder, but is still self-absorbed, as she notices the spoons on the floor, and begins gathering them slowly.

How important are these moments for you?
Wooden spoons hanging in the house
All of us gathering at that house
Do you remember?

---

[41] Konialis is a traditional *antikristo*, or 'face-to-face', dance that implements wooden spoons as percussive instruments. Its name is taken from the region of Ikonio in Asia Minor. The dance is performed by female-female and male-male couples, who dance separately.

We were together, I was not alone…
And the Norwegian trolls hung on the wall
On the wall, they were decorations
The snow falling outside and we ate soup
We ate warm soup
The whole family together
Gathered around the big table
Do you remember?

This next section is performed in a louder voice, with stronger emotion and larger movements, but Lily still seems to be addressing the same person, as if oblivious to an outside audience.

That was the decoration of the house in the village
Of our country house.
How important are these moments for you?
How important is what I am going through now?
Outside it might be winter,
It may be snowing.
What does this house mean to you – this house
In the village?

You were there
And so was I
Together with one other.
What does this house mean to you?
What does this house mean to you?

A memory?
Perhaps a tradition?

And if not, what else could it be?
What else?

                        (my translation)

Lily finishes her monologue, takes a deep breath and turns toward a large wooden chair behind her. She slowly proceeds to sit in the chair holding all the spoons tightly and then arranging them into a wooden bouquet of flowers. Though other dancers begin to surround her, she stays focused on the bouquet, with a dreamy gaze, as if her present moment still belongs to the past, or as if the past has been permanently resurrected in the present…

Though the text is set and the improvised movement is minimal and pedestrian, Lily performs the solo slightly differently each time, altering her tone and timing, re-creating her pathway, pausing spontaneously to transport herself to that memorable place and time. This subtle but definite lived presence in her performance produces the effect of a first-time experience of the events through the medium of embodied nostalgia. Is it Lily's personal stake in the narrative that allows her to maintain her freshness and presence that establishes performativity? Yet another compelling performative aspect of the solo is that Lily never reveals the identity of the 'other' in this scenario. We know Lily is in a familiar place, and that the other/s she addresses are important to her. Yet we don't know who the other is, or even if they are real or imagined, dead or alive. Notably, none of the group members asked her to disclose this identity; in fact, we did not request any details of the narratives, considering them intact, preferring to experience them through our own experiences. As Lily's rich past enters my personal reservoir of memories her story merges with my own history of biculturality, displacement, womanhood, potently intervening with my tucking away of unpleasant feelings. I sense the longing for my country house in Greece where I spent every summer with family as a child; I remember my maternal grandmother and her kind face, and miss her deeply; I wish to be transported back to NYC, walking briskly up Spring Street in the fall, rushing to catch a contemporary dance class; I want my freedom back, my freedom has been stolen, I want it back.

The vaguest and at times most disturbing aspect of Lily's monologue is perhaps this nameless 'other.' We do not know if this presence, more intimate as the narrative progresses, is a positive or negative part of Lily's vivid mosaic; he/she acts as a force

that binds the narrator and the recipient, but is also distant. At the same time, this unknown, mysterious dimension offers an open space to be filled by the imagination of the spectator. While we identify with the sensuous warmth of the house's interior that separates us from the wintry cold outside, we are invited to project, through our subjective and perhaps collective cultural memory, the identity of this third person.

This entity is perhaps a beloved relative; a family friend; a lover; a ghost; or a being that symbolises aspects of Lily/ourselves. The immediacy of Lily's experience is magnified by the vulnerability encased in her pregnant belly, literally 'housing' her unborn, unknown child, as her words gently locate us in the present:

How important are these moments for you?
How important is what I am going through now?
Outside it might be winter,
It may be snowing.

Though she seems to easily float through the dimly lit space, the questions she poses insinuate pressing discomfort, doubt, and emotional distance from the person she addresses. Does he/she share a similar experience, past and present, with hers? Who is this significant other from whom she seeks answers? Is it the father of her child? Her own father or mother? He sense of identity seems dependent on this person (it may be snowing outside right now, will you be 'inside', with her, perhaps protect her and her child?) and the rest of the people in the house yet she has the courage to accept the others' differing perspectives and instability of the memory. She suggests, through her questioning, that this moment, this house, this tradition may not mean the same thing to everyone present, and she may not be understood by some in this intimate setting. This instability seems to disrupt her sense of self.

In some ways Lily's narrative reflects a genre of African American contemporary dance analysed by Albright, made up of performative epics that foreground the 'representation of race, memory, and historical experience in ways that ask their viewers to engage with their own historical memories' (Albright, 2001: 440). In a passionate retelling of a personal historical instant, Lily simultaneously reassesses and reclaims it; in this way, she invites us to call upon our own histories. As Albright suggests, certain dances 'ask the audience to stay with the performance, even when the situation becomes disturbing or uncomfortable… this is when the act of watching transforms into the act of witnessing' (1997: xxii). However, unlike works that depict real settings, rituals, and deities, Lily's historical geography has subjective borders; the performative rewriting of her past is self-reflexive and autoethnographic, accessing the 'liminal and politicized spaces of culture' (Denzin, 2003b: 23). Finally, through her self-conscious personal narrative, Lily subjectively shares her cultural uniqueness with the audience, unifying facets of her identity and inviting the audience to enter this reality. The scene, set in Scandinavia (an important location in Lily's personal history), is performed in Greek (equally significant) to a mixed Cypriot audience. In choosing to tell her story in the native language of Cyprus, but only one of her own, Lily makes her history accessible, offering it to be reviewed, absorbed, and altered by others' memory pools. Accepting the hybridity of this experience can be transformational. By her sincere, performative self-disclosure, Lily appears to incite the spectator to seek liberation from strict notions of ethnicity, culture, gender, and motherhood. As 'performance pedagogy,' Lily's testimonial 'reflexively critiques those cultural practices that reproduce oppression,' enabling 'new historical ideas, new images, new subjectivities, new cultural practices' (Denzin, 2003b: 23).

VI

The Aesthetic Experience and the Performative Moment

Was Lily's solo experienced as a *performMent* only by me or by Lily as well and perhaps by other spectators? It is difficult to fully answer this question since most of my investigation of specific elements of these unique performed segments occurred after the process was completed. Yet this is a significant question. In assuming that *performMents* are distinct from 'performing' since they are performative, are they identified by performer, spectator, or both? If *performMents* do exist in performers' and spectators' realities are they the same moments for both? How can we discern whether or not the spectators' views point to similar characteristics?

I will begin addressing these critical concerns by depicting Lily's experience through her comments shared during loosely guided group discussions. Without revealing details about hidden aspects of the narrative, Lily expressed that the story and place meant a lot to her; moreover, she said she felt sad each time she performed it, but also relieved that she was able to talk about 'the house'. When I asked her if she experienced the narrative differently from other sections of the piece, Lily's response was 'it's about me and it came from me, so yes, it feels very different – I am more emotional and I am alone in it; and I lose all sense of time'. Lily also mentioned that performing the segment felt very real, as if she were transported to that place and historical moment, and that this feeling did not diminish with the amount of runs. Finally, Lily said that in a later section, when the other dancers put their hands on her pregnant belly, she felt similar; in both cases it was as if she was pulled into an intense moment without a beginning or an end.

What were the unique elements I perceived in the presentation of Lily's solo when compared to the bulk of the choreography? As described in the previous section above, I noted deep emotion, expressivity, and sincerity underlying her performance. In addition, Lily's disposition embodied exposure and vulnerability, supported by the longing in her delivery of the text and the conversational nature of it. Lily projected both immediacy and intimacy, perhaps also stemming from the autobiographic content of the text, drawing me into her reality and manifesting as the kinesthetic experience of physical closeness to her. I sensed a suspension of time while watching her solo as she triggered my memories and history through hers. Lily's performative narrative can also be seen as rooted in and reiterating a collective feminine history.

A similar phenomenon of shared and performed collective history based on memory is characterised by Winter (2010), mentioned in earlier chapters, in his notion of the 'performative moment'. Winter's conception of the performative moment primarily concerns the collective memory of war, diaspora, and war-instigated traumatic experiences; the performative rests in the remembrance or re-telling of a historical moment. Yet many of the elements he attributes to the collective experience of memory can be applied to occurrences during *Identity Project* and qualities I perceived in Lily's solo, including performativity, intensified emotion, nostalgia and what he deems the inevitable 'overlap between history and memory' (2010:13). Winter (2010:11) stresses the importance of multiplicity in 'performing the past' yet he also emphasises the role of shared memory, performed 'at the heart of collective memory', arguing that 'when individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together'.

Winter further contends that the due to its intersubjective nature, the performative necessarily borrows from both history and memory, offering, as he puts it, 'truth statements rather than true statements, though the two coincide more frequently than not' (2010:13). Winter argues that 'truth statements' are personal declarations, while 'true statements' refer to codified historical facts; collective memory lies at the interface of the two, and is performative (2010). The distinction between one who experiences a memory based on a collective past and a systematised version of history is therefore not clear, nor is the line between various individual experiences of a similar memory. As such, it can be said that although Lily's view of her solo confirms its difference from other performed moments as well as similarities with my perception of it, my partaking of collective memory through Lily's narrative alone can render it a performative moment. Although what constitutes a performative moment for Lily is certainly important, the receptor's experience of the narrative – in this case my own – is part of an intersubjective and dialogical encounter.

Another link between Winter's account of the performative act and Lily's narrative regards the historical nature of the content and the way performativity is expressed:

> The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form. The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in it its sticking power, its resistance to erasure or oblivion.
>
> (Winter, 2010:12)

Lily's vivid story was based on a significant memory also central to her identity. The emotion in her performance reflected, recreated, and transferred her memory to us; it was often a topic of discussion in our reflections as it drew us in and moved us.

236

As I have demonstrated above, it can be said that Winter's understanding of the performative moment is in some ways resonant with my notion of the *performMent*, particularly regarding the importance of emotion in both recalling and re-inventing the memory underlying the performative act. Alternatively, although Lily's narrative is concerned with memory and collective history other *performMents* during *Identity Project* were not. In seeking the nature of the *performMent* that directly emerges from explorations of identity it is necessary to establish recurring components.

In my attempt to outline the more consistent characteristics of the *performMents* I detected I discerned associations with Dewey's unmatched concept of the 'esthetic experience' (1934). While Dewey is credited for his work in the fields of logic, scientific inquiry, and education philosophy, his most renowned contribution has been in aesthetics and the philosophy of art (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online). Dewey's unique and influential text, *Art as Experience* (1934), based on the transcripts of a lecture series on the philosophy of art delivered at Harvard University in 1931, has been applied to the areas of philosophy, arts-based education, and socially relevant art-making. In this volume Dewey (1934) introduces the 'esthetic experience', a singular moment in one's life experience, not necessarily beautiful or connected to art, but one which stands out from routine events. Dewey (1934: 37) frames this experience as 'having tremendous importance – a quarrel with one who was once an intimate, a catastrophe finally averted by a hair's breadth … that meal in a Paris restaurant of which one says "that *was* an experience"… marked out from what went before and what went after'; he goes on to say this type of experience 'is whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency'.

In addition, Dewey (1934: 81) refers to 'esthetic emotion' that is linked to 'natural emotional experiences' as a catalyst for 'artistic production and appreciation'; this notion reflects the emotion triggered by performative moments in performers and spectators (discussed above). The following description of the esthetic experience may also illustrate qualities of the *performMent* (outlined in detail in later sections):

> In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time, there is no sacrifice of self-identity of all the parts… As one part leads into another as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. The enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its varied colors.
>
> (Dewey, 1934: 6)

In this excerpt Dewey considers 'flow' an enabler of the unified, seamless succession of different parts and a main characteristic of the esthetic experience. Significantly, unifying 'flow' is also seen in the *performMent*, described by both Lily and me above as a suspension of time and the sense of oneself as distinct from other moments in the piece, both multidimensional and whole. Dewey underscores these aspects:

> Because of continuous merging, there are no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centers when we have *an* experience. There are pauses, places of rest, but they punctuate and define the quality of movement. They sum up what has been undergone and prevent…dissipation and idle evaporation. Continued acceleration is breathless and prevents parts from gaining distinction.
>
> (Dewey, 1934: 36)

In addition to the element of unity in the above segment it is interesting to consider Dewey's description of the esthetic experience as 'movement', possessing qualities like breathlessness, punctuation, and definition, implying an urgency of motion and emotion. The idea of motion reflects the continuous yet fluctuating nature of the esthetic experience, with calm and then elevated and emotionally intense moments

238

of breathlessness, much like a real dance. Dewey (1934) emphasises that esthetic experiences are encountered by all people throughout their lives, parallel to, yet emergent from, their day-to-day experiences by virtue of their inherently emotional and aesthetic nature. It can be said that in a similar way *performMents* emerge from, yet are parallel to 'performing', as pockets within the surrounding performance context of choreography. In this light, I suggest that *performMents* are distinct or heightened performative segments within a performance, comparable to esthetic experiences that are heightened, intensified experiences within daily experience.

It can also be argued that the esthetic experience reflects scholarly concepts of performativity mentioned earlier in this chapter (hooks, 1994; Denzin, 2003) as an in-the-moment real event, related to one's lived experience. Moreover, elements of the esthetic experience as applied to arts pedagogy, like exploration, deep observation and curiosity (Greene 1995; Fowler, 1996), mirror the use of dance improvisation as an exploratory tool. These likenesses are significant. First, the notion of art as derived from daily experience supports a core aspect of *Identity Project*; second, the performative, distinct expression of identity bearing several sides but sensed as a unified whole, reflected both in Dewey's theories and participants' comments, can be seen as an esthetic experience in itself. Finally, the idea of identity as 'perpetually becoming' through dance (Fraleigh, 1999; Paxton, 2001), related to the performative segments in *Identity Project* (discussed in the next section), can be seen below:

> An experience has a unity that gives it its name ... constituted by a single quality that pervades the entire experience in spite of the variation of its constituent parts. This unity is neither emotional, practical, nor intellectual, for these terms name distinctions that reflection can make within it ... like "moving variations."
>
> (Dewey, 1934: 37)

This research has encountered identity as unfixed, but also as experienced and performed as a whole, resembling a 'singly quality', noted in performers' comments and echoing Dewey (above), performatively embracing and transferring its many facets: name, race, gender, or history. Winter (2010: 15) states, 'the performative act of remembrance is an essential way in which ... identities are formed and reiterated'; remembrance is re-experiencing moments, implying that the collectivity inherent in individual perception fosters the exchange of experiences between individuals, or, in our case, from performer to spectator. For Dewey (1934) transference also resides in experiencing rather than observing, akin to Albright's (1997) notion of 'witnessing' instead of 'watching', mentioned above. This exchange, underpinned by the meaning the art has for the spectator, is represented Eva's solo in *ap'to plevro enos andra*:

Eva steals the bouquet of spoons from Lily and walks to the metal staircase upstage left. She begins experimenting with the various timbres of the spoon against the frame and steps, and finally chooses metal against metal. Her percussive rhythm is initially sparse and unshaped; it develops onto a stark cacophony that reflects her anger and indignant attitude toward the others. I feel both aggravated by the noise and worried that the ladder may be knocked down by the banging.

In the meantime, Lily has been pulled away by the others downstage left, who are holding and rubbing parts of her body; Is this in order to protect her or to own a piece of her? I worry even more. As Eva notices the cluster, her percussion solo becomes louder, faster, more intense. In response to this sonic invasion Lily's body is further prodded by the women. When Eva realises that she is receiving no attention, she cleverly enters the group from behind; she quickly wraps arms around Lily's belly, and drags her away, all of Lily this time.

Eva's comments during feedback sessions while she created this segment validate the immediacy and intensity I felt while watching the solo. She shared that she chose to reveal an aspect of her identity that emerged on its own through improvisation – one that she described as 'cruel, selfish, greedy and jealous'. Eva often mentioned how these are all parts of her, and probably inside all women. She felt lucky to have had the opportunity to express these characteristics in a safe space, and enjoyed the cathartic quality of the performance. Lily perceived a similar 'raw realness' and 'selfishness' on the part of the other dancers as they 'desired to possess' her body, and 'what was inside it', literally and symbolically. Several audience members shared this view, commenting that the other women 'invaded the pregnant girl's body' and confessing their disturbance by the physical manipulation inflicted upon Lily. [42]

In her book *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart*, Behar (1996:16) states: 'When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably'. Behar is best known for her pioneering, humanistic, and reflexive approach to ethnographic fieldwork. Though a large portion of Chapter 5 is devoted to ethnographic practices embedded in this project, this statement is applicable to the experience of the *performMent*, both for performer, or 'writer', and spectator, or 'observer'. In dancing one's personal content the human, emotional aspect of the observer is activated. This goes back to Denzin's argument regarding the inter-relational aspect of performativity that incites dialogue and social change (2003a, 2003b). Yet Behar (1996: 14) also argues that being vulnerable 'does not mean anything goes'; rather 'the exposure or the self … has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to'.

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[42] Audience feedback received during informal conversations following performances.

Do *performMents* take us to otherwise inaccessible new territory, as posited by Behar? What are the main distinctive traits and outcomes of Lily's and Eva's performative excerpts, as well as in other performative moments in the movement research? The following lists include key elements of the *performMent* from differing points of analysis based on my own observations, comments from spectators, and performers' feedback (including Lily's and Eva's perspectives outlined above). I have chosen to list my findings rather than present them in paragraph form for the purposes of clarity and easier comparison/contrast. It is also important to note that I have created two lists from the perspective of the spectator, one that attempts to list characteristics objectively observed, and another that depicts a more personal, subjective experience of the spectator, primarily based on my own experiences.

The *PerformMent* from an objective/descriptive view of the observer:

- A continuous quality or flow
- An attempt to communicate something of personal importance to spectators
- Aesthetic awareness and deliberate movement/text choices
- An intense, unwavering presence in the moment
- A willingness to follow the unexpected during a solo improvisation or within the more challenging contact structure of a duet or group
- A performed vulnerability depicted through emotion and content that reveals a 'real' self as opposed to a performed one
- An emotional barrier broken during the course of the performed segment leading to content that challenges the status quo
- An aesthetic unity that is not 'traceable' linearly but reflected in the connection between all of the performed segments' parts
- A simultaneous awareness of other bodies or persons and an internal focus evident in the performer's glance, facial expressions and physical disposition
- An overt or underlying ritualistic discourse founded upon repetition, clear symbolism, pedestrian gesture and reminiscent of traditional genres

The *PerformMent* through the subjective or kinesthetic experience of the spectator:

- Inside out perspective for the performer, both as testified by the performers and as I experience it as a kinesthetically empathetic observer

- Intense emotion that at times, feels uncomfortable to watch

- Discomfort at times due to unpredictable choices and controversial themes

- Satisfaction at times due to unpredictable choices and controversial themes

- Presence in the moment, i.e. no before or after as I am watching the segment

- Relation to my own life and to themes relevant to me, often prompted by emotional moments and quick or random changes in the movement/text

- Afterwards, a sense of inner transformation in relation to a personal theme that can also be located in the broader scheme of an immediate socio-political topography (for example, feminine identities and women's roles as they pertain to my reality and Cypriot society in the whole)

The *PerformMent* through the experience of the performer:

- Inside out or vulnerable performance, exposing personal themes or perspectives related to a broader scope or larger social issue

- Intense emotion that at times, feels uncomfortable to perform

- Discomfort at times due to unpredictable choices and controversial themes

- Satisfaction at times due to unpredictable choices and controversial themes

- Presence in the moment; no before or after while performing the segment

- Performance of personal themes are imbued with emotional moments and quick or random changes in the movement/text

- Afterwards, a sense of inner transformation in relation to a personal theme that can also be located in the broader scheme of an immediate socio-political topography (such as one's identity and multiple roles in society)

Much can be said regarding the similarities and differences between the above-listed traits characterising three different perspectives. For the purposes of this analysis, however, I find most significant the similarities between my experience as a kinesthetically empathetic observer and the experiences shared by performers, validating the transference of subject matter and emotional content. These stark likenesses and their implications will be revisited in Chapter 5 and in the conclusion.

243

VII

<u>Performance, Performativity, Performability</u>

In solidly establishing the nature and plausible experiences and contexts surrounding the *performMent,* an analysis of its hypothetical opposite, the 'performed moment' is necessary. What are the shared elements of performance and performativity and the most prominent differences between the two? Do they intersect? How does performativity overlap with performance in the *Identity Project*, and what does this mean regarding the possibilities in gender identity representation?

Early on in establishing an academic and artistic foundation for my research I deliberately sidestepped the area of performativity, anticipating that such a specific and prevalent theoretical model may delimit or stifle the discovery process – particularly in the practical domain. Yet this area of research has ultimately been pivotal. At this point in my process, the writings on performativity, gender performativity, and performative ethnography validate my efforts to discover something that was beginning to feel 'undiscoverable'; in addition these research areas have aided in assessing the outcomes of this work. Powerful moments of identity representations were frequent but did clearly seem performative; other moments needed to remain ethereal for the material to stay alive; still other identities were perpetually coming into being, interdiscursive, moving in and out of not only discourses but absences of discourse. I am relieved and excited to have experienced, along with some of my artistic collaborators, performativity as exactly this thing; particularly when interfaced with notions rooted in radical pedagogy, the performative becomes nothing less than an act of transformation.

As in the case of Cypriot women and Cypriot feminine identities (noted in Chapter 3), I find it significant for this investigation and its results to have arrived at the in-depth scholarship on the performative within the long way around, particularly in an era where one is hard-pressed to find literature in the field of dance, performance, or theatre that does not include the axioms 'performativity', 'subjectivity' or 'constructivism'. In my effort to maintain a hands-on excavation of identity through the pursuit of empirical, embodied knowledge the discourse on performativity was not applied, but revealed, as the space in which identity has perhaps has resided in its most unoppressed and unadulterated version all along.

In general terms I view 'performing' as an intentional act in the form of a structured (with a beginning, middle and end), theatrical representation of a life-related event that is performable within an aesthetic frame that is understandable by those watching. Denzin (2003b), citing sociologist Adrian Franklin (2001: 218) refers to performance as an 'organizing concept for examining phenomena that may or may not be a performance in the traditional sense of the word', offering examples such as 'museum exhibitions, tourist environments and the aesthetics of everyday life'. Performance can also be seen as a dramatic mirroring of life events or constructs that communicates a perspective and is presented in a completed form; examples can include acts that represent love, like gift-giving and affection, or mourning, such as offering condolences at a funeral, as opposed to 'being in love', which would be considered a performative state (Winter, 2010). Similarly, as argued by performance theorists Victor Turner (1987) and Richard Schechner (2003), society functions as both a stage and an audience that enables people to take in multiple roles.

