

DANCE, MYSTICISM, AND SENSUALITY
PERSPECTIVES FROM TAJIKISTAN

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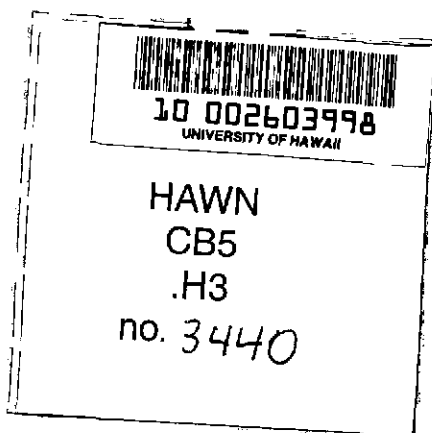
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A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

Translations

Nasiba Imomnazarova translated a majority of the interviews and poetry, whether from Tajik, Shugni, or Russian. Maruf Noyoft made a huge contribution to the translation of the poetry from Badakhshan; as a Badakhshani musician himself, he knew most of the poetry by heart, and he was able to clarify the meanings of ambiguous wordings that neither Nasiba nor I had caught. My Persian language teacher, Guli Saeidi, helped a great deal in translating the Tajik language poetry of *Gulamoy* and *Qurbonat Manam*, both of which contain several layers of meaning. I did some translation myself, as I focused on specific words and phrasings used by interviewees.

Romanization

For the most part, Romanization is based on that of Conroy and Firdaus in their *Tajik-English/English-Tajik Dictionary and Phrasebook* (1998), which follows the general guidelines of the Cyrillic-Roman project of the Tajik government. Some usages of *The Official Beginners' Guide to Tajiki* (Baizoyev and Hayward 2001) have also been incorporated. The transcription has been simplified as much as possible. The system is phonetic; each letter is pronounced, except for the doubled combinations of “ch,” “sh,” “gh,” and “kh.” Letters are pronounced as they would be English, with the following guidelines and exceptions:

a – as the “a” in “bat” or the “u” in “run”

e – as the “a” in “crate” or, more rarely, as the “e” in “den”

i – a long vowel, as the “ee” in “beet”

o – a long vowel, as the “o” in “job”

u – as the “oo” in “stoop”

h – is never silent and is always aspirated, as the “h” in “hi”

j – (usually “zh”) – as the “s” in “pleasure”

gh – a sound not found in English, but resembling the French “r”

kh – a sound not found in English, but resembling the “ch” in the Scottish “loch”

q – a sound not found in English, but resembling a “k” which is moved to the
back of the throat

’ – (as in *sama’*) a glottal stop, as the “t” is often dropped in the word “bottle”
(resulting in “bo’el”)

Some exceptions occur, as I have followed the Tajik practice of writing the “*ezafe*” (a suffix which shows a relationship between words) as “*i*” instead of the usual Farsi-English transcription of “*-e*.” For example, “horse dance” is transcribed as “*raqsi asp*” rather than as “*raqs-e asp*,” although the sound of the “*i*,” in this word-final position, is actually closer to that of the “*e*” described above. I have also used the common transcriptions for the following words and place names, although they would be better suited to the transcription in parentheses:

sazanda (*sozanda*)

shashmaqam (*shashmaqom*)

Tajikistan (Tojikiston)

Badakhshan (Badakhshon)

Khorog (Khurugh)

Bukhara (Bukhora)

In addition, although it would be more accurate to add the plural suffix “*ho*” to *bacha bazi* (professional young male dancer), *sazanda* (professional female dancer),

and/or *bakhshi* (spiritual and emotional healer), I have consistently used the singular form, in emulation of other authors (e.g. Koepke 2000; Levin 1999; Nurjanov 1995; Shay 2005a), and to cause less confusion to the English reader.