Denzin (2003b:7) also makes the distinction between a 'performance' and 'cultural performances' (the latter pluralised by Denzin). Following performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) definition, Denzin describes 'cultural performances as occurrences that are valued and conceived as performances, distinguishing them as 'pedagogical events that involve the politics of culture' (Denzin, 2003b:8). The connection that Denzin draws between performance and pedagogy is central to rising to the state of the performative moment. According to Denzin, 'performance and performativity intersect in a speaking subject', a subject that is by no means neutral, but rather acting through 'a gendered and racialized body' (2003b: 8). Butler, in turn, describes gender as 'in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts'* (1988: 19). The acts are performed, according to Butler (1988), through continuous embodiment, in a ritualised and dramatised manner, reaffirming the aspect of identity (such as gender, but not exclusively) that is most central in a given moment.

Denzin astutely articulates that 'performativity and performance exist in tension with one another … between *doing*, or performing, and the *done*, the text, the performance' (2003b: 10). In line with this, it can be further argued that what renders performativity clearly distinct from performance is a state of perpetual, self-reflexive coming-into-being that does not end when the performance ends. Performativity is an act that is continuously in the making. Perceived as a type of happening, the performative is an inherently, though not always pursued, dramatic, self-reflexive expression of being-in-action. Performance is *performative*, rather than

simply *performable*, when it derives from this sense of being-in-action in its creation and execution rather than a sense of what it should be; thus, a string of performative, or what Brown (2011) distinguishes as 'now-moments' can exist *within* a performance. These moments can be experienced so seamlessly in their intention that entire segments or even a whole performance becomes one long *performMent*.

Again the question of who is experiencing the performative act, the actor or the observer, arises. If we take the case of gender, assuming that gender is performative as Butler (1988) suggests, an answer may perhaps surface. Butler argues that gender is a concept both generated and understood within society that goes beyond biological gender differences; the performativity of gender incorporates certain codes and symbols that are understood by the people witnessing the performative act (1988). In considering this, despite variations regarding gender embodiment, there exists a common language, verbal, bodily, symbolic and otherwise, based on communally experienced social constructs through which issues can be discussed or categorised. In much the same way, a performative moment is created and/or presented by the performer using material – movement, text, facial expressions – that bears symbolic meaning for the observer and is therefore, as discussed earlier, transferable. Unlike the performed that can be comprehended by watching though not necessarily engaging, the performative cannot be fully perceived or designated only through observation; shared experience between performer and spectator is necessary in order for it to be apprehended. A main reason for this is the personal engagement of the performer in the performative, whereas the performed can be devoid of anything specifically relevant to the one performing.

247

In closing this section I would like to emphasise that my investigation and explanation of the *performMent,* an unforeseen discovery and a subject I intend to continue researching, is based on the practical work in this project. The definitions proposed are an attempt to identify and understand the *performMent* within the context of this research, and for the purposes of opening up liberating possibilities for identity representations.

VIII

<u>Identity, Performativity, and Autoethnography</u>

> My identity has to be perceived as multiple, even as I strive towards some coherent notion of what is humane and decent and just. At the same time, amidst this multiplicity, my life project has been to achieve an understanding of teaching, learning, and the many models of education; I have been creating and continue to create a self by means of that project, that mode of gearing into the world.
>
> – Maxine Greene (1995: 1)
> From *Releasing the Imagination*

The possibility of multiple identities within the same individual first materialised during the *I AM* narratives in *kouponi allagis* and was further explored through the challenge of collaboration (see Chapter 2). Two aspects struck me in the 'creation of self' through choosing specific facets of identity to develop, as Greene describes above: inadvertent rituals and autoethnography. While ethnography is addressed in Chapter 5, I feel it is important to introduce how ritual can intersect with autoethnography in *performMent-ing* identity, exemplified by a female duet in *kouponi allagis.* As noted in Chapter 2, the duet was a spontaneous improvisation by the women as they waited upstage while a male duet was performed downstage:

Chloe is behind Eva and they walk slowly, in unison; as they approach upstage center, they pause. After a few moments, Chloe, still behind Eva and taller than her, raises her arms and calmly begins stroking, then braiding, Eva's long black hair. This seems to take forever, as Eva's hair is heavy, thick, slippery. When Chloe is finished braiding, she unbraids. They take a few more steps and she starts over. No rush, as if in another place, another time.

Faint smiles on the faces of the two women subtly reveal the pleasure they experience from this activity, and my attention is drawn away from the strong, leaping physicality of the men to the calm, meditative quality of the women's gestures. I get stuck on them; this trance-like moment of femininity transports me to another place and time that seems ancient and sacred. I find a part of me in this realm where sisterhood, female beauty, goddesses, and close friends can peacefully express their identities...

In this bodily, autoethnographic narrative, the co-writers/performers are self-aware and also self-abandoned; in allowing themselves to merge movements and identities prior selves have been left behind. The dancers' histories, connecting momentarily to a collective past shared by Cypriot women, is re-written through the traditional and sisterly gesture of hair-braiding as it passes as a dated, unhurried time-space reality into a present fast-paced modernity. It can be suggested that this spontaneous contribution by the women, occurring in a parallel but separate manner to the male segment physically and symbolically claims a distinct feminine space. In addition, the flow and ease of their movement can be seen as representing the fluidity and dimensionality of their feminine identities, moving in and out of one self to an other, past to present, cynical to innocent, profane to sacred, effortlessly and harmoniously combining otherwise oppositional elements.

The freshness of this *performMent* was preserved throughout all of the runs of

kouponi as Eva and Chloe improvised the segment to reflect their inner state. Like

Lily's spoon solo, the ritualistic aspect of this duet shapes the *performMent*. Denzin

identifies moments such as these as 'a form of public pedagogy' as they implement

'the aesthetic to foreground cultural meanings and to teach these meanings to

performers and audience members alike' (2003b: 6). According to Schechner (1993),

ritual is symbolic, meaning-making, codified, repetitive, and performative.

Performer and scholar Tami Spry (2001), in her article *Performing Ethnography: an

Embodied Methodological Praxis*, refers to the notion of 'self' necessarily as plural

within autoethnographic practice. Spry (2010: 710) suggests that 'autoethnographic

methods recognize the reflections and refractions of multiple selves in contexts that

arguably transform the authorial 'I' to an existential 'we''. Moreover Spry

emphasises that 'autoethnography originates as a discourse from the margins of

dominant culture identifying the material, political, and transformational dimensions

of representational politics' (Spry, 2001: 710-711). Interestingly, this argument is

resonant of the radical, anti-hierarchical pedagogical scheme practised by Freire

(1978) mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Spry defines autoethnography as 'a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of

self with others in social context', rendering the 'socio-politically inscribed body'

central to 'meaning-making' (2001: 710). Along similar lines, Denzin (2003a, 2003b)

refers to performance ethnography, including performance autoethnography and

other forms of the autobiographical narrative, as facets of a genre in which the

'writer-as-performer is self-consciously present, morally and politically aware'

(2003:14). As such, performances can be 'the sites where context, agency, praxis, history and subjectivity intersect' that can ultimately build 'an improvisatory politics of resistance…where the doing and the done collide' (Denzin, 2003b: 16).

As previously indicated, in order to achieve a disruption of the self to allow for the exposure of multiple embodiments of self, I strove toward a more abstract, less guided process in our rehearsal sessions where improvisation, imagination and enfleshed communication could fluidly merge. I insisted that we stick with improvisation method while exploring instead of adhering to set movement to avoid uncomfortable moments. While unsure if this would be fair or if it would work, my improvisation-based process reflects autoethnographic practice, opening a gateway to personal understanding through the interplay of self and other. Spry writes:

> In autoethnographic performance, the self *is* other. Dialogical engagement in performance encourages the performer to interrogate the political and ideological context and power relations between self and other and self *as* other.
>
> (Spry, 2001: 716)

In this sense it has been significant for my research in *bare-ly there* to posit autoethnography as an artistic circumstance that unifies the many voices of the self and their dialogical relationship to internal and external others, supporting a liberating practice that generates agency when pursued through ethically aware, self-conscious story-telling. Within this reflexive performance genre an earnestly and largely spontaneously crafted narrative frequently leads to the abandonment or surpassing of itself (Spry, 2011). Spry emphasises the importance of freedom in autoethnography, referring to her autoethnographic performances within academia as a 'vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial scripts' as part of a 'robust

dance of agency in one's personal/political/professional life' (2001: 708). Through the freedom that emerges from not knowing, a discourse morphs into the living critique of itself, transcending the initial limitations that brought it into being.

IX

<u>Rehearsal Methodology: Toward an Unknown</u>

> The radical empiricists' response to the vulnerabilities and vicissitudes of fieldwork is honesty, humility, self-reflexivity and an acknowledgement of the interdependence and reciprocal role-playing between knower and known.
> – Dwight Conquergood (1991: 182)

> Dance is the art of taking place. Improvisation finds the places.
> – Steve Paxton (2001: 426)

In retrospect, it can be said that beginning with a certain type of fieldwork in this project without consciously choosing from an existing approach was influenced by my lack of experience with fieldwork in general, in conjunction with an intuitive understanding that an honest relationship was needed between the group and me that embraced all of our roles. I sought to enter into the activities and discussions with my own doubts and vulnerabilities and to develop an intimate rapport with the members of the group while pursuing a goal that was flexible and collaborative rather than fixed and all-encompassing. I turned to empiricism and a dialectical process of questioning that centred on the integrity of the subjective experience as a road toward individual and collective identities. I discuss the turn in methodology now rather than earlier as I want to place it in the timeline of the practical work.

I founded the bulk of rehearsal practice of *bare-ly there* in *pure improvisation* (my term). I have based this practice, to some extent, on Authentic Movement, an extension of the psychologically oriented 'movement-in-depth' technique begun by dancer and teacher Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950's that allows for free association in movement (online), and early contact improvisation, where an initial intention was to push physical boundaries and explore unknown places by staying true to the point of contact. Pure improvisation utilises structure but runs its course fairly unpredictably, in accordance with the players, the mood and the situation. In our rehearsals the improvisational exercises are introduced as a set task, but the context and rules are broad enough for the performer to create her own path to getting from point A to point B or C (and so on), and even moderately change the canons for the purposes of experimentation. Collaboration, viewed as inherently subversive (Brown, 2011), plays a key role, in actively improvising *with* an other or performing *for* an other. Issues including power, trust, communication, ownership and control move to the forefront. In *pure improvisation*, a projected outcome is not dictated or even insinuated beforehand; this type of open-ended improvisational method, as described by choreographer Simone Forti (2003), can lead to personal and interpersonal discovery in an organic and holistic way. We transcend the borders of ourselves through the less visible parts of ourselves and others (Brown, 2011).

In my twenty years of experience in the US and Europe with various forms of improvisation as student, teacher, choreographer and performer, I favour what I call *pure improvisation*, offering possibilities via an 'inside-out' approach, where the performer is less concerned with how the movement looks than what it is expressing

and in the moment. Catching a glimpse of oneself in the mirror, or even in one's mind's eye, may inhibit the spontaneity of the process. Upon completion, when viewing footage or hearing feedback, I have heard dancers say 'wow, that's not what I thought I looked like' or 'yeah, I was feeling that also' or point out awkward, beautiful, exciting, moments and others that drag on. Yet raising the stakes for an improvised performance while maintaining the possibility for the new, streamlining without squashing, is often a trial; as outlined by choreographer and scholar Victoria Marks (2003), committing to the improvisational method all the way through the performance phase can be challenging and even disappointing for many dancers. In our case, many of the participants preferred when improvisation was used for set movement. Feedback includes: 'we can more easily master the movement this way'; 'I feel surer of the outcome and what the audience might think'; 'I am more confident and perform better' (*Identity Project,* 2010, 2011, 2016).

Nonetheless, I have often been delightfully immersed (alongside many other dancers and choreographers) in the heightened state of inner/outer consciousness achieved through the commitment to the moment coupled with an underlying aesthetic awareness during a movement improvisation. Like other body-centred approaches improvisation has been known to break silences and release untapped modes of exchange that lead to knowledge (Vincs, 2007; Pakes, 2009). These openings are where self-discovery occurs and where the human experience becomes art, communicating states of being that are just as riveting for the spectators as for performers. The unexpectedness of the moment generates freedom and a platform for personal and social transformation (Albright, 2001; Foster, 2003 and 2017).

X

Interplay, the _I AM Monologues_ and _Tango ME_

> The improvised is that which eludes history.
>   – Susan Leigh Foster (2003: 4)

In order to more clearly convey our early process I will illustrate some of our staple improvisational exercises. A recurring duet task I call _interplay_ was implemented to cultivate trust, dialogue, freedom and spontaneity in our creative space. _Interplay_ called for each of us to move continually (for approximately twenty minutes) in contact with a partner while simultaneously engaging in a stream-of consciousness conversation. The same activity was also performed moving in and out of contact, while a third version entailed entering the improvisation from the perspective of someone that has made an impression on us in our lives, either positive or negative. Interesting results were incurred. Some couples had an easy time staying in contact; these pairs ended up composing a joint narrative, sometimes even an imaginary place, where they lived out their ad-lib scenario. Other couples struggled to maintain contact and keep the conversation going. Afterwards, some performers said they felt 'elated', 'free', and 'childlike'; some expressed that they had achieved an unanticipated level of intimacy with their partner. One stated that she felt as if the emancipated, improvised self were just as real as her daily sense of self; some agreed but commented that they could not express a 'free self' due to social constraints.

In one unexpected moment two performers broke away from one another as the duet turned into a cat-and-mouse chase accompanied by loud screeches. The duet felt awkward by the one pursued (shared during a group conversation following the

exercise) as it invoked memories of an unpleasant childhood experience, while the pursuer, unaware of her partner's feelings, found the task silly and began to laugh. Due to the serious ethical considerations at hand I proposed a 'time-out' at the moment and also as an option available from this point on, where dancers could call 'time-out!' at any uncomfortable moment and the task would be paused or ended. This idea was welcomed by the group unanimously. I also met with the dancer that had experienced discomfort privately after rehearsal; I expressed compassion toward her feelings and as well as gratitude for her integrity and courage in fulfilling the task and committing to improvising. I also reminded her that she had the right to withdraw from any activities or conversations at any time. She chose to remain in the group until rehearsals were suspended as a result of the economic crisis.

Another exercise we worked with was a version of the *I AM Monologues* used in *kouponi allagis* (see Chapter 2). Each performer improvised a series of one-liners that began with the words 'I am'. Ana only spoke in non-human sounds, some of which resembled the squeaking of a mouse, a growling cat, the drone of a dial tone. Gigi's monologue was stifled despite her magnetic presence as she repeated 'I am, I am, I am not... I am.' Artemis seems to choose her words carefully, slowly announcing, 'I am mother, I am nothing, I am alive, I am not dead yet, I am everything.' Finally, the *Tango ME* improvisation invited dancers to create variations of the basic tango step by applying repetition, retrograde, and changes in direction, level, and tempo. They then made contact duets using these phrases; the compromise of the original movement necessary for partners to remain physically connected can be viewed as a subversive aspect of collaboration (Brown, 2011).

XI

Lost, but not yet Found

Through my increasing written reflections triggered by the on/off nature of *bare-ly there* I attempted to locate what was missed along the way, and why there was resistance and discomfort on the part of some of the artistic collaborators in all three pieces to this exploratory process. I interpreted some dancers' repeated pauses and sighs during exercises as a struggle with self-expression and a vagueness surrounding identity, but believed it was on the surface. This often caused me to alter my process, setting more movement than I had planned, canceling more challenging improvisations, prodding less during discussions. Still, I gently persisted, espousing the notion that change takes time, carefully bringing the topic to our discussions; yet I did not push for a resolution but rather respected each dancer's voice or silence.

On the other hand, sometimes the movement would 'set itself' over time (without that being the task). For example, the first scene in *bare-ly there* is six women sitting shoulder-to-shoulder on a wooden bench waiting for something – like the bus, or a bell to ring. They can just about fit on the bench, so they squirm and shift in order to sit without falling off. The task is to improvise a group conversation sparked by something one might see sitting on a bench in the street of Nicosia, engaging fully, using hand, facial and other bodily gestures, without falling off the bench.

> *The exercise proves to be difficult for them. I join in, reluctantly, and someone now does not fit, and has to sit on the floor. I initiate the conversation each time. Mark, who is video-taping, tries to coach us to speak louder as only I and one other performer can be heard. I step out. After many more weak attempts, mainly due to giggling or the inability to hear one another, the women (of*

varying ages) begin repeating phrases and gestures they had performed in earlier runs, inadvertently setting the choreography. In consistency with the earlier movement choice, one woman, not always the same one, finds her way to the floor. I am relieved that this choice was made – it permits improvisation to continue. After several 'runs' of the section the performers are able to speak more loudly, with more confidence. But the excerpt, meant to explore spontaneous communication between women, has become a distilled, pantomimic caricature of women gossiping on a bench.

In referring to the often difficult commitment to improvisation, Paxton (2001) acknowledges the uneasiness of feeling lost or finding oneself in an unfamiliar realm with a foreign canon. Yet he stresses the importance of 'getting lost' as the first step toward the discovery of new patterns and discourses. Furthermore, Paxton emphasises the necessity of learning why we attach ourselves to certain habits, the reasons behind our struggle with change, as well as how we have accomplished it:

> Finding parts of new systems can be one of the rewards of getting lost. With a few new systems we discover we are oriented again, and can begin to use the cross pollination of one system with another to construct ways to move on. …To reject the familiar, so rooted in our nervous system and minds, requires discipline. The difficulty is that we have to know so much to understand what it is we do and why we do it, in order to know what to avoid. We are not attempting to simply eliminate the known systems, but also to realize how we have adapted to those systems.
>
> (Paxton, 2001: 425)

The self-questioning and self-awareness portrayed by Paxton in the excerpt above is the space in which some of the group members frequently got stuck. While I recognise the frustration sometimes involved in adhering rather austerely to improvisation, I would like to suggest that the resistance in the case of the *Identity Project* was also due to cultural factors largely linked to perceptions of identity.

Rather than finding oneself lost, the bigger problem seemed to be not knowing what to do at the point where one did not recognise the path or one's self, particularly in the face of others, also noted in the dancers' feedback and demeanor. It seems as if many of the younger group members did not have faith in the arrival of a 'new system' (to use the words of Paxton) or a solution to the problem on the horizon. Many of them looked uncomfortable and anxious in these unclear moments. What was the root of this inability or reluctance to stay with the uncertainty? What about the knowledge that new, and perhaps more interesting, things will come?

While there are several ways to tackle this question, my first response as an educator, in specific relation to dance educational and artistic practices, is my observation that pure improvisation is not a part of the dance culture in Cyprus. Most improvisation, even contact improvisation, is taught in a result-oriented manner, to learn a move, perform a stunt or act, to set a piece. Lia Haraki, For example, a major player in the Cypriot improvisational field and former instructor of improvisation courses at the University of Nicosia, is known for working with specific 'intentions' as she conducts her exercises. The 'intentions' are provided by Haraki or decided upon with the performer, who is then consistently reminded to go back to the original intention. As discussed in Chapter 1, Haraki's approach produces very clean and compelling performance results, especially in contrast to messier 'works-in-improv-progress' one is often used to witnessing on European stages, but the final version usually bears little resemblance to experimental improvisational techniques. Consequently, the pedagogical potential for improvisation to act as a catalyst for questioning, innovation and real problem-solving is minimised in this case.

Senior Cypriot improviser and choreographer Arianna Economou (mentioned earlier), who worked in the US with Nancy Stark Smith and Steve Paxton during the 1970's and early 1980's, teaches improvisation in Cyprus and also implements improvisation as a basis for much of her choreography. Her work is often criticised as 'sloppy', 'dated', 'unfinished', 'too long' and 'self-absorbed'; another comment has been that 'she does not take her audience into consideration'[43]. Some spectators were disturbed by the fact that she often works with older dancers, or non-dancers. I hold a rather different view of Economou's aesthetic and approach; I find her work to be courageously political, inclusive of various ages, body-types and technical levels, committedly improvisational, and aesthetically intriguing albeit unpolished.

On the other hand, I would argue that in her group work and teaching Economou tends to soften her approach. Since moving to Cyprus in 2006 I have participated in several of Economou's workshops, dance events, and performance festivals. One that stands out in my mind is a contact improvisation-based workshop within the context of the *Urban Bodies* dance film-making workshop in Nicosia during March of 2007. Most participants had little or no previous experience in contact improvisation and therefore did not know how to give or bear weight. I distinctly recall Economou coaching us through the exercises in a shape-oriented manner, using visual images to achieve the tasks. The element of proper weight exchange, the core of contact improvisation technique, was bypassed. Our final shape in the warm-up was a big cluster of bodies that were in full contact but were not interdependent on one another for balance. Perhaps Economou's 'outside-in' approach was an attempt to

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[43] These comments have been extracted from feedback on live performances that I received during group discussions during *Identity Project* and in informal interviews with Cypriot choreographers.

stay in line with the expectations and limitations of her group. In an informal conversation I had with Economou about contact after the workshop she stated that the performers would not be able to understand weight-bearing and they might get injured or scared of movement, so she taught on a more superficial level.

Another issue at hand is the vulnerability often resulting from an unrefined product (discussed through performers' feedback on *kouponi allagis*, Chapter 2) that appears to go against the grain of Cypriot society at large. Glossy performances prevail, even in the contemporary world. The artists who regularly receive funding for their work seem to have gained the trust of the Minister of Culture and Education through their imaginative yet polished works. This 'safe risk-taking' reflects a public image that is inextricably linked to conventionally socialised and gendered ways of representing the self. Looking fat, ugly, or unsexy as a woman or weak and vulnerable as a man on stage is a difficult image for Cypriot performers and audiences, unless it is within a humorous context. It seems that a tightly set piece with a limitation on deviant structure protects them from this exposure. Alternatively, some works by newer or less known choreographers, many of whom present either independently funded or un-funded works are more experimental with improvisation. One piece worth noting was a solo performed at the 2011 *NoBody* Festival (Nicosia) by a blindfolded female dancer on a steeply inclined plank that ran from upstage to downstage. It seemed to me that the structure of the piece was simply based on not falling off the plank.

> *The facing of the plank diminishes the angle of the incline, leaving one wondering why the performer was struggling to maintain balance. Ultimately, as the improvised movement became faster and more dangerous, the dancer loses her balance. On several occasions almost falls off, at places where she is quite high.*

Unfortunately, rather than being regarded as a worthy movement experiment embodying layers of meaning, this piece was criticised by many for its lack of spectacle and for the dancers' bad balance.[44]

Another recent example of improvisation at its investigational best is a senior project by Ana, a student in the Choreography II course of the Dance BA at the University if Nicosia in June 2013. Ana based what she calls 'Movement Experiments' on the philosophical theories of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Plato. She structured her improvisation duets so that unplanned responses were evoked through movement and spoken dialogue to stay in the 'now' and avoid pre-meditated results. The outcome was very different each time, and quite successful, despite the same performers each run. Views were mixed. After a Dance Programme Showing a small handful of us found the piece 'intense', 'humorous', 'disturbing' and 'riveting'. Most, however, including many of the university faculty, considered the piece unfit for performance, despite its originality. As such, it can be suggested that this example reflects previous ones that together make up the status quo: while there is always a small collective voice that goes against convention, the other, more dominant, conservative view is unyielding in terms of what constitutes 'good' performance.

In line with this, I would like also to propose that the aversion to the indefinite in our rehearsals may be, in part, connected to an overall resistance to rooted social change (in contrast to trend snatching) and transformation in Cyprus. Is the issue perhaps the fear of voicing fear, or even simply of voicing? I have detected a thick silence in response to a recent, unprecedented trend in Cyprus since late 2012 to

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[44] From conversations outside the theatre after the performance and with colleagues the following week.

make naked choreography. About nine pieces in which the performers were fully or partially nude appeared on the scene within a period of a few months, undeniably challenging the traditional underpinnings of Cypriot society. Choreographers include the well-known Lia Haraki, Fotis Nicoalou and Machi Dimitriadou-Lindahl (noted in Chapter 3) and newcomers Petros Konnaris and Arianna Marcoulidou. It is unclear whether these works shocked audiences or not, or if the naked body provoked thought, celebration or protest. There was, however, an analogous trend that characterised the reactions I observed at the four performances I attended, such as loud applause and subsequent stark congratulations but also a substantial amount of frowning and whispering during and afterwards. When discussing Haraki's and Konnaris' pieces in my undergraduate courses, with colleagues, or in rehearsal, some spectators felt shy to have watched their friends and colleagues without clothes on. Others insisted it was not a big deal. Still others made statements like 'showing people that there is nothing wrong with the body', excitedly implying that nudity may be a type of social rebellion toward personal freedom (Choreography II, Aesthetics in Dance and Senior Research Seminar in Dance, January to May 2013, University of Nicosia, Cyprus). Few appeared to have an interest in analysing why the performers were nude, what the perfect body types might represent, what artistic or political purpose the nudity may serve, or what role the body may play in political terms overall. In line with this, it can be argued that challenging issues regarding 'modern' expectations and representations of Cypriot women that concern the body, such as nudity in contemporary performance, are mainstreamed almost instantly in order to avoid discord; this leap forward leaves a gap in its dust, and filling the gap requires deep examination and work (Koursoumba, 2005; Skapoulli, 2009).

263

XII

Epilogue # 5

January 2014

It is not simply about telling personal stories as an ice-breaker or waker-upper in a dull or awkward moment and then getting on with the material; it is a methodology in which the personal, or whole person, is at the centre of the learning experience, the real dialogue, where what is occurring in the relationships and spaces between people is the ground for discovery and knowledge.

This I will call 'dynamic ethnography', though I am not sure if this term exists. In this sense, ethnography is in itself an art. Conflict and disagreement will, of course, occur between participants in a project. As innate aspects of human behaviour they are equally significant for learning and developing relationships.

This process is enormously exciting but can feel risky, not only because the vulnerability of not knowing is not typically associated with learning, but also because learning takes place on a deeper level – on the emotional, experiential level rather than in the form of intellectual debate or cerebral inquiry – and some of the dancers may not want to accept what is being revealed to them.

This awareness and perpetual becoming may be barely there.
But it is there.

Chapter 5

almost here: Autoethnography and *PerformMent-ing* the Self

I

blank page and now enter: no answers anticipated

> The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing … that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical.
>
> – Clifford Geertz (1973: 145)

> One thing remains constant about our humanity – that we must never stop trying to tell stories of who we think we are…we must never stop trying to listen to each other's stories. If we ever stopped, it would all be over. Everything we are as human beings would be reduced to a lost book floating in the universe, with no one to remember us, no one to know we once existed.
>
> – Ruth Behar (2003: 17)
>
> From *Ethnography and the Book That Was Lost*

June 2014

*I have finally taken the leap of putting my **self** into this project, with uncertainty. Memories, questions, desires, and versions of **me** and **them** fuel my body as I persist in telling a story that has been narrated by others, but has also been my own. I no longer deny the pieces of **them** in **me** – a rotating foot, a pointed finger, a rounded spine, a series of tangled limbs. The act of tracing an inner score of my self and others through movement relieves doubt, offering a language for confessions of not knowing…[45]*

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[45] As in previous chapters, all segments in italics are from my process journal.

Questions emerge once again, questions that have been there from the beginning. I entered this project with the aim of offering freedom to the collaborators and space to engage in the subject matter with little influence from me. I have tried to keep my own views and narratives at a distance, bypassing or defusing my own story via methodology or process-based justifications. After re-reading sections of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992) in search of some relevant text for *bare-ly there* the much-discussed question of process vs. product comes to the surface again – within it encased the sub-themes of 'artistic integrity' and 'artistic value'.

> *Is fieldwork art? If yes, is it 'good art'? Is art really research? This time I let questions come to paper unadulterated, rather than trying to fix each problem as it journeys from idea to movement or from the studio to the word, prior to settling on the page.*[46]

Just as before, answers are not immediate. Akin to the female protagonist in Winterson's anatomically descriptive novel (1992), I am torn between the frame and the contents: like the lover who vacillates between the flow of sensuous passion and the austerity of logical parameters imbuing her erotic relationships, I fluctuate between the intense 'now-ness' of *performMent-ive* expressions of self and the arduous, anti-creative task of labeling and stabilising. And, although I am not by profession an ethnographer, I find myself perpetually traveling back and forth between the ethnographic spaces of telling stories, my own included, and the insecurity of interweaving my identity in the tapestry. This discrepancy brings forth a critical question posed by Ruth Behar: 'Is there still some lingering shame in even today's self-conscious pursuit of ethnography?' (2003: 15). My own follows: How much of *me* is academically appropriate this writing, and what will it prove anyway?

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[46] This reflective segment has no date but was written during 2016.

Then there is the matter of the so-called 'piece', the anticipated product[ion], that *thing* we are trained to regard as visible proof, solid evidence of the process, and also as the skillfully constructed material that permits us to indulge, judge, interpret, enjoy, deconstruct and in the end retain the work as 'art'. Do I go so far as to openly challenge the paradigm this time, head-on? Should *bare-ly there* proclaim, celebrate, or even disregard of outcome from the onset? Indeed, it seems compelling (and all too easy) to ignore aspects of artistic outcome and/or legitimacy and market-ability (different but related) that stalk creators and performers during the making of an art work, tapering expectations under a learning curve of sorts, (dis)claiming that the artistic or aesthetic or political outcome is not what the project is about. But is such a thing achievable? I am reminded of Clare Porter, a NYC-based choreographer with whom I worked on several occasions between 1998 and 2001. Porter once said to the company just before the premiere of an improvisation-based, autobiographical group piece: 'Improvise, re-create, be yourselves on-stage; feel free to change things up. But remember that in the end the bottom line is, when the audience is leaving the theater, they have one of two things in their heads – *I liked it* or *I didn't like it*'.

Porter is by far not the only individual in my performance career to have expressed this outlook; even when involved in self-branded radical, subversive, or non-performance presentations, the phrase 'break a leg' is inevitably spoken by someone in the cast or crew, implying 'enjoy' but also 'perform well', 'impress', 'get a rise out of them'. This notion, or rather, contradiction, of simultaneously considering the moment and the outcome was as confusing to me then as it is now. In retrospect it has also been a dilemma for my collaborators, though perhaps from a different

267

angle. How can one commit to the insider's being-ness and liberating time-lapse that occurs within an improvised performative performance (characteristics I have since discerned as central to the *performMent*, discussed in Chapter 4) and at the same time reflect or even project on how the artistic occurrence is being received by the audience 'out there'? Even more unlikely, I would say, is the prospect of altering one's moment-to-moment choices in the midst of a deep improvisation to trigger some version of 'I like it' in the spectating body. It is something akin to having a supernatural experience and simultaneously attempting to navigate it. Wouldn't that alter the nature of the experience, negating the both the spontaneity, and the 'super' aspect of the supernatural?

During the piece mentioned above, created collaboratively in 2001 with Porter and seven female performers, I was offered a long, central solo just before the premiere due to an injury suffered by a colleague. Given the autobiographical slant at hand the solo was re-set specifically for me, implementing some feedback from the group. I recall wearing a long, full black skirt of mine that I was requested to manipulate almost like a prop to accentuate constant, quick, spiral movements; I was challenged by Porter to improvise text in three languages, English, Greek and a bit of French; I had to maintain long pauses in contorted positions; finally, I was instructed to contrast moments of heavy silence with humorous but confrontational moments toward the audience, where I asked them questions. While performing it the first few times, the solo felt very exciting and satisfying to execute, the last-minute nature adding to its appeal for me. I was not concerned with the quality of the presentation (as perceived from the outside) but rather just hoped to get through it; the

unpredictability (and added physical instability) resulting from the unrehearsed newness of the segment hoisted me fully into the moment, each word or movement catching the tail of the next before I knew it. Although the solo was different each night, I could not remember making new choices while performing – it all felt like one stream-of-heightened-consciousness, one long performative moment.

Interestingly, during those first nights I received what can be considered positive responses from audience and cast that included comments such as 'strong', 'entertaining', 'original' and impressive'; they enthusiastically offered details of the performance that helped me fill blank spots when reflecting. One night, as I was beginning to feel that I had somewhat mastered the solo, I remembered consciously making what I deemed smart aesthetic choices on stage. Afterwards, however, I was surprisingly filled with a vague emptiness. I asked a friend in the cast for comments; she shared that on previous evenings my solo had seemed more cohesive and fascinating to watch and also that my movements had been faster. Her honest remarks were not just disconcerting, but pointed to a kind of dead end for me littered with more questions, hidden yet vital: Was the transition to set movement inevitable, and what did that mean in terms of a sincere, spontaneous performance? Could I re-create the freshness without feeling technically insecure? How could I possibly control or instigate the level of (un)predictability?

Since the piece was showing for three weeks I opted (with Porter's guidance) to continue 'changing things up' during the latter two, to set my own mini experimental tasks. This approach helped, but the fear of dislike was always there. I was never able to reach the unfettered state of the first few performances. Due to the relatively

short run period, it is difficult to say whether more showings would eventually set the solo loose again; I prefer to believe that this may have been possible through incorporating tasks that would add new elements each time, as well as mentally remaining in-the-moment, as Paxton (2003) advises his students.

Of course challenging moments like these are partly what have made me a stickler for the fresh, new, and unforeseeable in the choreographic process. Having been fortunate enough to have worked with contemporary artists and educators that value process over product, such as improviser and scholar Ann Cooper Albright, choreographer David Dorfman, release technique instructor Barbara Mahler, Greek choreographer Anastasia Papadamaki, movement therapist Martha Eddy and aforementioned choreographer Clare Porter, I have been trained, so to speak, to give up expectation and seek the moment. Ann Cooper Albright often recited the Tao proverb, 'replace ambition with curiosity', during contact workshops to help liberate the group from holding onto control or expectation, inspiring us to dance from the 'inside-out'; I recall being instantly enamoured with this concept, making it into a type of mantra. In fact, I was so taken by this kind of work that I gradually developed a sort of amnesia when it came to technical or product-based training, despite my many years of studying classical ballet, Graham and Limón techniques prior to release, contact improvisation, and authentic movement. Because of my immersion and commitment to this approach, I often assumed that Cypriot collaborators would share my passion regarding the improvisational, process-based foundation of our dancemaking (as noted earlier); I felt disappointed when the same fervour that I had experienced with collaborators in the past was not displayed.

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 and re-visited in Chapter 4, it can be argued that, among other factors, the tendency toward product-based Cypriot dance pedagogy and choreography in both the classical and contemporary scenes has directed the mind-set of many choreographers and dancers regarding rehearsal methods and compositional structure. For the purposes of this discussion I will not further analyse the reasons behind this streak, as I have undertaken the subject at length previously. I will portray how the gap that sometimes incurs between embodied experience and reflective understanding, affecting movement choices and performance approaches, has impacted my decision to greatly minimise the aspect of final product and focus primarily on in-the-moment experiences in the next creative phase of *bare-ly there*. I will refer to specific conditions and findings surrounding this process.

As stated in Chapter 4, the goal of *kouponi allagis* and *ap'to plevro enos andra* was expand the limits of mainstream views and representations of Cypriot sociocultural identity and Cypriot feminine identities. In building upon this understanding through making *bare-ly there,* I aimed to subvert the status quo and initiate the generation of alternative notions and embodiments regarding identity. Significantly, I put myself into the work, shifting the paradigms of choreographer-dancer and concurrent relationships; I will argue this venture is in and of itself a political commentary on identity constructs. Another main aspect of this chapter concerns the characteristics and implications of an ethnographic discourse that, in reflection, I have discerned as running parallel to an artistic one. I will therefore analyse the research process from an ethnographic viewpoint, examine it in relation to relevant ethnographic concepts and practices, and assess the effects of this form of fieldwork on the overall study.

In delineating some general parameters for ethnographic practice that resonate with my own, I turn to ethnographer Ron Iphofen who has authored a detailed document entitled *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology,* published by the European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, aiming to provide guidelines for ethical ethnographic research and raising ethics awareness in related research communities (online). Resonant with anthropologist Clifford Geertz's description of ethnographic practices (1973) Iphofen defines ethnography as 'a field-based research method – not unique to anthropology – employing observation and interviewing to investigate social practices and the meanings behind social interaction'; Iphofen clearly distinguishes ethnography from anthropology, describing anthropology as the broader 'study of all aspects of human culture' that often entails an ethnographic component (online). On the ethical aspect of ethnographic practice, he states:

> The basic ethical principles to be maintained include doing good,
> not doing harm and protecting the autonomy, wellbeing, safety
> and dignity of all research participants. Researchers should be as
> objective as possible and avoid ethnocentricity (Iphofen, online).

I have referred to this particular definition due to its clarity and because it does not regard ethnography as exclusive to anthropology; in addition, the ethical concern reflects the priorities in my fieldwork toward the collaborators. My goal was to investigate Cypriot culture while rendering the experience a positive and respectful one for them. On the other hand, I do not believe I managed to be, or was supposed to be objective, as Iphofen suggests, or if fieldwork *can* be objective. Rather, while I did not plan to adhere to, or even include, an established ethnographic approach, the fieldwork occurring in *Identity Project* can be seen as reflexive – as a composite of subjective experiences gradually distilled to arrive at comprehensive conclusions.

The integration of performance practice and ethnography exists as an area of scholarship, often referred to as 'performance ethnography' or 'ethnographic performance'. Denzin defines performance ethnography as 'a performance rhetoric that turns notes from the field into texts that are performed' (2003b: x). According to Denzin, the juncture of ethnography and performance features personal narratives, poetic segments and what he calls 'everyday performance'; within this scheme the personal, political, pedagogical and performative interact and generate politically significant acts (2003a, 2003b). Denzin discusses interactively performed sociological principles alongside artistic research that undertakes ethnography and dialogical art-making as central to performance (as in my work). Similarly, performance scholar Deirdre Sklar (2000:70) contends that dance ethnography is sociopolitical, as the body 'draws on the rapidly developing ideas and language of cultural studies'.

In order to frame the understandings about ethnographic practice gained through hindsight and to depict the social context surrounding the fieldwork in *bare-ly there*, I have incorporated a greater amount of reflections from my journal than in previous chapters. Most excerpts are from my notes taken during a series of experimental movement workshops conducted in Paphos, a western coastal city of Cyprus, in early 2014 with four female non-dancers between the ages of 30 and 40. The primary aim of the workshops was to access experiences of middle class women through embodied explorations without the abstraction or affect that often accompany the work of trained dancers. While my fieldwork aided in acquiring data, I primarily fostered, as Denzin (2003a) describes, a reflexive discourse with the material and intersubjective exchanges between the performers. The notes highlight this aspect.

In collaborating with middle class women who were inexperienced dancers I also aimed to retrieve a grounded slant on feminine identities that included class; this was explored through movement outside the realm of codified dance vocabulary or institutionalised performance. As dance scholar Stacey Prickett (2013) suggests in her research on dance and politics in British contemporary dance in the 1920's, the sociocultural conditions in Britain during this time led to the generation of workers' dance groups, leading to a broader social consciousness of class identities. In a similar light, Prickett refers to American artist Edith Segal who coordinated a number of informal pageants in America in the 1920s in an effort to 'connect art and work and workers' (2013:51). While in my case neither the amateur workshops nor the final version of *bare-ly there* manifested as large events or a full-fledged social movement, my goal was comparable to the happenings described by Prickett; on a very small scale, it was embedded in and affecting a sociocultural superstructure.

The space that was created in this workshop component of *bare-ly there* enabled the participants to share their experiences in a similar manner to that of *ap'to plevro enos andra;* the exploratory domain was devoid of a physical male presence. Again, each session concluded in a group reflection addressing the movement practice and ethical concerns. Moreover, as in previous pieces, the participants knew one another prior to convening for the workshops and were rather comfortable expressing personal thoughts and experiences. As I have mentioned, unlike the previous works, I participated in all exercises during the movement workshops and candidly shared my views during feedback sessions (related issues and challenges are discussed below). Finally, unlike prior work, the workshops were not to culminate in a performance.

January 2014a

Conscious of perhaps missing the mark once again regarding the willingness and facility of my collaborators to be immersed in a more 'indefinite'[47] method of practice, I ask myself this last time around: What would the ideal collaborators look/think/act like? I am fully open to an open-ended process. Where can I find people here in Cyprus who adequately reflect this profile? Rather than naively supposing, as I have done in the past, that I can motivate any participant to indulge in my view, I now attempt to locate a tiny wedge of the population that would naturally be more receptive. Could the solution lie in collaborating with 'regular people' as opposed to dancers? Would non-dancers perhaps be less inhibited in communicating their views and experiences on the issues at hand – gender, identity, self and the body? After discussing this with a close friend, Mia, who is also pursuing a PhD in the field of identity and Cyprus that has included fieldwork with local residents in the small villages surrounding Paphos, I decide to create a group of four women, to meet for four to six sessions, none of whom are dancers or even artists.

January 2012b

The experiment begins in Anastasia's house. A couple of weeks ago, just before Christmas, Mia and I are invited to bake cookies during our children's play date. No men around and I take this opportunity to invite them into the project. They both say yes! I also ask Olivia, although she is not Cypriot and speaks little Greek. We will conduct the workshops in both Greek and English.

The other day I was invited to Anastasia's house again, together with my husband and children, for a late Sunday lunch (the tradition in Cyprus for Sundays). Women of all ages in the kitchen, men outside near the grill (how many men does it take to prepare one food? The women have done everything else!). Women eat on the small table inside, next to the children, while all the men eat at a different table. I have seen this many times before but am still so surprised. I mention it to Anastasia and she reacts with confusion and says, 'I never noticed until you mentioned it...'. Perhaps I shouldn't have said it; but it seems important to this research...

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[47] From my notes, 2011, 2013; refers to feedback from collaborators in all three projects.

February 2014a

*Though initially a bit shy, the members of this group do, in fact, appear to be less inhibited than the artists I've worked with so far, unequipped with an internal critical eye. This means no dancers' feet, no subtle, symbolic gestures belonging to a movement practitioner. Four women, between the ages of 30 and 40, all married with children, all working part-time, all beautiful in my eyes. I ask them if it's OK with them that I participate in the activities as a full-on member of the group. They look at me like I'm insane for asking, and then respond with 'of course you can, it's **your** project'. I don't know what else I can say to communicate what I meant by asking so I just say 'thank you'.*

Their movements are generally unrefined and at times awkward, akin to those of children in a creative moment class, but bolder and with more to express, deeper joy and pain. Much need for expression in these women and this is endearing and inspiring. During the warm-up we travel through the space, weaving between one another and acknowledging each other with gestures or facial expressions. The participants' pedestrian movement vocabulary initially binds them to versions of walking. When I suggest they change levels, they have less difficulty than expected. When asked to acknowledge one another with eyes or gesture they begin conversations. Anastasia starts joking and the group is soon in hysterics. This makes me smile. In a rehearsal with dancers I would ask them to restrain from talking, but I can see that the women are relaxing in this way and feeling closer.

The rules change and they have the option of making physical contact as they pass each other. Anastasia sweeps her hands over my protruding and belly then turns to Mia, momentarily cupping her breasts! Mia takes this in stride and then pinches Olivia's bottom; this triggers a series of similar actions by all, accompanied by another group laughing fit. I don't recall developments like these in my dancers' workshops; such moments would vanish almost instantly, so that we could 'get back to work', engaging one another in proper dancerly fashion. But today we pursue this silly, cathartic movement game, and I find myself acting like me rather than choreographer or a dancer. Nora, late to join us, enters during screeches of laughter. Anastasia humorously recounts these 'absurd' events. Nora feels welcome.

II

don't dim the lights on my shadow, it's the only thing left

> Modernity in divided Cyprus and the divided modernities of Cyprus have given rise to an alternative social configuration where analytical divisions between *lieux* and *milieux de memoire*, or between history and memory which … characterize western modernity are difficult to draw. This suggests an alternative configuration of the relationships between history, memory and place in societies experiencing violent ethnonational conflicts.
>
> — Papadakis, Peristianis and Welz (2006: 15)

> I'm living on my memories like a cheap has-been.
>
> — Winterson (1992: 70)

February 2014b

I am intimidated by Mia. I get the sense that she is critical. Strange thoughts enter my mind. Could it be her sun sign? Is it due to her cool, academic background? On the one hand she seems so comfortable in her femininity, swaying her cute, pixie-like body. Yet I feel like she is controlling the progress and I don't know how to address this or include it in the research. My video camera is not working today and this is just as well as I don't want to have to see myself looking so nervous.