GUIDE TO ACCOMPANYING DVD

The accompanying DVD has been organized as a selection of separate chapters. Therefore, the viewer may choose to play them in any order. After each chapter is played, the screen will automatically return to the main menu. Descriptions of each of the chapters follow:

Raqsi Tabaqcha—“Little wooden dish dance” performed at a rehearsal of the Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan in Khorog by Tahmina Fayzakova, Malina and Anisa Huseynova, Nasiba (last name unknown), Gulzar Dalatshoeva, and the author. It was filmed on August 28, 2006 by the author under the auspices of the Tajik Dance Initiative and its parent organization, Afsahneh Art and Culture Society. This is an example of choreographed *rapo* dancing and is examined in detail at the end of Chapter 2.

Raqsi Asp—“Horse dance” performed at the home of the *madoh* singer Sultonazar Saidnazarov by Oyatsho Shohidaryoev and Qimatgul Masumova. It was filmed on August 1, 2006 by Aliah Najmabadi under the auspices of the Tajik Dance Initiative/Afsahneh Art and Culture Society. Although I have included the introductory *rez*, sung by Sultonazar, I have excluded the other poems that lead up to the dancing. This is an example of improvised *rapo* dancing and is examined in detail at the end of Chapter 2.

Gulamoy—“My rose” performed by the author during a rehearsal at Theater Padida in Dushanbe. It was filmed by the author on December 6, 2006. This is an example of Kulobi dance and is examined in detail at the end of Chapter 3.

Qurbonat Manam—“I am your sacrifice” performed by the author at Theater Padida for a representative from the American Embassy in Dushanbe. It was filmed by Andrew Rick on December 14, 2006. This is an example of *shashmaqam*, or specifically *munojot*, dance and is examined in detail at the end of Chapter 3.

Shashmaqam—This is a series of clips from the International Festival of *Shashmaqam* in Dushanbe filmed by the author on November 28, 2006 with permission by the festival organizers. The first clip features the full Gulrez ensemble (twenty two dancers) and is a style called *soghinome* (similar to *munojot*, this may be considered “classical dance” and is therefore included in the *shashmaqam* genre). The second clip features a soloist from the Zebo ensemble performing to instrumental music. The third clip features five dancers from the Zebo ensemble. These are examples of the diversity of *shashmaqam* dance.

Estrada—This is Tajik popular music (*estrada*) accompanied by dance. It was recorded from Tajik television (TV Safina) by the author in November 2006; the original date of the concert is unknown. The singer is Saidakhbari Ismailzod, and the song is “*Sanam*” (“idol,” “object of worship,” “sweetheart”). The dancers’ names or ensemble affiliation are unknown. This is an example of modern Kulobi dance.

Tavlak—This is also filmed from Tajik television and portrays the author and her fiancé performing Kulobi dance and music with *tavlak* (hand drum). The recording was originally made on December 7, 2006 at the Television Safina studio and was recorded by the author when it aired on television on December 12, 2006. This is an example of the long sleeves of Kulobi dance costuming in movement.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Tajikistan is a mountainous, landlocked Central Asian republic. It borders Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west, Kyrgyzstan to the north, and China to the east (Figure 1). The country is divided into four main administrative regions (*viloyat*). These regions are colloquially referred to either by administrative designation or by the name of a major city within the region: hence, Khujand or Leninobod in the north, Dushanbe-region in the center, Kulob or Khatlon in the south, and Badakhshon¹ or the Pamirs² in the east. The ethnic makeup of the country is predominantly Tajik but includes smaller populations of ethnic Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Russians, and Koreans, amongst others. In addition, many people from Badakhshan (referred to as either Badakhshanis or Pamiris) consider themselves a separate ethnic group, although not all citizens of Tajikistan agree with this designation.

Tajikistan's current boundaries were established after it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in the early part of the twentieth century. Before that time, Central Asia was primarily composed of small city-states, which were incorporated into different empires over time (for example, one of the many Persian empires or one of the Central Asian-based empires of Bactria, Soghdia, and the Emirate of Bukhara). There was not a conception of nation-state, and boundaries were either non-existent or fluid.