Follow the leader and Olivia embarks on an improvisation beginning with large, flailing movements and in-discernable text that is not in any language. Her voice then becomes louder, ranging from shrieks to grunts, with intermittent declarations, like 'WOW', 'YES', and 'NOW' Again the innuendos are sexual and we all exchange smirks and knowing glances.

During the discussion, I ask the participants when they feel most like a woman in their everyday lives. Mia: 'When I have my period'; Anastasia: 'When I gave birth and when I am with my children. Nora: 'When I go clothes shopping!'; Olivia, after a reflective pause and a grin: 'When I am in bed with my husband.' A pause ensues, followed by several 'hmmm's'. It occurs to me that all their answers are centred on the body…

It perplexes me that I would never think of saying what Olivia has just said. Why is that? No one asks me when I feel like a woman; I gather that this is probably because I am the facilitator. Despite my sense of rejection I offer my part. 'When I feel pretty and walk down the street or go out for a drink but no men look at me or approach me, the way they would in Athens or London or New York.' I am afraid they find my comment weird. I am relieved when Mia and Anastasia who are both Cypriot but have lived abroad say they have never noticed this before but that perhaps I am right.

This sparks a discussion on men in Cyprus and I feel awkward about my full participation in the conversation. I am starkly aware that my role is becoming increasingly complicated, yet I do not remain silent. For the rest of the session we talk about women's social and sexual oppression in Cypriot culture and both men's and women's formulation of identity/self in this arena. It seems that most of the women are discussing this issue for the first time. I sense that they are worried that the others might think their husbands are included with the 'bad guys'. Yet they persist. I do not speak more or less than they do, and I am happy about this.

In linking this bit of fieldwork with the first quotation above, I ask: where is the space of self, an expressed, dimensional self, within an 'alternative configuration of the relationships between history, memory and place'? In building upon the questions regarding identity issues stemming from political conflict addressed in Chapter 3, I ask: do divided geographical and personal sites in the face of past and potentially recurring violence prevent an emancipated identity that can evolve holistically in the face of modernity? Which memories have made their way into the daily lives of each of these women? Whose history/ies play out? In what places? Do multiple feminine and masculine histories intersect in ways that allow for gender representations and performativities to reform in line with the expressive needs and capacities of each individual within this sociocultural mosaic? In our case, it can be said that all five women's histories were linked to oppression; yet none of us proposed a solution.

278

Mia's family, for example, comes from now-occupied Cypriot territory, referred to by the common term *prosfyges,* generally translated as 'refugees', but derived from the words *pros (προς)* and *fygi (φυγή)* – literally meaning 'towards fleeing'. After the invasion they were forced, like thousands of other families, to leave their homes in the northern region of the island and relocate to the south. Though rather traditional in her lifestyle Mia is on the left[48] politically, indicating that unlike the nationalists, she supports reunification of Cyprus with the full governmental and sociocultural inclusion of Turkish Cypriots. At times I have cautiously asked Mia how she views the displacement of her family and its effects on her own identity, whether she feels it was a violation of her family's freedom, property and future. Like responses of other *prosfyes* I have questioned, Mia's answers are evasive. I view this as a gap in her identity; perhaps in reconciling displacement it is easier for a self that excludes a painful historical past to subsist: the space of self-lost is replaced a new self, a reframed identity that may feel lighter but lacks substance. I suggest that a progression from identities informed by past events requires a new framework that, in part, transcends history; Bhabha's statement below can be applied to this notion:

> The borderline work or culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.
>
> (Bhabha, 1994:7)

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[48] The left, also known as communist, party of Cyprus is formally named the Progressive Party of Working People (Ανορθωτικό Κόμμα Εργαζόμενου Λαού, *Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú*, ΑΚΕΛ/AKEL). AKEL is in favour of the reunification of Cyprus through the inclusion of the Turkish Cypriot minority, separation of church and state, and disassociation with Greek history and culture, reclaiming Cypriot culture as distinct.

In the circumstance posited by Bhabha above, the past is not erased or forbidden, but instead assimilated into a new sense of self and culture in which it will ultimately be transformed. Can the women in the workshops perhaps more easily get into such a space of 'beyondness' through physically embodying their personal and collective histories, traditions, and present daily realities? Dance scholar Ananya Chatterjea discusses the notion of achieving 'beyondness' in terms of the immediate, potent physicality of dance through her readings of what she calls 'resistive' works by African-American dancer and choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Indian dancer and choreographer Chandralekha:

> The interventions in their work are indeed their manipulation of movement practices that are part of their embodied "traditions" in their cultural contexts, the revisioned understandings of history, the drawing on everyday sayings, practices, life forms to transform the context of artistic activity.
>
> (Chatterjea, 2004: 21)

Chatterjea importantly points out that the movement practices manipulated by these choreographers belong to a vital personal and cultural history; art allows for the series of lived experiences to be reassembled, acquiring new meaning and commentary. Her analysis focuses largely on the power of the dancing body in representing and re-inventing perceptions of culture and culture itself. In addition to this prospect, I suggest that in seeking liberation from identity constructs rooted in the past, in the case of Cyprus it is perhaps necessary to embrace the past before retelling it. As Hadjipavlou (2010) has argued, Cypriot women on the whole have not yet fully acknowledged a collective oppressive history laden with elements such as violence, inequality and silencing, still at play in the present. While I ventured to use the past as a springboard for the new, I had doubts, as expressed in my journal:

> *The reality of oppression – through the lens of woman, of the feminine – speaks through my body. It is the most striking aspect of the Cypriot society since I embarked on this project. Tension in my upper back, a knot in my throat, a buzzing in my head, restricted movement as I walk, avoidance of eye contact with men, an overtly aggressive posture, covert sexiness in the subtle swaying of my hips are some of the physical sensations I experience. I set out to instigate a tiny revolution in our safe, artistic orb. This, I thought, is what the women also want. But if, as it now seems, this is not the case for some of them, and perhaps Cypriot society on the whole, where do I go from here?*

One characteristic that stands out in this reflection in addition to the effect of social silencing discussed above is a sense of isolation, a lack of interchange within society. The communication attempted by my embodied self is not in mutual exchange with others; my bodily movements and sensations are reactions to an external force rather than creative actions or inter-actions with an other or others, seen in both my inner and outward responses. My experience lacks essential interrelated elements that Press, in positing 'the dancing self' – in which she includes an everyday self – deems healthy, such as 'exploration, assertion, vitality, and reciprocity' (2002:73)

Alternatively, my excerpt above represents a faith in the wisdom of the body. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983) validates kinesthetic intelligence, attributing it to successful athletes, dancers and surgeons, and describing it as a unique and highly skilled use of the body to understand the world, accomplish tasks and solve problems. Chatterjea develops this view, arguing that the body should be perceived as 'intelligent and multivalent' asserting its 'proactive role in political and cultural commentary' (2004:25). Chatterjea further contends that due to the inbuilt 'political valence' of the performing body, it is

inherently imbued with sociocultural constructs; at the same time performance 'offers possibilities of using bodies in certain ways to either reaffirm sociocultural expectations or subvert them in the context of such expectations (2004: 23). In discarding the prospect of a final product I began to see some Cypriot sociocultural behaviours more vividly, such as upholding a social persona, a resistance to showing emotion and an allegiance to strict gender roles, as depicted below:

March 2014

We meet again, for the third time. Today everyone seems tired; feel like I have pulled them out of their schedule. Nora has just opened a bistro in addition to taking care of her son and works until 2 a.m.; at 10 she is half-awake. She is still reserved I wonder how I should proceed; again I question my role. I have explained to the women (as I have to all participants in the past) that this is a research project and I am a researcher, but have not felt understood. How can I explain that dance counts as research? After I propose a collaborative task, they seem tentative but open.

We warm up with a walking exercise and then work in pairs, sculpting one another's bodies. This begins to break the ice. Then we show. They are careful with me due to my pregnant state, but I enjoy some of the odd, twisted shapes that turn out. Then Mia and Anastasia attempt to turn me into a ballet dancer, arms in high fifth position, feet turned out. Is this how they identify me, the dancer in me? Next duet – Mia is very sexy with her hip out to the side and Olivia a contorted Aphrodite. Anastasia has been morphed into a low, squatting shape, like a trapped frog looking up. This make me laugh. I see that they are becoming more spontaneous in their physicality. I wonder what will come next.

All four women have confided in me, in private settings, that they are lonely in their marriages; I have shared that I am as well. Of course I protect their privacy and do not allude to these or similar issues; I hope their feelings will appear in movement or comments afterwards. I lead an improvisation based on how we feel today. No mention is made. Anastasia must go home to cook and clean.

This excerpt leads me to recall the image of a ghost-self mentioned earlier, or what I view as an 'emotional dead zone'. I have encountered this phenomenon in Cypriot friends, students, collaborators, colleagues. It can be described as a cloudy passivity in an avoidance of something, an indefinite expressivity imprinted in their short sentences, in answering questions with questions, in an uncertainty of self, a flimsiness that needs extra padding, perhaps from a commercially-based modernity. While I can state with certainty, in light of my research thus far, that identity is not a fixed thing, I can also assert that the expression of identity can be celebratory and creatively expressive, as described by Press (2002, see Chapter 2), or robust and full-bodied like an aged wine, sensuously revealing its layered history and characteristics in one single sip. Why the absence of a rich and hearty inner voice? Why is identity embellished with fear expressing fervour, of approaching issues with passion?

An older woman named Tania whom I met in a movement workshop, teacher by profession and artist by hobby, addressed this issue. Tania conveyed that what she described as a 'lack of emotion covered up by false happiness' occurs because after the Turkish invasion, which she lived through as a young girl, painful memories were deliberately pushed aside, causing a lack of emotional expression in her generation and ones to come. She described her parents and grandparents as more emotional before the invasion. She had continued by saying that laughter, as a symbol of (re-in)forced positivism, and a focus on the abundance of food at family parties buries the anguish[49]. Her words were penetrating, perceptive and sincere, and I have since been attuned to the possibility of Tania's evaluation in social situations around me and often cross-references this view with others.

---

[49] My paraphrasing and translation.

I have linked Tania's account of emotional silencing to constructs of nationalism and heroism that Papadakis (2005) underscores in much of his work, cloaking the current generation's memories of the tragic Turkish invasion in heroic mythology or political propaganda. Can the performative unleash such buried emotions? Again, important ethical issues surround the endeavour of approaching painful memories. My role has required sensitivity, awareness, compassion, and respect for all participants' choices, including that of silence and/or withdrawal. I may experience dance as redeemer, risk-taker, re-shaper of identities, connecting discourses, or re-living memories; yet do the participants desire to persevere on such a path in line with my own yearning?

I will address these inquiries by turning to feminist ethnographic perspectives. Here I briefly refer to the view of feminist ethnographer and scholar Kamala Visweswaran (2003) on women's voices and will further elaborate upon feminist ethnographies in Section VIII of this chapter. Visweswaran (2003) argues that while feminist pursuits generally aim to release and empower women's voices, intellectual viewpoints, and underlying emotional states, some women may not want to go down that route:

> A feminist anthropology cannot assume the willingness of women
> to talk, and that one avenue open to it is an investigation of when
> and why women do talk – assessing what strictures are placed on
> their speech, what avenues of creativity they have appropriated,
> what degrees of freedom they possess.
>
> (Visweswaran, 2003: 30)

Visweswaran's argument is significant because it validates both the varying realities experienced by women and the different responses to oppression and silencing in the context of a mass feminist movement that promotes unity to face a common enemy (men). For instance, feminist author bell hooks (1989:9) strongly advocates a

collective struggle by women to 'talk back' as a 'liberated voice' in support of breaking the silence; this notion insinuates one voice, undifferentiated. Visweswaran further suggests that equally important to what can be revealed by women's voices are the circumstances surrounding women's silences (2003). Discussed in Chapter 3, Vassiliadou offers a similar assessment regarding her work with women's groups, stating that many of the women depicted a desire to speak about feminist issues but ultimately refrained; she links this behaviour to fear of the oppressor (2004).

As depicted in the descriptions above, in the amateur women's dance workshops I discerned a willingness to experiment while dancing but a reluctance to express deeper emotional content and personal views in both verbal responses and movement choices. This behaviour is contrary to that exhibited by the experienced dancers in other segments of *Identity Project*, perhaps representing non-artists – a larger portion of the population. It can be said that the avoidance of personal information and the humorous turn that most exercises took stemmed from a learned response to divert emotionally-laden situations, particularly in public, especially in an unfamiliar artistic environment. Since my conclusions on the subject have been developed in reflection, this issue was not discussed with the participants; yet the observations and questions that arise can be seen as equally significant to clear answers, perhaps to be addressed in future research. Alternatively, in the final phase of *bare-ly there*, involving three experienced contemporary dancers, intense and even disturbing personal issues were candidly brought forth and incorporated in the movement and text (see Conclusion). Perhaps latter's articulation is due to their familiarity with art as communication; the issue of silences will be explored below.

III

<u>Choreographic Practice as Ethnography</u>

> There is a strange hunger for ethnography in the contemporary world, which is shaped by concepts of the really real and the desire for stories based on the truth and urgency of witnessing. Ethnography, rather than becoming extinct, has become a necessary way of knowing.
>
> – Ruth Behar (2003: 1)

In this section I will address the creative, choreographic and performance processes of the *Identity Project* from a lived ethnographic perspective, describing how the practice-integrated approach overlapped with ethnography-based research and how the notions of 'fieldwork' and 'ethnography' have been reconsidered through my investigations. How can ethnographic performance unravel and unify multiple selves and others, and why are the particularities of individual stories and selves important? When does one arrive at a stopping point in this type of research? In what form do the 'conclusions' appear? Perhaps in the act of *performMent-ing*, as the body re-enacts the stories on stage and on paper?

I will refer to alternative ethnographic perspectives based on an intimate approach with participants and audiences, such as those of sociologist Alison Rooke (2009), and anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996, 2003). These scholars focus largely on issues of identification and knowledge embedded in the relationship between researcher and participant. I will also refer to feminist ethnographer Ania Loomba's views on multiple South Asian feminisms (2013), Avtar Brah's notion of diaspora (1996) and the work of anthropologist and feminist writer Lila Abu-Lughod's discussion on multiple feminisms (1990, 1998, 2000).

Although political and economic issues specific to Cyprus differ from those affecting South Asia, I have discerned sociocultural similarities rooted in the aftermath of post-colonialism and the silencing of women due to traditional gender constructs. In implementing the concepts proposed by these and other writers, I look at the issues central to Cypriot feminism from an ethnographic perspective. Moreover, I re-examine, through reflectively juxtaposing the practice-integrated method in *Identity Project* with ethnographic theory, the complications and opportunities within the researcher/participant relationship that has been a constant live component of my work, and how our experiences coincide with current theoretical concepts. Issues of power, identity, intimate friendship and emancipation have been embodied and analysed through the practice and discussions. For the purposes of this segment I will not engage in the deeper power politics of participant-facilitator dynamics in ethnographic research, such as the ramifications of distinct socio-economic differences or the politics of race; this investigation will be confined by the scope of my existing practice-integrated study. The hope is to extend my findings to a broader sociocultural scheme that concerns women and identity.

IV

The E-Mergence of (Our) Ethnography

It can be said that the modern turn in anthropological research seems to have begun with anthropologist Clifford Geertz's much-discussed insistence on 'thick description' (1973); according to Geertz, in looking for symbols of meaning regarding the culture being investigated, an ethnographer must look at all possible interpretations. My lack of training in anthropology and ethnography obstructs me from persuasively

defending or disputing any established ethnographic model or methodological practice. Nonetheless, I can relate my research path to certain approaches within the ethnographic spectrum, associating core elements and problems with a practice that is usually linked to reflexive ethnographic investigations. Primarily from a practical standpoint I incorporated tools that many ethnographers still deem basic, such as a personal research diary, questionnaires, audio-visual recordings, informal and structured interviews, socio-historical analysis of the subject, and participant consent forms. My goal was to arrive at theory via a day-to-day reality 'on-site', challenging both predominant notions of identity and ways of attaining knowledge about identity. I turn to a description of ethnography offered by Maja Nazaruk (2011, 2012), also referred to in earlier chapters. Nazaruk likens ethnographies to texts, connecting the presence of the author and his or her perception to the literary style and strategy that is implemented in the crafted presentation of the findings:

> '*Textus*' in Latin means 'woven fabrics'. In anthropology texts are made up of strands and patchworks of cultural signs, assembled to convey ideas about customs and ways of life of natives … imbued with discursive and literary qualities. They are nests for stories, which are deployed rhetorically to advance learning and establish the bearings of intellectual positions.
>
> (Nazaruk, 2012, online)

Significantly, according to Nazaruk the texts of the ethnographer are also present in the 'patchwork' as a central, complex and active in the research, in addition to those of the subjects. In a slightly different light, anthropologist Michael Agar (2006, online) discusses text in terms of language, meaning and context, referring to the view of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923), coined by Agar as 'one of the founding fathers of ethnography' (online). Agar states that according to Manilowski,

> The meaning of a word … was the way it was used in different situations. His view was called "context of situation." If meaning is context, then what's the point in pretending they're separate?
>
> (Agar, 2006, online)

The perspective that meaning and context are not separate but rather interlinked and interdependent brought forth by Agar corresponds with Nazaruk's notion of ethnography as a woven text evolving into 'nests for stories' (above). This inclusive or holistic approach to ethnographic practice is relevant to *Identity Project*: bodily communication is a layered text, and the performance of shared personal narratives is permeated with a unique and contextual reality. Body-as-text is located at the heart of the work, perceived from the onset as a natural materialisation of the self. Within the realm of ethnographic exploration the body becomes the object and the subject, and the author is offered the choice of intimacy and distance with respect to a shifting spectrum of self, location of self and interpretation of self. In this vein, Albright uses feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva's term 'intertextuality' (1966), the absorption of one text by another, in her analysis of the autobiographical work of Canadian choreographer Marie Chouinard. Albright states: 'Rather, **rather** than defining a single position (either theoretical or physical) for the female body' she is 'interested in exploring the intertextuality between writing and dancing bodies…' (1997: 118). Albright suggests that bodily and conceptual text and context are interconnected, organic counterparts in Chouinard's radical performance of female sexuality, reflected by the repetition and bold italics in her own text. Likewise, in her unique *Manifesto for Dead and Moving Bodies* (1995), Foster equates corporeal experience with writing, as bodies both encase and rewrite histories through interacting with society/culture through other bodies:

A body whether sitting writing or standing thinking or walking talking or running screaming is a bodily writing. Its habits and stances, gestures and demonstrations, every action of its various regions, areas and parts–all these emerge out of cultural practices, verbal or not, that construct corporal meaning.

(Foster, 1995: 4)

Similarly, dance scholar Mark Franko (1993) highlights the relationship between embodied history and textuality in his book *Dance and Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*. In the volume *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (Goellner and Murphy, 1995:xi) bodily signification is centrally located when analysing and writing about dance, where identity is 'gendered … in a particular, biological dancing body … at the same time constructed through performance'. While these two depictions of 'body as text' differ, it is significant that the intertextuality of the dancing body was established over two decades ago.

If dance can be seen as a written bodily discourse occurring within one's self, the self can become 'other' as it is communicated to another self or body. This is exemplified in a duet improvised by two women, Ellen and Nora, during *bare-ly there*. The task was to share an intimate personal story while moving, always maintaining contact. Their stories, one about being on a sea shore and the other recalling desire, for a former partner were verbally exchanged. The movement became more intimate, the latter part of the duet in full bodily contact, the women either hugging or laying on one another, repeating certain verbal phrases over and over, such as 'by the sea', 'you were there', 'I loved you then'. In their feedback on the duet they stated that they felt they 'owned' both stories by the end of the improvisation since they had contributed to creating both and had 'internalised' the text through their bodies.

In juxtaposing such corporeal moments through relevant literature, my approach can be seen reflexive, new to my practice and my previous theoretical inquiry, and a near-perfect fit with *Identity Project*. Yet much has been written in critique of reflexive ethnography, described as somewhat of a trend in over recent years, often reaching exhaustion due to its circular methodology (Nazaruk, 2011). Nazaruk (2011: 73) further contends that reflexivity, as a term, can be seen as 'ambiguous, poorly articulated, with scant substantial research evidence to back it up and it is used as a *passe partout* tool for referring to auto-critical thought and works'. It has also been argued that reflexiveness has been mistakenly practised as a rather narcissistic endeavour that stays in the subjective realm, unable to achieve valid or objective results in its claim to self-reference, representative of a self-centred society plagued by conflated individualism (Myeroff and Ruby, 1982; Nazaruk, 2012).

Alternatively the recent plethora of literature addressing the reflexive or dialological method (Agar, 1996; Behar 2003; Geertz, 2005; Rooke, 2008; Alexander, 2008; Nazaruk, 2011) shows that self-reflexive ethnography can actually *break* the cycle of turning in on itself through its drive toward self-knowledge in dialogue with an other. In this case the researcher 'gives shape to his results through his self-reflexive personality', further contributing to and expanding rather than diminishing the outcome (Nazaruk, 2011: 74). The narratives at the core of reflexive ethnography reveal the powerful nature of communicative human experiences, resulting in multiple interpretations of culture through the interaction of personal histories. This intricate, unique knowledge occurs at the crossover of one's own and another's story, at the threshold of communication:

> Ethnography … offers the possibility of reshaping and fine-tuning theory by offering knowledge of the world of practice: the way people make sense of the understandings available to them.
>
> (Rooke, 2009: 5)

As such, in theoretically relating my process to an ethnographic one, I encountered inspiring conceptions of ethnography that can be seen as supporting my efforts, such as ethnography as art (Behar, 2003), the exploration of gender through ethnographic performance (McNamara and Rooke, 2008), and the notion of ethnography as composition or choreography suggested by social anthropologist Paul Atkinson (2013), where 'having ideas and using ideas are themselves part of the craft of ethnography'. Behar (2003: 15) questions whether ethnography may be a 'creative form of non-fiction', advocating for the teaching of courses that 'focus on the craft of ethnography', so as to address the relationships 'between characters, plot, voice, place observer, critique and previous literature'. Simultaneously this type of ethnography poses significant ethical concerns regarding potential tensions in using this methodology. Performance studies scholar Bryant K. Alexander points to this issue; he first defines performance ethnography as 'a reifying and magnifying performative act that replicates aspects … of cultural performance … in the staging and embodiment of "the other" in performance' as it focuses on 'observable and replicable behavior of cultural members in a particular context' (2008: 97). He goes on to point out the central role of ethics in this practice:

> Performance ethnography depends on the integrity and ethical acts of the ethnographer who describes culture and the performer who embodies cultural experience. Questions of *why are certain cultural practices engaged* and *why are they practiced through performance* should be scrutinized carefully.
>
> (Alexander, 2008: 97)

Alexander (2008) develops this argument by emphasising that the ethnographer must make responsible and ethical choices regarding the content of the performance, taking into consideration both the audience at hand, the performers, and the cultures that are represented; he contends that while all ethnographic performance is political each process is particular and different. Finally, Alexander (2008) argues that ethnographic performance is culturally interpretive on an individual and communal level, signifying that space must be given for a plethora of angles particular to a given project to be expressed without bias, and exercising caution in re-telling or re-framing another's narrative (an important concern during *Identity Project*). Along these lines Behar suggests that 'every ethnographer, to some extent, has to reinvent the genre of ethnography to make it fit with the uniqueness of his or her fieldwork experience' (2003: 15). Again, Behar refers here to a self-reflexive, or reflective, approach to ethnography, which 'takes itself as the object' (Nazaruk, 2011: 73).