¹ The spelling "Badakhshon" accurately reflects colloquial pronunciation. However, I will use the more common English spelling, "Badakhshan," from this point onward.

² This term comes from the "Pamir" mountain range of Tajik Badakhshan. During Soviet years, this designation was created to differentiate Tajik Badakhshanis from Afghan Badakhshanis, since there is a contiguous region of Badakhshan in Afghanistan.



Figure 1: Tajikistan (Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin)
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/tajikistan_pol01.pdf

Because of these fluid boundaries, Tajikistan shares many historical and cultural ties with neighboring regions, particularly Iran, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan. All of these nations are predominantly Muslim, are heavily influenced by Sufism (mystical Islam), and share many pre-Islamic traditions. Pilgrimage to the tombs of Sufi saints, and the use of Sufi poetry in music and formal speech is common. *Nowruz*, a celebration welcoming the new year, is celebrated every spring equinox and is thought to date back to Zoroastrianism³ or even pre-Zoroastrian shamanism. Other aspects of pre-Islamic culture link these regions (for examples, refer to Perry 2001 or Rahmoni 2001).

When the Uzbek and Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics were created as part of the Soviet Union, attention was called to Uzbek and Tajik ethnicities. These ethnic groups and others had lived side-by-side for centuries without geopolitical divisions based on ethnicity. Because of this, the division of the area into an ethnic Tajik and an ethnic Uzbek state was not wholly successful. Bukhara and Samarkand were given to Uzbekistan even though ethnic Tajiks and the Tajik language were and still are more common in these cities than ethnic Uzbeks and the Uzbek language. Even today, many Tajiks complain that these are really Tajik cities, culturally, historically, and linguistically. Likewise, parts of northern Tajikistan are predominantly Uzbek. After the creation of the Tajik S.S.R. and Uzbek S.S.R., each republic was encouraged to develop its “national” culture. This resulted in “national” dances, “national” music, “national”

³ Zoroastrianism is an ancient monotheistic religion that flourished throughout Iran, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and western China from about 600 B.C.E. to 650 C.E. (the advent of Islam). It had a substantial influence on subsequent monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and is still practiced today by a small number of devotees (refer to Boyce 2001).

heroes, and many other expressions of “national” Uzbek or “national” Tajik culture, despite the fact that in past centuries there were not such distinctions.

Religion was heavily suppressed during the Soviet years and Muslim mosques, Christian churches, and Jewish synagogues were closed down. Muslim women were forced to remove their veils, and religious leaders were assassinated or sent to labor camps. Books written in Persian/Arabic script were burned, since they were thought to have possible religious content, and a great deal of historical, philosophical, and religious knowledge was lost. In many areas, religious practice went underground. Islamic groups were active in fighting for independence from the Soviet Union, and since independence there has been a rise in Islamic religious practice even though the country remains officially secular.

Tajikistan declared independence only fifteen years ago, on September 9, 1991, following the break up of the Soviet Union. Shortly after independence, a civil war erupted that lasted five years. The war greatly destabilized the country and caused many ethnic rifts. Ultimately, the fighting was over political control of the country, not only between religious and secular factions, but also between different clan/regional groups. People today still feel the loss of family members and neighbors and some tension exists between regional groups (e.g. Badakhshani/Pamiri, Kulobi, Gharmi, and Khojandi). For the most part, however, these tensions are noticeable only in people’s attitudes and stereotypes towards people from different regions; they are not visible in continued ethnic violence.

Tajikistan’s current government is officially a republic with a president and parliament. Unlike any other Central Asian country, opposition parties are allowed to

actively participate in the parliament, and the country is economically and politically stable, if very poor. Tajikistan receives a great deal of foreign aid, and many French and Americans live and work for aid organizations in both Dushanbe (the capital) and Khorog (the administrative center of Badakhshan).