These prospects support my dialogical exploration of Cypriot identity through choreographic practice and performance that can be seen as my 'version' of ethnography. In addition to engaging subjectivities my process embraced communal interpretations of the thematic material and outcomes, and addressed the particular ethical concerns that arose (as have been discussed). Here I will re-encapsulate three main aspects of my work that required ethical attention and responsibility on my part. This first ethical issue concerned the small community environments predominant in the Dance Programme and in Cyprus in general and how information and personal issues communicated during rehearsals and within the choreography might be interpreted by friends, family, and the spectators. Another sensitive area regarded the

tensions and emotions that sometimes emerged during identity explorations regarding the Turkish invasion and relocation of many Cypriot families (directly affecting certain participants and audience members). Finally, my role as participant was very complex, as I was not viewed as an equal when I was a participant due to my parallel role as facilitator. I repeatedly negotiated my position of power to address important issues as well as respect/include participants' choices of movement, text, structure and how far they wanted to deepen into the issues at hand.

Texts and notions such as those discussed above lead me to discern that I locate the body, and the body-as-text, at the core of my personal 'truth and urgency of witnessing' (to use Behar's words quoted earlier). Agency resides partly in the hands of the performers but also in the audience's experience, as the stories embodied on stage are reshaped and tinted by the personal memories of those watching. This literature justifies my insistence on initially turning away from theory in support of the sincerity I often mention in our quest for knowledge. The idea of honesty in ethnographic research and representation is, of course, problematic, in both the witnessing – what one chooses to see and retain – and narration; yet it is something that an ethical ethnographer strives for (Alexander, 2008). Despite the best of intentions, the most evocative narrations are sometimes the most distorted, as they are vividly coloured by the author/presenter (Nazaruk, 2012). Nonetheless, since all accounts require a narrator to be conveyed, it is the only process available; and perhaps the inherent discrepancy in the method proves what the research itself purports – that human experience is linked, and that any objective notions, honesty, or 'truth' can only be found in the intercourse of subjectivities.

Can the *performMent* act as the crossing of subjective realities, rich with insight and fresh knowledge? My desire to address this question through first-hand experience influenced my decision to place my self in the last leg of *bare-ly there* by being an active author as well as narrator. Hence, *bare-ly there* becomes a series of solos that overlap complexities regarding my own identity with those of the artists that worked with me in earlier sections of the piece. In *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (2011) Foster presents various performing bodies as catalysts for communication across cultures, describing this process as the intercourse of three concepts/actions: choreography, kinesthesia, and empathy. Foster suggests that these elements are interdependently at work as 'kinesthetic empathy' within the performer-spectator relationship, resulting in the audience's shifting, visceral experience of the performing body. In the case of this autobiographical project that features several personal narratives in each piece, I would argue that a similar performer-spectator relationship occurs between performers. Collaboration based on individually crafted solos entails first attentively viewing the work of the others as a spectator before collaborating on the material. However, precisely because of intimate 'kinesthetic empathy' sparked during our dancemaking and spectating, I became concerned about the divergence between the personal and academic, that our subjectivities may nit fir the criteria for 'research'; I again turned to literature on reflexive ethnography to explore this issue. Validation of personal experience is at the crux of Behar's compelling work as a 'vulnerable observer' (1996) that supports subjective accounts within an academic frame; she aims, using Geertz's term (2005), to be 'enmeshed' by her subject/s (Geertz in Behar, 2006), pursuing collaborative relationships with her participants in order to understand their full reality rather

than retrieve extracted facts. In line with this, Nazaruk (2012) suggests that being 'enmeshed' underlies a 'strategy of vulnerability', characterising the self-reflexive anthropological approaches of both Geertz and Behar:

> Becoming enmeshed in culture signifies being part of a complex process of self-projection into alterity, reception in this place and all the interactions that build means the pull and push between people, as they react and co-write a narrative of self-portrayal, irrespective of who the writer is.
>
> (Nazaruk, 2012, online)

As I allow myself to be enmeshed by the culture and subjectivities of the Cypriot woman *perforMent-ing* as her multi-faceted self, I am in the midst of her current. The approach is related to, but also the reverse of, artistically crafting the presentation of the research results; the art is the ethnography, and the spectator is challenged to work through the issues brought forth in the performance. In this light, *Identity Project* can be read in a self-reflexive ethnographic light, with the body as text and the studio and stage as fields that house the power of the performing body, a notion discussed by Nadine George-Graves in her book, *Urban Bush Women: Twenty Years of African American Dance Theater, Community Engagement, and Working It Out* (2010). George-Graves refers the approach of Jawole Willa Zollar's hybridic artististry with her African-American dance troupe as 'working'. As such, she argues that Zollar's choreography is 'emblematic of how individuals and communities work through social anxieties using layers of performance', and that her work 'is changing what it means to see certain bodies perform' (2010:3). Similarly, as indicated above, in her analysis of Zollar's and Chandralekha's repertoires Chatterjea highlights the physicality of the performing body as a vessel for political commentary

and mobilisation, pointing out the importance of the audience's reaction evoked by the movement material:

> …these choreographers' conceptualizations of highly articulate bodies, of how bodies must be configured and movements arranged in order to subvert traditional hierarchies, of how dancing bodies can signify such that ideas and politics become incarnate and uniquely mobilized. It is also this intelligence that creates images in … the audience's … perception, layered with different levels of recognition or questioning, or through invoking visceral reactions to movement.
>
> (Chatterjea, 2006: 25)

It can therefore be said that according to both Chatterjea and George-Graves, as unsettled social constructs and issues regarding identity are put into motion, agency invoked by the dance rests with the audience; the spectator re-inscribes and re-mobilises the experience according to his or her own reality. Scholar Randy Martin (2005) whose work focuses on arts, politics, and public policy, proposes a similar notion regarding the audience (which he describes as 'other' in dance ethnography), a necessary component to complete the communicative endeavour of dancemaking:

> The other, grounded in more practical terms as the mobilized presence of the unstable audience, provides momentary context to the agency of the object itself, now the writing of spatial inscriptions or dancing, or of ethnographic texts.
>
> (Martin, 2005: 112)

Enrolling the audience in the personal assimilation of body-as-text is central to completing the dancemaking journey and arriving at a territory where agency – involving kinesthetic and emotional empathy – will be enabled. It is what Albright calls 'witnessing' dance, a state in which the observer is fully kinesthetically engaged, in contrast to bearing a 'consuming' gaze (1997: xxii). In this sense, the audience

completes successful communication and a furthering of the issues presented by the work. This vital contextual and intertextual exchange and its ramifications will be discussed in terms of Cypriot performance and audiences in in the Conclusion.

V

<u>Mixing Work with Pleasure: An Intricate String of Relationships</u>

> 'I want to kiss you – but we are in rehearsal.'
>> – Anonymous
>> From *Identity Project,* 2016

Sociologist Alison Rooke's (2009) self-exposing account of what she terms 'queering ethnography' describes a complex, unprecedented interpersonal research process infused with deliberate sincerity. Rooke's project is quite pertinent to my research methodology, laden with similar aims and unforeseen issues. While my topic is not related directly to the politics of sexual identity and issues of erotic love were not overt, intimate interpersonal dynamics and their implications resonate with Rooke's.

In her written analysis of a year's worth of fieldwork in the lesbian, gay and bisexual community of London, Rooke (2009/10) argues that 'queer ethnography does more than use ethnography to research queer lives; it also takes queer theory seriously to question the conventions of ethnographic research' (2010, online). Rooke elaborates on this notion by stressing the importance of 'addressing the assumed responsibility and coherence of the ethnographic self and outlining how the self is performed in writing and doing research' (2010, online). Notably, Rooke takes the time to fully convey the intersecting moments, viewpoints and relationships within the women's group that included her own challenges regarding identity as a woman, lesbian,

academic, friend, and lover that led to significant questions and new forms of knowledge. Similarly, the second two works of Identity Project brought to light issues regarding women's realities in Cyprus in an alternative manner that challenges mainstream research methods regarding Cypriot identity.

The *Identity Project* collaboration with the participants did not entail interchanging artistic ideas and piecing them together for the sake of chorographic material, or negotiating issues of artistic ownership. Rather, I was concerned with pursuing a genuine curiosity and tolerance of one another as people, ultimately gaining a deeper knowing of ourselves and others through the collaborative process. The personal investment in this type of exchange involves vulnerability, honesty and receptivity in both the artistic practice and the interpersonal discourse. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the range of exercises and movement techniques I employed in the creating the works sought to facilitate the disrobing of identity-related armour; however, as this venture unfolded, my role in the process was not consistent. As our movement research process broadened and intensified, I became divided concerning various routes of acquiring knowledge, such as improvisation-based representations and open reflections vs. more structured performance styles. I valued the lived subjectivities that sparked unexpected insights in contrast to the data derived from of standard analysis. I began preferring questions to answers.

> Postmodern ethnography has carefully acknowledged its limits, interrogating the politics of the research process and the conditions of the production of ethnographic texts. This has led to a reduction of and deconstruction of claims to 'knowledge' and a critique of an assumed ability to definitively represent cultures.

> (Rooke, 2009: 5)

Rooke's acknowledgement of the 'limits' in ethnographic practice indicates the need for new approaches. Her view implies an opposition to the pursuit of objective observation and definitive data and instead shifts the focus to the value of discursive and reflexive intersubjectivities played out within the complexities of real life (2009). Similarly Behar, in her moving article *Ethnography and the Book That Was Lost*, discusses the quest of what she calls the 'heartbroken ethnographer', perpetually 'searching for ways to evoke how intersubjectivity unfolds as a fundamental part of the representation of social reality 'in order to 'know the world beyond the self'.

More specifically, she refers to intersecting points between personal experience and the outside world that 'most fully reveal the process by which ethnographic knowledge is attained in the highly charged moments of our fieldwork encounters' (Behar, 2003: 7). In this essay Behar links this undertaking to her own journey of balancing the aspects of her identity as a Cuban, Jewish and American woman, an immigrant and a diasporic. Her intimate relationships with participants throughout her research are recounted, entailing the discovery of lost bits of her childhood past in Cuba through creating a documentary *Adio Kerida/Goodbye My Dear Love* (2002). As with Rooke, the liberty and space Behar takes in this academic essay to describe her personal, emotionally-ridden experiences made an impression on me. Though she discusses the uncomfortable feeling of talking about herself, she persists, taking the reader along with her, and it does all make sense at the end. Like a mosaic, it must viewed as a whole, from afar, to see the image clearly; looking too close is akin to meandering through a maze. The warmth and closeness in Behar's manner, a familiarity in her written speech, and an easy flow in her words are all part of her

artistic ethnographic crafting, makes one feel as if one is really getting to know her. This style seems to serve a personal need to reclaim parts of her identity but can also be viewed as a literary strategy that employs vulnerability, positioning oneself as a primary. Consequently, Behar seems to abolish the subject-object dichotomy through the simple process of unification of one's emotional and intellectual selves.

Behar's overall writing style openly positions Behar's self and her personal history as both subject and object. This deliberate 'subjectification' of the embedded material, certainly challenges notions of validity advocated by more conventional ethnographic writing and representation that attempts to objectively frame the research findings, even in cases when subjectivities are included (Agar, 2006, online). Yet I suggest that Behar (2003) accomplishes something even more important. In not attempting to hide the emotional and passionate aspects within human experience that are subjective and far from absolute – such as desire, longing, pain, confusion, joy and love – but rather using them as a source, Behar fully connects the human ethnographic subject/participant to real human experience. This gently lures the reader/spectator into an awakened and active emotional state that enables an interactive, intersubjective relationship with the text. The receiver of her text is simultaneously transported into Behar's history and one's own, somewhat like a stage where several characters from different plays perform similar scenes. As such, it can be said that Behar's conclusions rest, in part with the spectator, in the form of absorption and empathy, inspiring change. The same can be said for the engagement with bodily text, a notion is in line the spectator's experience of the performative moment, described in Chapter 4. Below I express my view on physicalising text:

Will my words perform in this way as I compose and narrate in barely there? Will my translation distort or sharpen the accounts of the other women? Will I recreate some of the feelings, discoveries and reel of changes that occurred during our journey, linking them to human experience and evoking empathy? This is a tall order but one that potentially strings my work from the beginning all together – from the uneasy a feeling I have had all my life regarding who I was culturally and where I was really from, to my conflicting encounters with being a woman in Cyprus.

(February 2014)

VI

***That's Not my Real Name*: Dynamic Ethnography**

What has our ethnography resembled in action? If our collaborative attempts at making dances about ourselves can be considered an ethnographic approach to identity, then which realities were at play and what were the upshots? Conversely, can the ethnography have an effect on each of our intrapersonal and social realities? I turn to Rooke once again, who points to both the complexities and opportunities within what I call a 'dynamic ethnography':

> An ethnographic approach to sexuality … acknowledges that gender and sexual identities, and the meanings that circulate around them, are more than merely discursive formulations. They are daily realities and practices that have real consequences.
>
> (Rooke, 2009: 5)

Throughout the *Identity Project*, relationships within the group were infused with real-life dynamics. As previously noted, during *kouponi allagis* I tried to detach myself from this parallel reality, I was focused on dissipating emotional responses, desires, and gossip played out between the dancers during rehearsal. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Cyprus is small and the dance community even smaller, making it

increasingly difficult to close out this aspect, yet equally challenging to draw the line. As Agar points out, 'So the problem is, where do you snip the webs of connection? When is enough enough? This is a major issue for ethnography' (2006:122).

Furthermore, due to the involvement of most participants in *Identity Project* with the Dance Programme at the University of Nicosia our lives were connected on a daily basis; some of us had relationships that were difficult to bypass in rehearsal. Eva and I, for example, were linked to the same family members and withstood similar family tensions during the choreographic process; Anastasia baptised my daughter; Vivian will be Eva's maid of honour. Such interconnected relationships are common in Cyprus; though ours did not include erotic feelings, they can be likened to the relationships in Rooke's fieldwork LGB community of London. Another example concerns Rory, who failed to keep in pace with the rehearsal progress due to personal issues, leading us to take on an understudy (Rya). It was obvious that Rory's withdrawal from the process, while proving to be temporary, affected the group; yet the other members did not openly express their feelings. Rather, they dealt with the ensuing tension and awkwardness by hiding behind a cold misdemeanor or being overly polite to one another. This emotional stiffening in lieu of an open discussion mirrors Tania's view (see Section II) on the Cypriot tendency to bury feelings.

Despite provisions in the participant consent form and my previous experience with narrative pieces, it was often a challenge to negotiate perspectives in this case – to keep details of intimate relationships separate in a process that required the sharing of deep emotions and personal stories within a small community. Each moment of tension was addressed according to its particularity. For example, in the case of

Rory's departure, I brought the issue to a group discussion to help clear the air; I listened, showing compassion toward some members' feelings of abandonment by her, but also demonstrated support of her decision to withdraw. My perspective ignited similar responses in some of the women, while others felt she showed a lack of commitment. I remember reeling in the discussion before it became critical of Rory, using my role as 'director' to protect one of the members.

Alternatively, it can be said that when a difficult moment arose I used a standard series of actions that helped both acknowledge and move beyond the participants' initial feelings. I first suggested a break from standard rehearsal practice; I then engaged the group in a discussion, giving each member an opportunity to express thoughts, feelings, and concerns; finally, I proposed that we come up with options to solve the issue, alleviate stress, and/or resolve uncomfortable feelings. Apologies were sometimes offered (I was not excluded from this).

These and other dynamics caused me to question the place of life in the domain of research, and how the fields of ethnography, anthropology, or choreography create the research environment for an intervening reality that may conflict with an artistic or academic vision. As Rooke contends, 'due to its intensely social and at times intimate character, ethnographic research is filled with ontological, epistemological and ethical dilemmas' (2009: 6). Was it therefore ethical on my part to have preferred certain dispositions – or selves – in the practical research in an effort to extricate this utterly commonplace, albeit uncomfortable, human encounter from our artistic interactions? Or could we have perhaps risked incorporating our full range of feelings into the research and movement practice, and possibly even

included actual occurrences between us in the narratives? It seems that no answer is adequate and that all answers may be relative; in these cases I went by feeling, mainly guided by compassion and love for the participants. It appears that certain behaviour and choices that may be ethical in terms of the particular relationships at hand may not be ethical when considering the research motives and progress.

I recall experiencing dismay at my difficulty in negotiating the inclusion of my various unsynchronised roles shifting to the forefront of our creative relationships. I was concerned that fully incorporating this dynamic might be disruptive to the group's team feeling, and heavy on relationships that were varied, deep and complex. Perhaps this challenge would have enriched the research, and evoked more risk and emotion in all the participants, and affected my approach in *bare-ly there* (discussed below). Rooke reveals her own such confusion with the choices she was challenged to make in an arena in which she was simultaneously involved in various personal relationships, including friendship, the teacher-student bond, and intimate love:

> I felt a deep unease when attempting to keep my feelings to myself and retain some objectivity while trying to engage and understand my informants' experiences through an 'ethic of listening' which combines emotions and intellect.
>
> (Rooke, 2009:12)

I am not certain that this issue can be easily negotiated. As *Identity Project* progressed I advocated the inclusion of raw, personal material, albeit somewhat tapered in performance to protect the participants. I emphasised the value of honesty in rehearsals. I tried to allow ethnographic dynamics to carve the research path while respecting the privacy of the collaborators. I believe that this environment of trust and openness fostered new understandings.

Feminist Ethnography

Almost three decades ago, feminist anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod asked a loaded question in the title of her article: 'Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?' (1990). Through this inquiry Abu-Lughod openly problematises the issue of defining feminist ethnography; she argues that feminist ethnographic practice is not singular and cannot be universal, particularly in light of the power hierarchy that typically offers advantages of the ethnographer over her subjects (Abu-Lughod, 1990). In line with this, it can been suggested that the feminist commitment to social change runs the risk of sweeping over differences and representations of 'other'; this propensity in Cyprus has been both underscored and critiqued by Vassiliadou (1997, 2002) and Hadjipavlou (2006, 2010). At the same time, experimental ethnographer Behar (1995, 2003) suggests that all feminist ethnography entails story-telling and an autoethnographic component; conversely Visweswaran (1994, 2003), challenges the fictional or literary turn in much recent ethnography regarding women. Finally, anthropologist and scholar Marsha Giselle Henry (2003), as a South Asian diasporic, focuses on the complexity of the researcher's identity in her reflexive ethnography.

What, then, are some general attributes of feminist ethnography? While it is neither possible nor applicable within the parameters of this study to engage in a full overview and critique of feminist ethnography, I will briefly point to perspectives that provide a basis for my practice and reflect my intentions. Sociologists Katherine R. Allen and Fred P. Piercy define feminist autoethnography as 'the explicit reflection on one's personal experience to break outside the circle of conventional social

science and confront, court and coax that aching pain or haunting memory that one does not understand about one's own experience' (2005: 159). The authors deem this method inherently autobiographical, in which researcher and subject are often one and the same. Furthermore, Allen and Piercy suggest that feminist ethnography can occur 'at any level of scholarly enterprise…by providing a space to work through the fragments and missing pieces that echo in one's research project, classroom teaching, advising, supervision or activities of daily living' (2005: 159).

As indicated in Chapter 4, Spry (2001, 2011) defines autoethnography as dialogical blurring of the line between self and other, emphasising the role or personal narrative. Ethnographer Carolyn Ellis suggests that autoethnography is 'research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political' (2004: xix). When considering these views, my approach can be seen as feminist as it is both autoethnographic and self-reflexive in exposing feminine subjective voices. In addition, my own experiences and narratives in the practice coloured the outcomes. This self-reflexive endeavour as a woman within Cypriot society explored my presuppositions about Cypriot women and the body as part of a strategy to access, deconstruct and activate silenced aspects of my own and other women's identities. I saw myself as one of them; this coincides with power issues brought about by ethnographic practice. As Rooke explains,

> [The] deconstructive turn regarding epistemology is found within feminist debates which have also interrogated the politics of knowledge production within specific disciplines, raising questions of the relationship between the knower and the known, and the gendered nature of research, in an attempt to create new subject positions of knowing.
>
> (Rooke, 2009: 5)

Rooke's perspective implies entering a new domain through ethnography, one that overturns previously known relationships and methods. Rooke argues that this ethnographic movement is related to feminism, opposing patriarchally constructed paradigms regarding knowledge. This view overlaps with my implementation of the body as an alternative method of obtaining new knowledge and a unique language for problematising identity. Behar quotes Geertz (1995), to make the point that both vocabulary and field are often missing to express what takes place during ethnography: 'There seems to be a genre missing' (Geertz in Behar 1996: 9).

Finding a language in our case also meant dwelling in the silences. As mentioned earlier, it can be said that some female performers' silences in *Identity Project* stem from conscious withholding as well as socially imposed restrictions of which the women may not be fully aware. Hadjipavlou (2006) argues that Cypriot women are generally cautious about how they appear to unfamiliar others and how their real opinions, particularly those regarding gender, may affect their outward self-image and social acceptance. Underlying this reticence may be a sociocultural constraint that deprives females of open or free communication early on in their lives. On the one hand, as I have pointed out, Cypriot women often engage in dialogue in ways that establish camaraderie; simultaneously they are distanced from the experience of self-validating speech due to the inherent lack of freedom in the ways they were taught to use, or refrain from using, language (Vassiliadou, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2010) The tension between tradition and modernity also affects women's corporeal language, often aligned with a socially agreeable identity they wish to uphold, particularly regarding the construct of the virgin-whore spectrum (Skapoulli, 2009).