This study is based in two areas of Tajikistan, the semi-autonomous region of Badakhshan and the capital city, Dushanbe. Today in Dushanbe, government-sponsored dance ensembles are constantly seen on television promoting a national identity based either in antiquity and represented by “classical” *shashmaqam* dance, or reflecting one of several regional or ethnic identities found within the borders of Tajikistan. The broadcast message is that Tajikistan is an ancient country with a rich artistic and spiritual history, and modern Tajikistan is a secular country full of different peoples enjoying peaceful and prosperous lives. In Badakhshan, most Badakhshanis tend to present a perspective of dance that is steeped in mysticism and conveys the message that Badakhshan is a spiritual land unspoiled by the corruptive influences of modernity.

Statement of Purpose

In this study, I focus on aesthetics and perspectives of dance that contain mystical, spiritual, emotional, sensual, or sexual attributes. I also address contextual elements of dance performances, such as music, poetry/song text, environment, and politics, which reflect a synthesis of mysticism and sensuality. The conception of “body” is commonly based on its perceived opposite, “spirit.” Likewise, sexuality is often opposed to spirituality, and a pleasing sensual experience is opposed to a transformative mystical experience. I believe dance has the ability to blur these perceived boundaries by using

both body and spirit to induce sensual pleasure and effect a spiritual, emotional, or mystical experience in both practitioners and audience. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use perspectives of dance in Tajikistan as an example of dance's ability to syncretize mysticism and sensuality. This syncretism may help to explain the ambiguity of dance, its emotional power, and why it is often controlled or censored by the state.

A number of questions provide the impetus for this study. What is the relationship of dance to mysticism and sensuality in Badakhshan and Dushanbe, Tajikistan? Mystical Islamic (Sufi) poetry is often the basis for song lyrics. How is this mystical poetry embodied and represented by a sensual dancing body? Dancers are treated by society in different ways; they may be respected as accomplished artists who embody the emotional and spiritual aesthetics of a culture, or despised as low class entertainers who merely provide sensual pleasure. How do dancers feel about their role in society? Do they feel dance is something spiritual, mystical, emotional, sensual, or sexual?

Methodology

I was in Tajikistan for about six months, from early July through mid-December 2006. From the middle of July to the beginning of September, I was in Badakhshan researching dance as a member of a collaborative research project, the Tajik Dance Initiative.⁴ The rest of my time was spent in Dushanbe, where I studied primarily at one dance studio, Theater Padida. In Badakhshan, I almost always saw music and dance performances in private homes. In Dushanbe, most of the live dance performances I saw

⁴ Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, under the section titled "Research and Performance Context."

were being filmed for television and took place in large concert halls. In both places, I was a student of dance. Because each location was unique and required different research approaches, I discuss the research and performance contexts more thoroughly in the introduction to each section (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3).

Throughout my time in Tajikistan, I was accompanied by my fiancé, Andrew (Andy) Rick. We usually introduced ourselves as a married couple, since our unmarried status could have been seen as reproachable, immoral, or simply odd to some Tajiks. Traveling and researching as part of a “married” couple, instead of as a solo female, had an impact on my research. It allowed both women and men to relax around me, since they felt they neither needed to protect nor suspect me. It may have had other unknown impacts on my interactions. Andy’s background as a musician and sound engineer greatly contributed to my research; much of my understanding of Tajik music is based on conversations with him. In addition, his observations and insights into cultural, environmental, and political contexts inform my own.

I am concerned with the physicality and character of dance movement, how it relates to song text, is explained during the course of dance lessons or rehearsals, and represents sensual, sexual, emotional, mystical, and spiritual aesthetics. I am also interested in how dance is embedded in specific contexts (such as environmental, political, and social) and how this may influence the mysticism or sensuality associated with dance. Therefore, my methodology necessarily contains both a wide perspective and a narrow focus.

In the wide perspective, I observed general tendencies of dance performances (informal, formal, live, televised) in Badakhshan and Dushanbe and their broader social,

political, and environmental contexts. During interviews, I asked questions about “dance” as an abstract concept in order to try to understand the philosophy and aesthetics of dance according to each speaker.

In the narrow focus, I chose four specific dances to analyze in relation to song text, performance context, aesthetic embodiment, and any words used to explain or instruct the dance (if applicable). From Badakhshan, I analyze one dance, *Raqsi Tabaqcha*, set to a poem in the Tajik language and taught to me as a performance piece in a studio setting. I also look at one performance of *raqsi asp* (horse dance) accompanied by Tajik and Shugni-language⁵ lyrics and performed in a well-known *madoh* singer’s home (*madoh* is devotional music, common throughout Badakhshan). From the Dushanbe region, I examine one *shashmaqam* (“classical”) dance, *Qurbonat Manam*, and one dance from the region of Kulob (just south of Dushanbe), *Gulamoy*. Both dances from Dushanbe are set to Tajik-language poetry and were taught to me in a studio setting.

I apply Labanotation (dance notation), Effort Analysis, and poetic description. Labanotation aids in scrutinizing the quantitative, physical components of movement. Labanotation figures are included throughout the text, but Labanotation has also influenced many of my written descriptions of movement, as has Effort Analysis. Effort Analysis aids in understanding the qualitative character of movement and involves the examination of the use of weight (from strong to light), time (from quick to sustained), space (from direct to indirect), and energy (from bound to free flow). Poetic description has been used to introduce each subsection on dance in Badakhshan and Dushanbe.

⁵ Shugni is one of many colloquial languages found in Badakhshan. Many, if not most, songs in Badakhshan are set to Tajik-language poetry, even though it is not the colloquial language.

These personal reflections of dance events are written and included with the intention of giving the reader a feeling or image of the dancing.

I have chosen to include “direct” quotations from many Tajik dancers, musicians, or observers. These statements were spoken during dance lessons, formal interview sessions, or informal performances or conversations. Most statements have been translated from Shugni, Tajik, or Russian language; thus, they are not technically direct quotations. I utilized informed consent⁶ and received permission from each speaker to use his or her name and words in my thesis. In the few cases where I was unable to ask permission to include a name, the speaker has been purposefully left anonymous and unidentifiable. I feel it is important to include names for two reasons: firstly, it gives credit to the specific speaker for his or her knowledge and insight; and secondly, it removes any notion of a generic “informant.” (Refer to Appendix C for a list of individuals, including members of the Tajik Dance Initiative, dancers, musicians, and observers, all of whom greatly contributed to my research.) It should be made clear, however, that in every case, it is I who chose what statements would be included and where they would be placed in the text. As I observed and participated in dance lessons, ensemble rehearsals, and formal, informal, live, and televised performances, I developed my own perspective of dance in Tajikistan. The (translated) words of dance teachers, ensemble directors, government employees, dancers, musicians, and bystanders at times contradict and at times coincide with my own perspective; they are used with the intent to provide additional and multiple perspectives of dance from Tajikistan.

⁶ I completed Human Subjects Research Training at the University of Hawaii in the spring of 2006, received clearance for my research from the Committee on Human Subjects, and utilized informed consent throughout my fieldwork.

Definitions

Many words can be interpreted and applied in different ways. Therefore, it is necessary that I define some of my core terminology. Although I use only the terms “mysticism” and “sensuality” in my title, I am interested in the mystical, spiritual, emotional, sensual, and sexual aspects of dance. Therefore, I have used the words “mysticism” and “sensuality” as umbrella terms under which to discuss a variety of topics. Also important to this thesis is a clarification of the differences and similarities between the terms “Persian” and “Tajik.” The definitions discussed below, excepting “Persian” and “Tajik,” are based on a survey of several dictionaries.⁷ Following this discussion of English definitions, I explain the Tajik words I used during interviews and their relationship to these definitions.