Feminist film-maker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha (2000) questions whether probing the reality of the 'other', even in an effort to liberate, perhaps reinforces a colonising gaze; I extend this notion into interpreting Cypriot women's silences. Along these lines, Visweswaran (2003), mentioned above, argues that the women's silences are often mis-categorised in ethnographic investigations. She problematises women's use of language and abstinence from speaking:

> Thus far epistemological problems about women as subjects have been framed in terms of anthropological model … when much feminist theory outside the discipline takes the problematic of voicing as its starting point. Yet feminist theories of language have not informed ethnography. In fact, I would argue that feminist anthropologists stand to learn not only from women's speech, but women's silences as well.
>
> (Visweswaran, 2003: 31)

Different cultures, as Visweswaran contends, may therefore be equivalent to what she calls 'separate realities' (2003: 30). As emphasised by Vassiliadou (2004), while all Cypriot women are oppressed by the same hegemonic superstructure their experiences differ. Similarly Loomba (2012), in her analysis of South Asian women's issues, proposes a pluralistic view of multiple feminisms. This notion is quite relevant to Cyprus, a culture that is still driven by familial ties (Bryant, 2002) and post-colonial remnants but is also affected by modernisation and multiculturalism. For example, a diasporic British-Cypriot woman who has recently re-located to Cyprus will not have the same needs from a mass feminist movement as a Vietnamese domestic worker who has been a Cypriot citizen for three decades but is still seen as a 'foreigner'. Both women are categorised as 'other', but the first is far more privileged; this advantage manifests on economic, social and personal domains.

Resonant with the notion of 'multiple feminisms', Brah (1996) proposes the concept of 'multiple diasporas' and 'diaspora space' (also see Chapter 1), both consisting of imaginative and real components influenced by dominant sociopolitical discourses, but also allowing for change. Brah defines diaspora as 'an interpretive frame referencing the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of contemporary forms of migrancy' (1996: 186); examples of these forms can include, immigrant, expatriate, temporary worker, and refugee. According to Brah (1996) the relationship one has to both the native land and new land is associated with power and privilege, and difference with each case (as in my example above referring to two diasporic Cypriot women). What happens, however, when two realities, as indicated by Visweswaran, or two homelands, or diasporas, in line with Brah's argument, live inside one person? It can be suggested that in each Cypriot woman resides a modern version of herself and a traditional one; one that desires freedom to express and one that chooses silence. Perhaps a new 'identity space' is required for the negotiation of the two, or even multiple, feminine identities.

Many Cypriot women identify with biculturality and/or displacement. How might a dual or displaced sense of self be found, negotiated, or transcended? Such schisms point to the need for a Cypriot feminism that embraces multiplicity, divergence, diaspora, and parallel feminine realities. Issues emerging from fissures in feminine experiences of self are explored performatively in the final phase of *bare-ly there*, described in the next chapter which concludes the thesis. I argue that a fully improvisational, process-over-product approach aids in the liberation of feminine voices and identities, a landmark in my artistic practice and research methodology.

VIII

<u>Epilogue # 6</u>

I am transported to my first year in Cyprus, March 2007.

I take part in the 3rd Annual Urban Bodies Dance Film Workshop organised by Arianna Economou; Old Town, Nicosia. The guest artist this year is former contemporary dancer Miranda Pennell, now a London-based film maker. Miranda is lovely, temperate yet persistent. She invites us to find material for our dance videos in our daily lives and the immediate environment around us.

Looking back, many of the participants are pleasantly eccentric: Spyros is a flamboyantly gay theatre director speaks with huge gestures; Evie is extremely affectionate and open with all, as well as blunt about her sexual experiences with men; Juta, a Lithuanian photographer with bright red hair, spends an entire day in my apartment down the road from the studio to get the right angle of a profile in a window frame; tall, bearded Sasha, though married with a small child, exudes a healthy uninhibited admiration of women. A usual, multicultural group of artists, not much different from those I have encountered in New York, Paris, Athens. And so different from the plethora of socially reserved and emotionally reticent Cypriot acquaintances I will make over the next few years.

I am four months pregnant with my first child, and the group honors this by including the aesthetic of my S-shaped spine and my rounding belly in their films. They are also very protective of me during the movement workshops.

A series of s's. Shadow, scrim, Sasha, sensual.
        The sagittal S-curves of my changing body.
            The S-curls of my long hair.
                        The exaggerated hyperextension of my knees as
                                In a shot taken from the ground.
                    I am the Star. In reflection I can say that the *film-making is performMent-ive.*

My film features Evie. In all the shots she is a young woman in transport, though she never moves from her spot.

Three to five second takes. Evie behind bars, the steps of a ladder, legs dangling like a little girl.

In one scene I cut her head off, and we hear her voice talking about what her beheaded body, clad in a long hot-pink gown that once belonged to my mother. Perceptions and desires. I now contemplate why I did that.

Shift to a close-up of her throat and the vulnerable twitches of her larynx. She repeatedly recites the phrase

'my name is Evie'

in several languages, as if dictating what she prefers to be called in each space she inhabits. She knows many languages from being a tour guide, even though she really

wants to be an actress.

Just as

we begin to form a

complete image of her based on her multiple

(dis)locations, the scenes are clipped again and

we have to piece Evie back together.

Was I always so drawn to the subject of identity?

Only in retrospect do I realise that this video is autobiographical. I am Evie, she is me, a woman in constant transport, physically and psychically, revolving around an identity with many sides, whose colours blend together like those of a spinning top, a moving kaleidoscope. I am also on the inside, attempting to hold onto the centre, as if there is such a thing, seeking peace and definition in

*the **eye/I** of this SPECTACULAR s t o r m.*

From a distance, I can see that I am afraid to let go of the many selves that I, along with others, see in me. I have set out to guide others on this path. Is it my turn?

Conclusion

I

***bare-ly there, take 3*: How we Broke the Silences**

The final version of *bare-ly there* was developed in Paphos, Cyprus during 2017 as a collaborative trio between dancers Eva, Vivian, and Eleni (me). Eva, mentioned earlier, is a former university student of mine and current colleague and friend; who participated in the first two works of *Identity Project*; Vivian, also a former student at the University of Nicosia, is now a colleague and close friend. This project did not receive funding. It was performed as an impromptu improvisation in an outdoor, informal venue – a public square in downtown Paphos – in late September 2017. The process for the trio differed from the other pieces in *Identity Project* and the first version of *bare-ly there* in a number of ways. Firstly, the performance outcome was of no concern to us during the movement explorations; in valuing process and minimising the importance of product, the material was not manipulated or refined so that it would be 'ready for the stage' as in previous works. Secondly, our working method was fully committed to improvisation into the final execution of the work, influencing by choice to use trained dancers. Thirdly, the notion of *performMent-ing* was brought forth from the onset as a movement element and a catalyst for the liberation of (our) feminine voices. This journeyed us to challenging, emotional, unexpected places of real reactions and expressivity within ourselves and with one another (described below). The main principles in working as a trio were maintaining a receptiveness and sensitivity to one another during the process, a dedication to staying in the moment during improvisations, and giving up control of the results.

I have chosen to include the information and analysis of this phase of *bare-ly there* as part of the conclusion of this study rather than earlier in the writing because I believe that this distinct process and its outcomes reflect many of the findings of the research. In addition, the evolving methodology of this project can be seen as reaching its apex in this last artistic endeavour, as key theoretical perspectives regarding feminine identities were consciously activated, embodied and subverted. Correspondingly, it can be said that our bodily discourse challenged and transcended mainstream notions of identity, particularly in the area of gender, and seemed to intervene with the spectators' realities in a transformational manner. Due to the improvisational style of this piece and my full participation in it, I have not recorded descriptive reflections from my perspective as a spectator as I had with the previous choreography; in this case my journal entries subjectively express my experience within the work, and not at all analytically or objectively. It is also important to note that no photographs were taken of the process or performance. While descriptions will not be interspersed throughout this chapter, this process is included in the conclusion to emphasise the embodied culmination of key concepts of the study.

Bare-ly there # 3 (as I will call this phase of the process from this point on for the purposes of clarity) was created in three parts, each a structured, collaborative improvisation between all three dancers. In the first section, the dancers were blindfolded. The task was to move through the space linearly while counting steps within the pre-measured length and width of the performance area. When dancers encountered one another, contact was maintained as a duet for as long as both or all three partners desired; upon departure the counting sequence was continued.

Besides counting, other text was spoken during pauses that expressed the dancers' current mental or emotional state, desire, or concern. The dancers were permitted to respond to one another and build on the dialogue until locomotion resumed.

The second section of the piece was based on personal borders. In turns, two of the dancers physically trespassed the surrounding space and bodily crevices of the third. Although voice and sounds were used; the only word permitted was 'STOP!', as a sign indicating that a performer had reached her internal limit of being 'invaded'.

Vivian is tall and strong. She stands in the centre of the space. Eva and I enter her space any way we can. Through her legs, between arm and torso, the nape of her neck. She moves to a different spot; we follow. I jump on her; she carries me to another area of the space; she flings me off of her. Eva jumps higher onto her body and doesn't let go as Vivian begins to run. I chase her and try to catch her. I block her and wrap my arms around her legs. 'STOP!' She screams. 'Please stop!' And she breaks into tears.

The third section entailed the recounting of a personal narrative, by each of the performers regarding a significant erotic relationship. The story in each narrative remained the same each time it was told, but the words and underlying emotion were different. In various spots of the performance space were branches with dried leaves, fresh roses, and an old traditional Cypriot wooden chair. The dancer reciting her narrative sat in the chair, or moved on it or around it. The other two improvised in response to her text, with or without the props. After the last narrative all the dancers took turns addressing the audience. A series of provocative questions were asked, such as, 'How do you feel about all of this?'; 'How is it being a woman in this place?'; 'Do you men know what it means to be a woman? DO YOU?'.

II

General Conclusions

In order to address the findings of this study I engage a platform that allows for the multiple stands that have emerged from the practice-integrated methodology I constructed to explore a topic that is virtually absent in current scholarship. I will theoretically address the questions brought forth at the onset of this study regarding Cypriot sociocultural identity and the contemporary dancing body. I will also refer to the findings from the practical work and tasks unique to my subject matter, based on an ongoing interdependent discourse between the theory and movement research.

Here I once again emphasise that my practice-integrated methodology evolved alongside the research itself; as such, it became essential to draw conclusions throughout the writing in order to establish the findings of certain phases and contextually approach choices regarding each next direction of the investigation. The outcome has been an interdisciplinary research process that involves dance studies, choreography, somatics, cultural practice, politics, pedagogy, feminist theory and ethnography. In presenting and analysing the conclusions of this venture I draw upon the multiple interfaces of these fields as they affect the outcomes, contributions to existing research fields, and possibilities for future research.

There are three areas into which the general conclusions of this study can be categorised. The first area encompasses the role of the dancing body in investigating Cypriot sociocultural identity; the second concerns feminine identities and women's voices in Cyprus; and the third involves the function of performativity in arriving at

new representations and interpretations of identity. In addition, I have observed a plethora of Cypriot contemporary dance made in the last decade; I have associated this fieldwork with Cypriot identity issues and my own work. It can be said that all findings emerge from the active, dialogical relationship between theoretical investigation and movement practice.

III

<u>Results from the Literature Review</u>

My review of literature extends to the many research areas listed above. I will address them in this section as they are pertinent to theoretical understandings. At the same time, I will approach my theoretical conclusions from the platform of a practice-integrated process.

Through my examination of literature on Cypriot identity I have discerned that a prominent and recurring discourse in the research of most scholars explores the notion of 'other' within the context of political conflict and a factor in perpetuating divergence. Moreover I have ascertained that the underlying intent of most identity research regarding Cyprus concerns overcoming conflict and division geographically and socioculturally with the northern region as well as within Cypriot communities in the south. In much of this literature nationalist constructs are presented as the main propagators of divergence (see Chapters 1 and 2). A number of comparative studies, often including fieldwork, have been conducted that address the similarities and differences between northern and southern Cypriot identity constructs.

317

Literature that includes the moving body or dance in addressing Cypriot sociocultural identities is not available. Some scholars, as mentioned, discuss the body but not in relation to dance or movement, exploring themes such as sex trafficking, sexual identity and domestic violence (see Chapter 3). As I have indicated, Stavros Stavrou Karayanni (2004) is currently the singular scholar that addresses the embodiment of identity issues through dance, focusing on masculine identities. Writing that includes the female contemporary dancing or performing body as a main vessel for identity is not available. There is also an absence of academic research that explores the connection between contemporary dance and performance and Cypriot culture.

A group of Cypriot feminist women sociologists/activists collectively demonstrate and problematise the current subordinate social position of women in Cyprus and consequent silencing of women's voices and concerns (see Chapter 3). This literature validates perspectives and discoveries in *Identity Project* as well as the significance of movement practice in exploring feminine identities. The literature shows that research on the Cypriot woman is still limited. Maria Hadjipavlou's book, *Women and Change in Cyprus: Feminisms and Gender in Conflict* (2010) is the only volume that refers to colonialism, war, and oppression in Cypriot women's history. Literature substantiating the link between Cypriot feminine identities and the performing body is absent. I suggest that the lack of the body in feminist research and the reasons behind it is a significant subject in and of itself and area for future research.

My literature review led me to notions of performativity that encompass my aim to 'performatively perform' identity, expanding my practice. Perspectives linked to performativity also centred on the personal narrative in autoethnographic practice

helped uncover findings in the practical work. Denzin's notion of 'performance ethnography' (2003b) represents a significant milestone for the performance of identity, rendering it a simultaneous performative, pedagogical and political act. I have named the distinct traces of this lived phenomenon in my work 'performative moments' or *performMents*. Ann Cooper Albright's (1997, 2003, 2017) emphasises the multiple discourses at play in performative identity embodiment, including the universality of narrative and the intertextuality of the dancing body (see chapter 5).

Scholarship on critical pedagogy and experiential pedagogical approaches concerning the arts calls attention to process over product, democratic practices and critical thinking. This influenced the allegiance to process in the last movement endeavour, *bare-ly there #3* (as depicted above). The literature connecting pedagogy, politics and performativity portrays learning as a dialogical and creative process. This work enriched the movement research process. Education philosopher John Dewey's notion of the 'esthetic experience' (1934) was a basis for my establishment of the characteristics and parameters of the *performMent,* a primary discovery of this work implemented consciously in all the phases of *bare-ly there* (see Chapter 4).

Scholarship that addresses alternative and intersubjective notions of colonialism, diaspora and ethnographic practices bring forth issues that concern Cypriot society, such as the need for diverse feminisms and diasporic realities (see Chapter 5). In line with this, I have identified and interpreted layers of Cypriot identity that appear in relevant literature on the case of Cyprus and, have brought them into the movement practice. Literature that addresses Cyprus in terms of postcolonialism indicates sociocultural and historical discourses unique to Cyprus, outlined in the writing.

IV

<u>Outcomes and Findings from the Practical Research</u>

In concluding, I reconsider the primary initial questions underlying my study: In the performance of identity, whose identity does one perform? Which experiences that comprise one's sense of self predominate and which are left behind? How does the performance medium affect the meaning? The link between dance and sociocultural practices, including the performance of identity, has been discussed by a number of scholars in recent decades (see Introduction). While drawing from these sources, my study is primarily concerned with what happens when identity is performed.

Through the practical research I have observed that our lived identities are multiple, and that identity is always being performed. In this pursuit I have followed Judith Butler's notion of performativity (1990) and developments of other scholars upon her theory. This literature has ascertained that ongoing, internalised performance of identity is performative, a lived, continuous 'act of doing' rather that a codified representation with a beginning, middle and end. As Albright suggests in her analysis of performative identity in contemporary dance, 'Butler theorizes identity as a "becoming," a process that is continually in motion, one that can never begin or end' (Butler in Albright, 1997:26). This concept clarified and embellished the liberating and transformative outcome of the performative during *Identity Project*; merging this notion with critical pedagogical theories within our dancemaking led to the *performMent* (see Chapter 4). Moreover, cultural historian Jay Winter's view of the 'performative moment' (2010) as the performance of history and memory, revealed and contextualised aspects of the personal narrative present in *performMent-ing*.

During *Identity Project* my observations and the participants' feedback revealed that identity was most often experienced in a manner that was not fixed, and that many aspects of self – or multiple selves – are experienced and performed in day-to-day life and in artistic performance situations. Through this research I have determined that the discourses between the multiple selves inherent within each identity are intensified in a consciously performative state; I have verified this through analysis of the performative nature of several segments. I have demonstrated that the shifting or unstable sense of self is reflected in the collaborators' written text throughout the thesis, in phrases such 'I am not; I seem' (*kouponi allagis*) and 'Do you know me? You think you know me…but I do not even know me…' (*bare-ly there*).

Alternatively, through our movement practice and group reflections it became evident that the continuum of the self, as a perpetually re-created state, is also projected and embodied as unified, whole, creatively expressive 'dancing self' (Press, 2002). This unified expression of self is significant in terms of the collaborators' perseverance to reach self-understanding amidst the destabilising rupture of self in many movement explorations of identity (see Chapters 2 and 3); in addition, this expressivity contributed to their confidence in performing.

Aligning my method with a phenomenological approach to bodily practices (see Chapters 1 and 2) has established that an intersubjective, reflexive process results in the attainment of unique forms of knowledge and experiential states. In line with Pakes (2009), who proposes the significant link between dance practice as research and emergent knowledge, our movement practice in *Identity Project* uncovered new, otherwise unobtainable insights concerning identity and performance of self.

The collaborative basis of the dancemaking process led to new understandings of self and other through ongoing negotiation of physical, emotional and conceptual perspectives and borders. The contribution of movement, text, and histories from a number of collaborators maintained a dialogical discourse regarding identity; in addition, the group nature of the dancemaking establishes a secure space within which the participants could more easily approach personal or uncomfortable issues.

Furthermore, I have observed that improvisation, both in the context of in-rehearsal movement explorations and performance, often resonates with the coming-into-being of performativity (Paxton, 2003). I perceived the value of improvisation in reuniting fragmented pieces of the self. Through improvisational tasks that explored identity followed by reflective discussions the participants both blurred and clarified preconceived notions of self and other in an unpredictable way.

I have established that the performative moment or *performMent* is based on the experience of identity, not as a fixed image or persona, but always in the process of becoming, performed with authentic emotion and in-the-moment presence. I have determined that the destabilising aspect of the *performMent*, associated with intense improvisational collaboration and the recounting and exchange of intimate personal narratives leads to a subversive and transformational discourse regarding identity. Through conversations with audience members after performances it became evident that the spectator often receives the meaning and emotional content of *performMents* in a similar manner as that experienced by the performer. I argue that the *performMent* is a response to the need for a new term and genre that reflects an active, meaningful, transferable performative state in dance performance.

322

V

<u>Outcomes from Methodology</u>

In reflecting on the practical segment of the research I have discerned that in a similar manner my methodology, a discourse parallel but also interconnected to the research process, has not been fixed. My research path has been one of arriving at ethnographic practice through collaborative and self-reflexive artistic practice, exploring a identity through its 'web of relationships and the textured, tangled emotions invoked by this process of coming on to another' (Nazaruk, 2012, online). Moreover, the investigation and inclusion of alternative pedagogical practices in my study had led me to conclude that a performative dialogue based on the expression and sharing of subjectivities pursued through radical educational methodologies can propel self-awareness and the generation of new knowledge. It was my intimate encounter with the struggles and pleasures of the performers' experiences that brought me deeper into this subject area of the Cypriot woman.

Through the participants' feedback and my own experience as a participant and spectator during *Identity Project* I have discerned that when aesthetically informed, minded bodies improvise and collaborate based on the exchange of personal narratives an empathetic discourse is activated between performer and audience. It can be said that a particular performer-spectator relationship is generated in which the story is no longer belongs solely to the narrator. The attentive, empathetic watching and listening of the spectator is required for the communicative act of narration to be completed. In turn, this dialogical encounter informs the performer's sense of self and contributes to the sense of identity as an evolving state.

As such, this study has led me to connect my practice-integrated method with ethnographic practices, in particular, reflexive autoethnography. This has continually repositioned me in multiple roles, as researcher, observer, facilitator, choreographer and dancer. The findings from this process have primarily indicated that multiple relationships co-exist in the researcher-participant or observer-subject dynamic, and which can be approached with various levels of subjectivity; however, in concluding it appears that even when aiming to be objective, fieldwork is an intersubjective dynamic housing the researcher's subjectivity and, in this case, identity.

Finally, my research on Cypriot contemporary dance since its institutionalisation in Cyprus via the Annual Contemporary Dance Platform in 2000 has shown that many contemporary dance artists explore sociopolitical, cultural and gender identity. My interviews with Cypriot choreographers have revealed that some pursue the subject of identity intentionally while others tap into it by default. Overall, this body of work remains separate from the surrounding social reality. This discourse also remains a distinct academic one, yet to appear as the subject of a published, formal study.

VI

Contribution to Current Research

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this project it contributes to several areas of research. For the purposes of this discussion I will address the fields that encompass the most significant issues and findings of this study. Areas that are a further extension of the key contributions will be addressed in the following section, in the context of possibilities for future research.

Firstly, a primary research area to which my study contributes is that of Cypriot sociocultural identity. Filling a large gap in current studies on the issues surrounding Cypriot identity through the inclusion of the performing body – and the practice-integrated process through which identity was explores – this research carves a completely new area within the existing field. I have ascertained through my investigation that valuable new understandings of Cypriot identity can be achieved through artistic movement practice. This knowledge, as mentioned above, is often intersubjective and symbolic; in addition it reflects more subtle or unexpressed aspects of identity. Integrating movement practice with Cypriot identity research can be of great service in uncovering new identity representations in the field.

Secondly, this research has sighted and problematised significant layers of Cypriot feminine identities. I have described these layers throughout the writing; they include the secondary position and treatment of women, the silencing of women, the virgin-whore dichotomy at play in society, and the tension between tradition and modernity. In my study many aspects of women's day-to-day realities that imbue the facets of their identities were first discovered in the studio and then investigated and developed through academic research. This process revealed that the movement research disclosed intimate feminine perceptions and experiences of self and other not found in the literature (see Chapter 3). A bodily dimension to Cypriot feminist research and activism activates a multiplicity of feminine voices. Moreover, this contribution merges art, feminism, and identity research, fields which have not been connected in the academic domain. While feminist themes are reflected in Cypriot dancemaking, dance is not present as a vessel for identity in feminist literature.