I am interested in both “mysticism” (practice/system) and “mystical” (experience/adjective) as these terms relate to dance in Tajikistan. As an adjective, “mystical” is defined as an experience or reality with spiritual or esoteric significance. This significance is not knowable, apparent, or recognized through the reasoning of the mind nor the perception of the senses; it cannot be rationalized, seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted. As a system, “mysticism” infers that its followers (mystics) seek personal communication and union with God (or the divine), usually attainable through immediate illumination or insight. The terms “mystical” and “mysticism” may also be negatively associated with unsubstantiated knowledge, pure speculation, confusion, or

⁷ *Webster's New International Dictionary* (3rd Edition, 1976), *The Chambers Dictionary* (1994), *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2nd College Edition, 1982), and *Webster's New World Dictionary* (3rd College Edition, 1988).

dreamy thought. In this thesis, I use and apply the former, more positively phrased, definitions, as manifest in the following questions: in the practice of dance in Dushanbe and Badakhshan, Tajikistan, are dancers seeking personal communication and union with God? In the experience of dancing, is dance spiritually or esoterically powerful or meaningful? Is it explained in ways that put it outside the realm of the mind and the senses?

“Spirituality” is simply the condition of being “spiritual,” which denotes things of the “spirit,” or those things that are beyond the material world. These words are perhaps the most difficult to define, for nearly all the dictionaries I consulted contained such circular definitions; primarily, these terms relate to the immaterial world. Thus, “spiritual” qualities are associated with religion, sacredness, morality, ghosts, and the supernatural. The spiritual qualities of humanity are associated with indefinite terms such as “soul,” “spirit,” “mind,” “temperament,” or “heart.” In my application of the terms “spiritual” and “spirituality,” I refer to religious or sacred thoughts or actions as well as aspects of the human “spirit” related to the religious, sacred, or supernatural. For example, what does it mean to “dance with heart?” Are other such “spiritual” aesthetics attributed to dance? Do dancers consider what they do to be spiritually motivated?

“Emotion” is defined as a state based on instinct rather than reason in response to one’s mood, environment, or relationship to others. Although emotions are triggered by hormones released by the brain, the origin of emotions is colloquially linked (in both English and Tajik) to the “heart” or “temperament” of a person; the home of the individual “spirit.” An emotion, therefore, is both individually felt as well as communicated and affected by interaction between individuals. When I speak of the

emotional power of dance, I refer to the way dance affects an instinctual, sometimes subliminal, response in practitioners or audience as opposed to an intellectual, reasoned response; for example, the response is articulated in terms of mood and feeling rather than intellectual import or abstracted meaning of the dance piece (*the personal, felt response as opposed to the impersonal explanation of the piece's significance*). I also use “emotional” to refer to dance aesthetics related to the affectation and/or communication of a particular mood or state between musicians, dancers, and audience.

Thus, the terms “mystical,” “mysticism,” “spiritual,” “spirituality,” and “emotional” are related, for each attempts to articulate or describe an experience, sensation, or quality that is beyond physical, material reality and logical, rational description. When I speak generally of “mysticism and dance,” I thus refer to those aspects of dance that could be described using these terms.

On the other hand, dance is inescapably sensual. Why? It uses the body and usually aims to please the senses of sight and sound, at least, as well as the kinesthetic sense⁸. “Sensual” denotes of or relating to the body, the senses, and physical pleasure; but every dictionary I consulted also included a secondary definition related to lust, licentiousness, carnal pleasure, or lewdness. I use the more neutral definition of this term, which is simply tied to the body, the senses, and physical pleasure. If dance is inherently sensual, how is sensuality reflected in dance? “Sensuality” is either the quality of being sensual (*that which makes it belong to the body, the senses, or physical pleasure*), or the indulgence in or ability to enjoy the world of the senses. I utilize the

⁸ I consider the kinesthetic sense to be our “sixth” sense; it is, among other things, body language. For example, our perception of motion and stillness in both ourselves and others helps us to determine emotions, intentions, and nonverbal messages. Further discussion follows in Chapter 4.

first part of this definition of “sensitivity:” what makes dance pleasing to the senses in Badakhshan and Dushanbe, Tajikistan? Is sensitivity used to effect emotional, spiritual, or esoteric states? If so, how, and for what purposes?