Thirdly, the notion and practice of the *performMent* expands the findings of studies concerning personal/political 'transformation' (Denzin, 2003b) and the experience of 'kinesthetic empathy' (Foster, 2011) in the performance of identity (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). Through the use of personal narratives within this aspect of the research I have shown that the subjective can represent a collective or universal experience of identity, akin to Albright's view of autobiographical performance. In her analysis of dancers Blondell Cummings' and David Dorfman's performative choreography in *Dancing Bodies and the Stories they Tell* (1997), Albright proposes 'another kind of "intratextual practice of interpretation," one that would privilege neither the autobiographical voice nor the dancing body, but rather take these textual and bodily discourses as the site of analysis' (1997: 125). In offering one's narrative to interpretation to a spectating body, the subjective autobiographical voice becomes point of intersection with issues and lives of many people; in this sense, one person's story/history becomes person's story/history.

However, I believe I have taken this perspective one step further with my notion of the *performMent*. In evaluating the *performMent* I have addressed the specific conditions surrounding and embedded in autobiographical performance as well as the effective transference of meanings during the most intense and meaning-filled moments in the performance of identity (see Chapter 4). I have explained in detail *how this occurs*. In *performMent-ing,* a multi-layered, performative, transformative, autobiographical discourse, unique to each creator, is extended to the reality of the spectator. I have shown how the visceral experience of the performer triggers the spectator's own pool of memory and experience (see chapter 4).

Finally, the evolution of the collaborative dancemaking process in *Identity Project* demonstrates the subversive power of collaboration (Brown, 2011) in conjunction with politically imprinted performative pedagogy (Denzin, 2003b). In merging these two research areas I contribute to research concerning dance as a political act and dance as agency. For example, *bare-ly there # 3* shared elements of risk and chance as the ground for new sightings, stimulating social critique in personal, interpersonal and sociopolitical arenas. This achievement of transgression, housed in a series of 'I''s, ultimately engages in a performative discourse with other 'I''s, including the spectator's, challenged normative standards related to self and other through the dialogic, intertextuality of bodily expression and co-interactive expressions of self. Academic analysis of the social and political significance of such occurrences within Cypriot contemporary dance is a new, unexplored academic research.

VII

Suggestions for Future Research

Locating the dancing or performing body at the forefront of academic investigations of Cypriot sociocultural identity is a topic for future research with much potential as currently it is virtually non-existent. In terms of expanding upon this study in itself, I am interested in the role of spectator in experiencing and building upon the *performMent*; the standards and sociopolitical discourses at play in Cyprus in assigning value to contemporary dance; the role of the arts in education; and the connection between the performativity of Cypriot feminine identities and the development of Cypriot feminisms.

Another research area that I consider abundant for future investigation concerns the multiple diasporic communities that intersect in Cyprus, the diasporic nature of Cyprus, and the sense of self as diasporic as manifesting in contemporary dance and the moving body. This brings to mind dance anthropologist Ann R. David's notion of 'fantasy space' in the performance of diaspora. In her account of ethnographic fieldwork examining the conditions surrounding the re-learning of Bollywood choreographies in London dance classes, David argues that the predominantly diasporic students participate in a 'fantasy space' characterised by a 'multi-layered and multi-valent gaze upon the dancing body, producing a complex mix of poignant longing, myriad identities, imagined fantasies, and diasporic dreams and memories' (David, 2010: 216). I suggest that a similar performative relationship of 'fantasy space' arises from the relationship between the notion of a 'native' Cypriot culture and the lived reality of cultural or geographic displacement. I am interested in exploring how the diasporic dancing body can navigate Cypriot identity discourses that negotiate tradition, modernity, and migration.

As noted earlier, I am drawn to examining the role of the spectator in the transference of performed meaning in dance, particularly through personal narrative and conscious *performMent-ing.* As described by Martin, 'the wonder of fiction is the desire it sustains for another tale to be told. The magic of dance is to deposit this desire with the audience (2005: 114). Linked to this notion is the possibility of a series of internal shifts for the spectator as well as social change prompted by the visceral transference the 'desire' described above through 'kinesthetic empathy' during powerful performances (Foster, 2011).

Finally, evoking agency through practice-based dance research interests me a great deal, especially regarding Cypriot gender issues. A significant and socially vital study in this area would entail the inclusion of men and male identities, a central theme in recent black feminism. Some black feminists (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2004; Davis, 2016) argue that the oppression suffered by men by the same patriarchal hegemony that affects women is of equal concern. For example, hooks advocates the reclaiming of 'feminism for men, showing why feminist thinking and practice are the only way we can truly address the crisis of masculinity today' (2004: xvii).

In line with this, I have seen that a prevalent Cypriot movement through the arts, including contemporary dance, has embraced diversity, conflict resolution, and multiculturalism; at the same time sexism, racism, and classism are still found in daily Cypriot reality. I believe these essential issues require attention. In addition, the undervalued role of the arts in Cyprus reflects a sweeping global phenomenon that renders education and culture more and more compartmentalised, de-humanised, and result-driven (Giroux, 2012). Consequently the worth of a work of art is often judged in terms of its value as a 'product', typically determined by its acceptance by mass culture. As such, the specific criteria implemented to assign value to certain art forms or works over others can be seen as a prism for understanding prominent Cypriot social value systems and their origins. The potential for art – especially dance and dancemaking – to proactively affect Cypriot society on the whole, to make vital political statements through subjective as well as collective voices, and to ultimately initiate individual and institutional change is a notion that has not been addressed in scholarly literature concerning Cyprus. This field is of great interest to me.

VIII

Epilogue # 7

Blinded
And crippled by the sounds
Sounds make me react
When you're blind in a relationship
You try to make sense of things
Say what you feel
Without choking
That's when you get a
Moment of CLARITY.

I can see through you.
I can see through you, but I'm not
Looking at you.

How about breathing?
When you focus on breathing
What do you see?
BREATHE

You are blindfolded
You can take it off (take it off)
If you choose
To take it off (take it off)
Is it nice in the dark?
So do you enjoy the feeling?
The fear? (Do you like it?)
Or are you just accustomed to it?

You are choosing to stay blind.
I understand you.
I understand that you are afraid to be
Uncomfortable
To be even more blinded by the light.
Don't worry, I will wait.
I will give you
TIME.
And when you open your eyes,
You will see ME.

> – Text excerpt from personal narrative
>   written and spoken by Eva
>   from *bare-ly there # 3*, 2017

Roehampton University London

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

Please read the Notes for Applicants before completing this form

The form should be word processed using black size 12 font.

PLEASE TICK THE RELEVANT BOX			
MEMBER OF STAFF	☐	RESEARCH STUDENT* (MPhil,PhD)	x
EXTERNAL INVESTIGATOR	☐	STUDENT (Other)**	☐

*If you are a transfer student please see Section 2.2. of the Guidelines before completing this form.
**If you are on a taught course you do not need to complete this form unless your project is worth more than 50% of your total credits or you have been asked to do so by your tutor or School Ethics Committee

SECTION 1: PERSONAL DETAILS	
Please complete the header with your name and School	
Name (lead):	Eleni Drogari
Other investigators:	
Correspondence address:	Kerkyras 2, Apartment 101 Kerynia Court Pallouriotissa 1035 Nicosia, Cyprus
Telephone no:	+357 96535115 (mobile) / +357 22468534 (home)
Email:*(all correspondence will be sent by email unless otherwise requested)*	drogari.e@unic.ac.cy
FOR STUDENTS ONLY:	
Programme of study:	MPhil/PhD Dance Studies / School of Arts
Mode of study (full-time/part-time)	Part-Time

Director of Studies: (If you are on a taught course please give the name of your tutor)	Director of Studies: Stacey Prickett Co-supervisor: Ann David
FOR EXTERNAL INVESTIGATORS ONLY (please see Section 4.5 of the Ethical Guidelines):	
Name of Academic Assessor:	

SECTION 2: PROJECT DETAILS

Title of project:	Searching for the I/Eye in Identity: Layers of Identity in Cypriot Contemporary Dance
Proposed start date: *(Please note it can take several months to get approval. The Board will not approve a retrospective start date)*	As soon as approval is granted (RDB2 approval received)
Duration:	Approximately four (4) years
Source of funds:	Roehampton Studentship; Possibility of partial funding from the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture for choreographic works intended as research.
Purpose of the proposed investigation : This section should include the material which outlines the rationale for the project, i.e. why this study needs to be done. This should be done in a way that is both accessible and scholarly, i.e. have proper cited sources.	

Purpose of Investigation

The proposed programme of research will investigate the issue of sociocultural identity within Cypriot contemporary dance by looking at representations and embodiments of identity, gender and class. Throughout this study, all references to Cyprus will pertain to the Republic of Cyprus; there will be no inclusion of the northern occupied region of Cyprus other than brief references to delineate historical, demographic and socio-political realities on the island.

An initial accumulation of historical information regarding identity and contemporary dance will range from the 1960s to the end of the 20th century. However, the bulk of the research will concentrate on the past decade, beginning with the year 2001 – marking the first state-funded contemporary dance showcase – and will continue through the milestones of contemporary dance to the present.

The principal aim will be pursued and realised through the following objectives, streamlined and altered as the research progresses according to information acquired through an anthropological approach to academic study and fieldwork:

1. To explore and distinguish conscious and inadvertent constructs of sociocultural identity in Cypriot contemporary dance as seen through representations of gender, class and ethno-national identity by researching the works, processes and intentions of Cypriot choreographers and performers.
2. To implement relevant theories and recent scholarship on regarding identity as cultural practice, and the body and identity (Albright 1997; Grau & Jordan 2000; Thomas 2003/04) in order to illuminate the social and political realities reflected in the expressions and constructs of identity in Cypriot contemporary dance. The creative approaches that are currently implemented by many choreographers will be examined through the lenses of aesthetic analysis and post-colonial theory (Karayanni 2004/06, Papadakis 2006).
3. To examine how other forms of theatrical and social dance on the island during the same period, particularly ballet, performed traditional Cypriot/Hellenic dance and Salsa, inform contemporary dance's representations of identity, social recognition and status (Argyrou 1996), and state funding.
4. To explore the contemporary dance community in Cyprus as an opposition to the norm socioculturally and aesthetically. Members of organisations such as *Nea Kinisi (New Movement)* , *Dance House Lemesos*, *DanceGATE Cyprus* and *DanceLab Nicosia* have adopted identities designated by the respective institutions that bear artistic, social and political capital, often deconstructing the status quo and evident in their artistic work.
5. To investigate audience reactions, interpretations and awareness of identity as a concept/theme and how it resonates with personal experiences and views of identity.
6. To identify ways in which layers of sociocultural identity in Cyprus and the cultural norms, social constructs and political boundaries they reflect can be expressed, re-negotiated and transcended through the collaborative creation of contemporary dance (specifics of the choreography projects are described below). Within this scope, the potential for the emergence of individual and collective identities rooted in the existing society rather than derived from external sources (i.e. Europe and the West) will be examined.

Outline of project: This section should include the details of methodology i.e. what will be done and how. Please also identify ethical issues raised by project.

Methodology | Outline of Project Components

The research methods and overall design necessary for thorough, successful completion of this project will include theoretical and practical components. An in-depth academic study of movement in relation to sociocultural identity and related fields (delineated above) will provide the theoretical basis in approaching this topic. Research in the areas of post-colonialism and Cyprus, the historical evolution of Cypriot identities and past and present Cypriot social structure will also be conducted.

Academic research will be supplemented by fieldwork primarily within the Cypriot contemporary dance community and informed by current theories and practices in the areas of ethnography and interview methods. Despite its marginalised position in comparison to the more classical arts, contemporary dance in Cyprus is rapidly flourishing. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of individuals active in the community, over thirty contemporary dance companies are registered with the Cyprus Office of Registrar and Official Receiver. Each of the troupes employs an average of three dancers annually to present at least one work locally, often partially supported by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture. Many pieces also win places in international contemporary dance festivals abroad (informal study, 2009).

Thus, fieldwork will occur in three main ways: a) viewings of contemporary dance rehearsals/performances; b) interviews with Cyprus-based choreographers, dancers, students and audiences; and c) three short collaborative choreography projects (about 15 minutes each in their final form) examining questions of identity. For all three components I plan to approach dancers from diverse backgrounds in order to broaden the field and sharpen points of comparison. Secondary fieldwork will include attending Cypriot events, exhibits, organisations and institutions where identity and inter-cultural exchange through the arts are core concerns.

Interviews and Participant/Audience Feedback

Upon obtaining ethical approval I will proceed to the interviews, some already sheduled. Choreographer Arianna Economou and I collaborated on a video-dance workshop in April of 2008 based on the transiency of cultural identity as it relates to the shifting boundaries of the body. I intend to re-investigate the experience through conversations with Ms. Economou and co-examination of footage from the workshop. Choreographer Lia Haraki, known for her work on identity (*Eye to I*, 2005; *Pretendance*, 2008; *Party Animals*, 2009), and visual/performance artist Christodoulos Panayiotou who addresses stereotypes and romantic love in his *Slow Dance Marathon* (2005) have consented to interviews. My goal is to interview at least 12 choreographers, 8 dancers, 4 dance students, 6 spectators that frequent contemporary dance performances and 6 audiences as a group (method described below). Interviews will be conducted the form of structured, recorded one-on-one dialogue as well as video-taped group discussions where applicable (i.e. at the end of a rehearsal or performance). Audience feedback will also be included through talks and written questionnaires conducted following performances (with permission by performers).

Performance Attendance

Due to the flourishing Cypriot contemporary dance scene (described above), attendance at many and diverse contemporary dance performances throughout the course of the research (approximately forty/40), performed in both formal and

informal settings, receiving state or private funding or unfunded, and created by both experienced artists and newcomers to the scene is crucial to this work. When granted permission by choreographers I will attend rehearsals and post-performance discussions as well.

Choreography

The choreographic process I will implement for the three collaborative projects (based on personal choreographic themes and culminating in performances) is one I have applied successfully in the past as part of my choreography, teaching (University of Nicosia, New York City Ballet) and research (MA thesis). Guided individual and group improvisations and movement tasks will help to achieve unity and trust within the group. Verbal and movement dialogues, sharing of movement/gesture and group discussions will inspire collaborative creation of performance material. Issues of personal/shared identity, imposed identities, and ideal/imaginary identities will be addressed. In this way it is hoped that the participants will own the performance process and that deeper, more subtle layers of identity will be brought to conscious awareness kinesthetically and intellectually for both performers and audiences.

Regarding Ethical Issues

My extensive work with multicultural populations as director of Orchesis Center for Dance Movement (NY) and teaching artist with the New York City Ballet leads me to believe that intense feelings may need to be addressed as a result of potent issues and dialogues that may arise. This deeper experiential level is essential in recognising and possibly overcoming judgments and fixed notions related to identity (nationality, gender, class, culture); I am confident in my ability to handle such matters as I have done in the past.

Of special concern to me in this part of the methodology is my role of facilitator/director of the choreography projects, as my principal aim is developing trust and openness between the participants and between them and myself. Avoiding objectification of the performers is a primary goal, as is maintaining my own distance from their process to gain clarity in analysis.

Another issue that will require special attention is that of participation of former and current University of Nicosia students in the practical research, as my position as Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Dance Programme colours my relationship with most of them. I deem the dance students an important population in informing this research, and currently the University of Nicosia houses the only dance degree on the island. Care will be taken to allow for unguarded participation of students, separate from their (and my) roles in the university setting. Provisions taken with regard to all ethical issues mentioned above are delineated in a later section and in the participant consent form.

All data gathered from this process will be used to analyse the outcome of movement collaboration as both a reflection and deconstruction of culture and identity on Cyprus. Rehearsals, workshops, discussions and performances will be filmed. This more practical form of research is vital in the scheme of the proposed topic. Approaching the physicality of identity within a safer social context is likely to more fully disclose notions of identity, and the reality of the moving body will enrich the theoretical aspect that has prompted it, helping to create a live, ongoing discourse between the two aspects.

Ethical issues raised by the project:

I. Relations with and responsibilities toward research participants:
   a. Full confidentiality and anonymity of research participants will be maintained throughout all aspects of research when requested (procedure is fully described in section 3).
   b. A safe, supportive and respectful environment will be provided throughout the choreographic process. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any point without any explanation.
   c. Participants will be given an opportunity to be open and enjoy sharing thoughts, opinions and experiences, and withdraw from the interview without pressure, workshop or performance process at any point.
   d. No photographs or footage of workshops, performances, or interviews (that have taken place within the context of a performance project) will be made public without written consent of the participants.

II. Relations with and responsibilities toward participants that are/were students in the Dance Programme of the University of Nicosia:
   a. It will be made clear in the participant consent form (included) that student participation in any aspect of my research will be completely separate from their participation in the Dance Programme and will not affect their academic standing in any way.
   b. Any references to previous or current student-teacher relationships will be avoided.

III. My role as in the Choreography / Performance process:
   a. My role as facilitator/director in the choreographic process will be stated to all participants from the onset of the creative process. I will not participate but remain an external facilitator.
   b. When facilitating/directing the choreographic works I will implement the feedback approach of *objective reflection/subjective response* process (example, appendix i) that will help keep my personal history, opinions, reactions and conclusions separate and outside the dialogue and creative sphere of the participants.

IV. Relations with and responsibilities toward colleagues and the discipline of Dance Anthropology:
   Research will be conducted through implementation of methods, tools and procedures in line with the current standards in the field, as will content, documentation and publication of research.

V. Relations with and responsibilities toward the Cypriot dance communities and Cypriot society at large; this area of responsibility is twofold:
   a. The results of the research will be shared through performance, publications and lectures, always in full accordance with anonymity and confidentiality policy.
   b. On the other hand, special care will be taken not to validate and demonstrate respect and support toward all dance artists, choreographer, or members of the Cypriot dance community used in analysis of the research data and development of arguments.

Indicative Bibliography

Works relating to Identity and the Body

Albright, Ann Cooper (1997) <u>Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance</u>, London; Hanover, NH: University Press of New England

Grau, Andrée and Stephanie Jordan, eds. (2000) <u>Europe Dancing: Perspectives on Theatre Dance and Cultural Identity</u>, London: Routledge

Thomas, Helen (2003) <u>The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory</u>, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Thomas, Helen and Jamilah Ahmed, eds. (2004) <u>Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory</u>, Oxford: Blackwell

Works relating to Identity and Cyprus

Argyrou, Vassos (1996) <u>Tradition an Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle</u>, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Calotychos, Vangelis, ed. (1998) <u>Nation, Identity and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997</u>, Boulder, CO and Oxford: Westview Press

Karayanni, Stavros Stavrou (2006) 'Moving Identity: Dance in the Negotiation of Sexuality and Ethnicity in Cyprus,' <u>Postcolonial Studies</u>, 9, 5, pp. 252-266

Papadakis, Yiannis, Nicos Peristianis & Gisela Welz, eds. (2006) <u>Divided Cyprus: Modernity, History and an Island in Conflict</u>, Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press

Papadakis, Yiannis (2005) <u>Echoes from the Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide</u>, London and New York: I.B. Tauris

Pollis, Andreas (1996) 'The Social Construction of Ethnicity and Nationality: The Case of Cyprus', <u>Nationalism and Ethnic Politics</u>, 2, 1 pp.67-90

Works relating to Ethnography and Fieldwork

Agar, Michael H. (1996) <u>The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography</u>, New York & London: Academic Press

Brettel, Caroline B., ed. (1993) <u>When They Read What We Write: the Politics of Ethnography</u>, Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Buckland, Theresa Jill, ed. (1999) <u>Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography</u>, London: MacMillan Press

Clifford, James and George Marcus E, eds. (1986) <u>Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography</u>, Berkeley & London: University of California Press

Coffey, Amanda (1999) <u>The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity</u>, London: Sage

Davies, Charlotte A. (1999) <u>Reflexive Ethnography – A Guide to Researching Selves and Others</u>, London & New York: Routledge

Hammersley, Martyn (1992). <u>What's Wrong with Ethnography</u>? London: Routledge

Kealinohomoku, Joann Wheeler (1976) <u>Theory and Methods for the Anthropological Study of Dance</u>, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, USA

Wolcott, Harry F. (2001) <u>The Art of Fieldwork</u>, Walnut creek, CA: Altamira Press

Works relating to Interview Methods and Techniques

Gillham, Bill (2000) <u>The Research Interview</u>, London and New York: Continuum Press

Maso, Ilsa and Fred Webster, eds. <u>The Deliberate Dialogue: Qualitative Perspectives on the Interview</u>, Brussels: Vub Brussels University Press

Stewart, David (2007) <u>Focus Groups: Theory and Practice</u>, London: Sage

Weiss, Robert S. (1993) <u>Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies</u>, New York: Free Press

Works relating to Choreography as Fieldwork

Ness, Sally Ann (1992) <u>Body, Movement and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community</u>, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

Widdess, Richard (1994). Involving the Performers in Transcription and Analysis: A Collaborative Approach to Dhrupad,' <u>Ethnomusicology</u>, 38, 1, 59-80

SECTION 3: USE OF PARTICIPANTS

- You should download the Participant Consent Form Template and amend it if necessary
- You should also attach any other information to be given to participa
- You should consider carefully what information you provide to participants, e.g. scope of study, number of participants, duration of study, risks/benefits of the project
- If images or anything else which might allow the identification of participants is to be publicly accessible (e.g. on the web), further written consent must be secured

Give details of the method of recruitment, and potential benefits to participants if any (include any financial benefits where appropriate):

Methods of recruitment – Interviews:
All interviewees will be approached and invited personally, whether verbally or in writing.

Methods of recruitment – Performance Projects:
- Personal invitation, either written or verbal (sample, appendix ii)
- Announcements of workshops and choreography projects in dance newsletters (*Footnotes*/University of Nicosia; Stegi Synchronou Chorou/Dance House Lemesos)
- Invitation through Audience Feedback Forms (described below)
- By audition

Methods of recruitment – Audience Feedback:
- Audience members will be invited to complete a feedback form after performances. The confidentiality policy will be stated on the form and spectators may choose that option (see sample form attached).
- Spectators may also be invited to participate in group discussions following showings.
- Audience members may show their interest in participating in a future project through the feedback form.

Potential Benefits to Participants – Interview Subjects:
Participants that are interviewed and consent to be quoted and represented in publications and lectures will benefit from having their work and thoughts documented within the contemporary dance archives of Cyprus. Their work and personal research methods/approaches may also gain more public exposure in this manner. Finally, through the interview inquiry/response process, participants may gain deeper insight into their own process and work.

Potential Benefits to Participants – Workshop/Performance Participants:

Ideally all dancers in the performance projects will be financially compensated for their time, effort and skill (money will be derived from ticket fees in combination with some public and private funding.) The amount will depend on initial funding and type of venue. In addition, upon receiving their written consent, the dancers will get exposure through advertising and media coverage of performances.

SECTION 4: HEALTH AND SAFETY

- **You must download and complete the Risk Assessment Form and attach this to your application.**
- You should be able to demonstrate that appropriate mechanisms are in place for the research to be carried out safely
- If necessary the University's Health, Safety & Environment Manager should be consulted before the application is submitted

Will any of your project take place outside the UK?

YES

If you have answered yes please list the countries below and refer to Section 4.2 of the Ethical Guidelines:

Cyprus

Is this a clinical trial or a project which may involve abnormal risk to participants?

| x | YES | | NO X |

If you have answered Yes please refer to Sections 3.5 and 4.2 of the Ethical Guidelines

SECTION 5: PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

How will you disseminate your findings? (e.g. publication)
- Publications, i.e. journals and magazines, such as *The Dance Research Journal, Postcolonial Studies, Time Out Cyprus, Phileleftheros Cyprus*
- Talks, Lectures, Symposia
- Conference Presentations
- Performances
- Photography Exhibits

How will you ensure the anonymity of your participants?
(If your participants do not wish to remain anonymous you must obtain their written consent.)
The participants' anonymity will be maintained in the following ways:
- The names of participants will be changed in all references to them.
- Physical descriptions or personal information that may expose the identity of participants will not be included in any documentation or writing.
- References to specific social, political, ethnic or cultural organisations with which the participant has or has had strong associations and as a result may risk exposing identity will be avoided.
- Care will be taken to avoid any other small references or associations that may lead to the disclosure of the participants' identities due to the close-knit society of Cyprus.

SECTION 6: STORAGE OF DATA

Section 2.7 of *Roehampton University Code of Good Research Practice* states the following 'research data must normally be retained intact for a period of at least ten years from the date of any publication which is based upon it. Researchers should be

	aware that specific professional bodies and research councils may require a longer period of data retention.'
	Describe how and where the following data will be stored and how they will be kept secure:
	a. Raw and processed data
	Please see below (b).

	b. Documents containing personal details of any participants
	All data (in categories *a* and *b*) will be stored digitally, on tape, as photographs or in printed form in the private office of the researcher throughout the process of completion of the thesis and for an additional twelve(12) years thereafter.

SECTION 7: EXTERNAL GUIDELINES, APPROVAL & FUNDING

	Are there any relevant subject-specific ethical guidelines (e.g. from a professional society)? n/a If so how will these inform your research process?
	Has/will the project be submitted for approval to the ethical committee of any other organisation, e.g. NHS ethics approval? (Please see Section 4.3, Ethical Guidelines) n/a What is the outcome of this?
	Is your project externally funded? Yes No If you have answered yes you must complete a P1 form and submit this to the Bids & Grants Team, RBDO before you complete your ethics application. Has your P1 form been approved? n/a Please state the name of the funding organisation/company below and provide any other relevant information:

☐   ☒ X

SECTION 8: APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE

Applicant's signature:	Eleni Drogari (electronic)
Date:	1/2/10

FOR STUDENTS ONLY: DIRECTOR OF STUDIES SIGNATURE
(Where there is not a Director of Studies this should be completed by the academic supervisor)

I confirm that I have read and support this Ethics Application

Signature:	Stacey Prickett (electronic)
Print name:	Dr Stacey Prickett
Date:	1/2/2010

SECTION 9: APPROVAL

CHAIR OF SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEE

I confirm that this Ethics Application has been approved by the School Ethics Committee

Signature:	
Print name:	

DEAN OF SCHOOL

On behalf of the School, I support this Ethics Application and confirm that the appropriate research or support facilities are available to support the project to completion.

Signature:	
	345
Print name:	
Date:	

CHAIR OF UNIVERSITY ETHICS BOARD	
I confirm that this Ethics Application has been approved by the Ethics Board	
Signature:	
Print name:	
Date	

(Last Updated: Research Policy Team, July 2009)

ETHICS BOARD

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM PRO FORMA

Title of Research Project: *Layers of Identity in Cypriot Contemporary Dance*

Brief Description of Research Project:
The proposed programme of research will investigate the issue of sociocultural identity within Cypriot contemporary dance by looking at representations and embodiments of ethno-national identity, gender and class. Academic research will be supplemented by fieldwork that will be conducted in three ways: a) viewings of contemporary dance rehearsals and performances, b) interviews with Cyprus-based dancers, choreographers, students and audiences and c) three short choreography projects, created in collaboration with the performers, examining questions of identity.

Investigator Contact Details:
Name: **Eleni Drogari**
School: **Arts/Dance Studies**
Email: **elenidrogari@unic.ac.cy**
Telephone: **+357 96535115**

General Consent Statement:
I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that any information I provide through interviews, feedback forms, group discussions, movement workshops, or choreographic processes will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be fully protected in the publication of any findings. In addition, photographs and filmed footage of workshops, rehearsals, interviews or discussions taking place within the context of a performance project prior to reaching the public performance sphere will be kept fully confidential.

Interview Consent Form:
This form is to be read and completed by participants prior to any interview. All information given will be regarded and treated as confidential material and also be stored as such.

Please read the following carefully respond to the statements/questions with either **yes** or **no**. If you have any questions, please ask freely.

1.   I understand the aims and objectives of this research project.
2.   I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding this research project.
3.   All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

4.	I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without providing an explanation.
5.	I have the right to maintain my anonymity and be given (for the purposes of this project) a pseudonym.
6.	All of my personal/private information, such as nationality, ethnicity, gender and age, will only be used for the purposes of this research and in association with the pseudonym provided.
7.	I have the right to refrain from answering questions without providing an explanation
8.	I agree to the interview being recorded and to its content being used for the purposes of this research.
9.	Would you like to see a copy of your interview's transcript?
10.	Would you like to be acknowledged in this research (without being linked to any specific content or quotation)?

Choreography Project Consent Form
1.	I understand the aims and objectives of this research project.
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding this research project.
3.	All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
4.	I have the right to ask questions at any point in the choreographic process and have my questions be answered.
5.	I have the right to withdraw from any workshop or the performance project itself at any time without providing an explanation.
6.	I understand that a safe, supportive and respectful environment will be provided throughout the choreographic process.
7.	I consent to photographs or footage of workshops, performances, or interviews (that have taken place within the context of a performance project) being made public through advertisement of performances and media coverage.
8.	If I am currently a student in the Dance Programme at the University of Nicosia, I understand that my participation in this research is completely separate from my participation in the Dance Programme and will not affect my academic or personal standing in any way.
9.	Would you like a digital copy of the final performance?
10.	Would you like to be acknowledged in the written thesis (without being linked to any specific content or quotation)?

Name (printed) …………………………………...........

Signature ……………………………………................. Date …………………………………

Please note: If you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party you may contact the Dean of School or Director of Studies. Thank you.

Director of Studies Contact Details:
Name: Dr. Stacey Prickett
School: Arts/Dance Studies
University Address:
Froebel College, Roehampton
        University, Roehampton Lane,
London SW15 5PU
Email: S.Prickett@Roehampton.ac.uk
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Dean of School Contact Details:
Name: Lindsay Brimstone
School: Arts
University Address: Ho.107
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        London SW15 5PU
Email L.Brimstone@Roehamptin.ac.uk
Telephone: 020 8392 3371

Eleni Drogari
Research Project: *Layers of Identity in Cypriot Contemporary Dance*

Interview and Questionnaire Examples

Introduction*(To be placed where applicable)*
The following interview and written questionnaire questions are part of my PhD research in the Department of Dance Studies of Roehampton University (London). My research concerns Cypriot contemporary dance and identity.

I would be grateful if you would complete the following anonymous questionnaire, as it will greatly assist me in gathering data regarding identity and Cypriot contemporary dance.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sample Interview Questions
General Questions

1.   Gender:
2.   What is your age?
3.   What is your marital status?
4.   Do you have any children? How many?
5.   Where were you born?
6.   Where did you grow up?
7.   How many years have you lived in Cyprus?
8.   What is your current occupation?
9.   For how many years have you been practicing your profession? How many of those years have been in Cyprus?
10.   Have you been formally educated in dance or a related field?
    a.   If yes, where?
    b.   If no, in what field was your higher education?
11.   What was the highest degree or certificate achieved?
12.   How would you describe your relationship to dance?

For Choreographers and Performers

1.   What dance forms have you studied?
2.   What dance forms do you currently teach (if any)?
3.   How would you identify yourself culturally?
4.   Please describe your nationality.
5.   What is your opinion on Cypriot national identity?
6.   What is your view on gender roles in today's Cyprus?
7.   Overall, how would you describe the Cypriot contemporary dance scene?

8. Do you feel the contemporary dance community has flourished over the last ten years? Please explain.
9. Do you find that the issue of identity arises in Cypriot contemporary dance?
a. If yes, how often and in what form?
b. If not, what are some themes that you find to be the most prominent in recent years?
10. How do you see the future of contemporary dance in Cyprus?

For Choreographers

1. In choreographing, which dance form(s) do you utilise/practise the most?
2. What have been some themes for your chorographic works?
3. Please describe your typical choreographic process.
4. Do you ever consciously choreograph on the theme of identity? If yes, please elaborate.
5. On reflection, do you perceive issues of identity within your work arising unintentionally? Please elaborate.
6. Do you think there exists a collective identity regarding Cypriot contemporary dance, particularly with respect to the rest of Europe?
a. If yes, please elaborate.
b. If not, please tell why.

For Performers

1. In performing, which form(s) do you practise the most?
2. Is identity ever an issue for you as a performer in Cyprus? Please tell how.
3. (Only If yes to the previous question.) Have you been able to express, explore or resolve any issues of personal identity through performing contemporary dance?
4. Is identity ever an issue for your if/when performing outside Cyprus? Please elaborate.

For Recent University Graduates

1. What have your pursuits been since you finished University?
2. In performing/choreographing which form(s) do you practise the most?
3. What does the word 'identity' mean to you?
4. Is identity ever an issue for you as a new member of the professional sphere in Cyprus? If yes, please tell how.
5. Is identity ever an issue for your if/when choreographing or performing in Cyprus? Please elaborate.
6. Is identity ever an issue for your if/when choreographing or performing outside Cyprus? Please elaborate.

For Spectators

1.   How long have you been attending contemporary dance performances?
2.   How often do you currently attend contemporary dance performances?
3.   What other forms of dance do you watch?
4.   Does the issue of your personal identity ever arise when you are watching dance in Cyprus? If yes, how?
5.   Do you find that there are some other main issues that often arise when watching dance outside Cyprus? Please elaborate.
6.   Do you find that similar issues arise in non-Cypriot contemporary dance?

<u>*kouponi allagis*</u>

choreography project #1 of *IDENTITY PROJECT*
on the theme of sociocultural identity and the performing body in Cyprus[50]

This piece was rehearsed three times weekly from September 30th to November 20th 2010.
As mentioned earlier, kouponi allagis was performed at the *NOBODY* Festival November 21st 2010.

The dance-making process and performers included the following four artists between the ages of 25 and 35. The artistic occupations and educational affiliation of the performers at the time of the creative process (fall 2010) have been included as they are relevant to the dancemaking process and the research outcomes.

The names of all performers have been changed.

Eric
musician, actor, arts coordinator, director, composer, teacher
part-time instructor, BA in Dance (University of Nicosia)

Mark
figure skater and instructor; Diploma in visual arts/photography
BA student in Dance (University of Nicosia)
plays guitar; works as a truck driver

Chloe
BA Physical Education, BA student in Dance (University of Nicosia)
certified Pilates instructor, personal trainer, dancer/performer

Eva
musician, singer, BA student in Dance (University of Nicosia).
plays piano and sings

<u>Notable Performance TEXT from *kouponi allagis*</u>

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[50] As mentioned in earlier sections if the thesis, references to Cyprus or Cypriot individuals/things/places pertain to the recognised Republic of Cyprus (member of the European Union); there is no inclusion of the northern Turkish-occupied region of Cyprus in the performers' text.

Chloe

I am an exchange coupon (*kouponi allagis*)

I am a soul

I am cells

I am not; I seem; I do not seem – I AM

Eric

Eimai tachinopita (I am a tahini pie)

Eimai evlogimeni (I am blessed)

I am what you want me to be

I am --------, ID # -------, address ----- phone # --------, mobile # ----------

Eva

I am my mother's daughter

I am OK

I am NOT that

Mark

I am a truck driver

I am dirt

I am a father

Text chosen to speak/speak sing in the piece

(Text was shared, exchanged and chosen collaboratively for the piece)

I am OK

I am not that

I am a truck driver

I am dirt

I am an exchange coupon (kouponi allagis)

I am a father

Eimai tachinopita (I am a Tahini pie)

I am my mother's daughter

Eimai evlogimeni (I am blessed)

I am what you want me to be

I am cells

I am: Name, ID # -------, address ----- phone # --------, mobile # ---------

I am a soul

I am not; I seem; I do not seem – I am

Notable Interview Questions created by performers when asked to create ten questions that will help them find out who the others really are:

Do you know how to ice skate?

Do you believe in God?

If you won the lottery, what would you do with the money?

What is the difference between Buddha and Christ?

How well can you follow the traffic signs?

How many times have you fallen in love?

What did you dream about last night?

What is the difference between a bird and… a bird?

Exercises and Improvisations, rehearsals 1-12
- o   Who am I? Group responds to individual with language or movement
- o   Call and response – movement
- o   Call and response – voice
- o   Who are you? Interviews
- o   Who are you? Respond with movement
- o   Text into movement
- o   Trust exercises
- o   Group contact
- o   Follow a leader
- o   Duet improvisations
- o   Distilling another's movement material
- o   Setting small solos, duets and quartets

They said, among other things:
- All Cypriots are crazy
- We are typically post-colonial
- We are overly materialistic
- Cypriots are largely conformists
- Everything revolves around food
- They don't express their emotions – this has to do with the war
- We think that anything English is upper-class
- Cypriot is not a dialect, it's a language
- Certain feelings and ideas can only be expressed in Cypriot
- Women are discouraged to study dance
- We are an isolated culture
- We have been conquered too many times
- Cypriots are Cypriot but also Greek
- I don't feel Greek
- Our proper language is Greek
- We need art to open 'their' minds
- The divorce rate is out of control because people feel pressured to

marry by a certain age
- Who is in the audience?
- Education is a must
- We definitely have an identity crisis going on
- This society will never change
- Cypriots consume more meat on average than any other European group
- The sea must definitely affect us
- We are typically post-colonial
- We are overly materialistic
- Cypriots are largely conformists
- They don't express their emotions – this has to do with the war
- We think that anything English is upper-class
- We think anything foreign/European is cool
- Women are discouraged to study dance
- I don't care what other people think of me
- I always wear ripped clothes to relatives' houses
- If you wanted a nationalist type in the piece you should have invited your husband (said directly to me when asking about their sense of allegiance)
- There is too much racism
- Foreigners have more rights than Cypriots, get more government money

Selected Performers' feedback:
- Piece reflects isolationism and need for belonging in Cypriot society (the name of the speaker is not indicated in my notes)
- Eva – I love it, it's very meaningful to me and original as a whole
- Mark – I love performing it, want to keep doing it; I feel expressed
- Chloe – I' m not sure if I like it or believe in it
- Eric – interesting and original, needed a few more rehearsals

Some notable audience feedback:
- Fresh
- A bit rough around the edges
- Interesting
- Original movement and text
- Dark lighting, hard to see against black costumes (lighting designer's choice)
- Very strong performers
- Vulnerability/authenticity/inside-out visible in performers, except Chloe
- United cast
- Many spectators said they knew it was about identity, though the programme notes did not indicate the theme of the piece.

ap'to plevro enos andra
choreography project #2 of *IDENTITY PROJECT*
on the theme of feminine identities in Cyprus and women's voices

Rehearsed three times weekly from January to June 2011
Performed at a number of venues during this period, indicated in Chapter 3

The dance-making process and performers included the following six artists;
all of these young women, between the ages of 18 and 28, were students in
the BA at the University of Nicosia at the time.

Sia, dancer

Rory, dancer

Ana, costume designer

Rya, dancer/understudy

Eva, dancer, musician

Lily, dancer

Although text was used throughout the creative process, only Lily's narrative
was performed in the final version of the piece.

Lily's Text, written and performed in Greek, my translation:

Wooden spoons
Wooden bowls
Big spoons hanging
It was you, me and one other
Me, you and another…
Remember?

She now speaks louder, but is still self-absorbed, as she notices the spoons on the
floor, and begins gathering them slowly.

How important are these moments for you?
Wooden spoons hanging in the house
All of us gathering at that house
Do you remember?
We were together, I was not alone…
And the Norwegian trolls hung on the wall

On the wall, they were decorations
The snow falling outside and we ate soup
We ate warm soup
The whole family together
Gathered around the big table
Do you remember?

This next section is performed in a louder voice, with stronger emotion and larger movements, but Lily is still seems to be addressing the same person.

That was the decoration of the house in the village
Of our country house.
How important are these moments for you?
How important is what I am going through now?
Outside it might be winter,
It may be snowing.
What does this house mean to you – this house
In the village?

You were there
And so was I
Together with one other.
What does this house mean to you?
What does this house mean to you?

A memory?
Perhaps a tradition?

And if not, what else could it be?
What else?

This solo/text emerged from the main improvisation for this work that was repeated several times during our process in which the dancers were asked to explore everyday gestures that symbolised their sense of being a woman in Cyprus.

Key audience feedback:

o Very moving piece
o Lily's performance struck a chord
o Shows the oppression of women
o Beautifully performed, very theatrical
o Worried about the pregnant woman on stage

bare-ly there, take 3

choreography project #3 of *IDENTITY PROJECT*

on the theme of subversive feminine identities in Cyprus and women's voices

Rehearsed twice weekly from March to September 2017
Performed informally at a main square in Paphos, Cyprus

The dance-making process and performers included the following three artists:

Eleni, dancer

Eva, dancer

Vivian, dancer

Text excerpt from personal narrative written and performed by Eva:

Blinded
And crippled by the sounds
Sounds make me react
When you're blind in a relationship
You try to make sense of things
Say what you feel
Without choking
That's when you get a
Moment of CLARITY.

I can see through you.
I can see through you, but I'm not
Looking at you.

How about breathing?
When you focus on breathing
What do you see?
BREATHE

You are blindfolded
You can take it off (take it off)
If you choose

To take it off (take it off)
Is it nice in the dark?
So do you enjoy the feeling?
The fear? (Do you like it?)
SELF DESTRUCTIVE
(self-destructive)
Why?
Why are you destroying yourself?
Do you enjoy it?
Or are you just accustomed to it?

You are choosing to stay blind.
I understand you.
I understand that you are afraid to be
Uncomfortable
To be even more blinded by the light.
Don't worry, I will wait.
I will give you
TIME.
And when you open your eyes,
You will see ME.

Text excerpt from personal narrative written and performed by Vivian:

I remember,
The sheets
The sunlight on the sheets
When we woke up that morning.
Your wife was away again.
I remember thinking
That you are a prick,
But that I love you.
No,
Not any – way
Not anyway.

I am strong – look at my thighs.
I am fast – my mind is a razor.
I am independent – three grand monthly.
I am clever – I always find the way.

With you I cannot find the way.
Any way.
NO – way.
I remember the yellow light.
The feeling of your thighs against mine.
Your voice singing the psalms the next morning.
We met in church.

You are a prick,
My love.

And I love you more than myself.
You do not love me.
I know that.
I do not expect it.
In ANY way.
You love yourself.
And maybe you love your son.

I will be expecting you,
I have marked my calendar until she returns.
We have 13 days
I am organised.
I have bought the wine
I will have lit the candles.

There are two more Thursdays left in June.

Text excerpt from personal narrative written and performed by Eleni:

In my dream,
You are the enemy.
Armed with whisk and ladle
I store backup alongside
Salt and flour.
I plan the next battle.

In my dream I craft moments.
My hands are strong and sinewy
From years of sorting and grip;
They no longer tremble as I

Pour your whiskey, or slide
Your tie up toward your hard chin.

In my dream I fight you,
Aiming with the breadknife
At your heart.
There is little blood;
My trusty cheesecloths aid in
Quick cleaning. I do not run.

Sometimes I try to say something,
Lips stuck to teeth
Eyes wide like craters.
Your limbs are loose against the armchair
And I shoot again
With that gun you keep in the drawer.

And yet: I cry.
Almond blossoms
Bundles of snow on dark branches,
The blushing of spring.
You departed.
February, the shortest of months.

At first I did not realise you were gone.
A sock under the dresser,
Your toothbrush still wet.
I found crumbs
On the counter after
Taking the kids to school.

And those letters from the post.
The closest ally in my
Battle for your presence.
But after dark, no doubting.
The door never opens, despite
Your flannel shirt on the chair.

The neighbors never mentioned it –
That moaning and the raucous
Flow of tears, night after night,

Filling the dry river banks
Flooding into the fields and
swiftly down to the harbour;
A persistent, thick current
Dragging with it big and small traces
Of various lives,
Alerting the earth of the
Loss that precedes spring.
No one said anything.

No one dared say anything –
About the flood,
The mud-covered roads, or
About you missing
Since that that morning
When the almond trees turned white.

Key audience feedback:
- Strange piece
- Women were angry
- We have to change things
- I can relate (female spectator's comment)
- Was this dance?
- Was this rehearsed?
- Was this based on a true story?
- So this is a therapeutic piece.
- No comment from most

It is important to note that *bare-ly there* take 3 was performed impromptu without formal invitations. Some audience members were friends and family of the performers, which had been invited. The rest of the audience was in the square and approached when the performance began.

It is also important to note that the text was in English and may not have been understood by many spectators.

Finally, I will mention that the three performers enjoyed this process and immensely, deeming it gratifying and cathartic.

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