Sensitivity often connotes sexuality, as described by the secondary definition given to “sensual” above. I am interested in whether sex is directly or indirectly referenced in dance. By this I mean the “sexual” aspects of dance; those aspects that relate to the act of sex, the sexual organs, or the differentiation or interplay between the two sexes. I also pay attention to the sexual appeal of dance or dancers, or their “sexuality,” and how it affects the reputation or social standing of dancers or dance companies within specific communities.

Sensitivity and sexuality are both grounded in physicality rather than otherworldly or supernatural spheres. For this reason, when I speak generally of “sensitivity and dance,” I refer to the physicality of dance and the way the body and the senses contribute to views about dance and dancers.

Two other terms must be defined, “Persian” and “Tajik.” These terms both refer to languages and peoples; confusingly, sometimes they refer to the same language and people and sometimes to different languages and peoples. “Tajik” applies to the Tajik language as well as to ethnic Tajiks and is usually extended to include all citizens of the modern republic of Tajikistan. “Persian” relates to both the citizens and language, alternately termed Farsi, of modern Iran as well as to the language and people of ancient Persia and successive Persian Empires. Ancient Persia (circa 650 to 330 B.C.E.) was a very large empire that stretched from Turkey, through Iran, and into Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and other parts of Central and South Asia. After the advance of Islam

(around 650 C.E.), this large area maintained political and cultural ties. This area produced many great poets who wrote in the Persian (or Tajik) language. Tajik language, Dari (the language of Afghanistan), and Farsi are all based on the ancient Persian language and consequently are a part of the “Persian” language family.⁹ Therefore, when discussing modern peoples and languages, it is easy to distinguish between “Persian” and “Tajik.” However, historical lands, peoples, and languages are termed differently depending on whom one asks. Following general practice in Tajikistan, I use “Tajik” to refer not only to ethnic Tajiks but also to citizens of Tajikistan (although the politically correct term may be “Tajikistani”),¹⁰ and I discuss poetry/song text written in the “Tajik” language (even though Iranians and others, if using English, may call this the “classical Persian” language).

Finally, what terms do I use to speak to Tajiks about the sensuality and mysticism of dance? In interviews and informal conversations, I used the words “*ruh*” (“soul,” “spirit”), “*ruhani*” (“religious,” “spiritual”), and “*badan*” (“body,” “flesh”). These words get at the central concepts of my research, yet they do not have negative connotations, as do many other words in Tajik that relate to sensuality or sexuality. Of course, I tried to ask the broadest questions possible (such as, how do you feel when you dance? What makes a good dancer?), and I allowed conversations to develop according to the interests of each individual, rather than directing questions only to my research interests. Yet, when I explained what my research was about, I stated, “*Tesam darborayye raqs, ruh,*

⁹ Tajik, Dari, and Farsi are mutually intelligible, if with some difficulty. Commonly used words and phrases (for example, “How are you? Good.”) vary from region to region and accents are noticeable, but most grammar and vocabulary is the same.

¹⁰ Even Badakhshanis and other non-Tajik ethnic groups refer to themselves as “Tajik” rather than the unheard of “Tajikistani.”

va badan ast” (“My thesis is about dance, spirit, and body”). By using the simplest and most neutral terms, it allowed those I talked with to interpret and elaborate on them in their own ways.

Literature Review

I approached this study by examining works from a wide geographical area including Tajikistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, in order to both contextualize practices in Tajikistan as well as supplement the few references to dance, specifically, in Tajikistan. Studies in dance ethnology, ethnomusicology, history, Islam, and Sufism,¹¹ have made an impact on my theoretical and methodological stance. Themes concerning spirituality, sexuality, aesthetics, politics, and gender are woven throughout the literature relevant to my study.

Nurjanov’s article on dance in Tajikistan (1995) focuses on nineteenth-century female dancers (*sazanda*), and he emphasizes their role in the enrichment of a female audiences’ spiritual life; however he does not address their role as comedic cross-dressing entertainers, as does Levin (1999). Most references to dance in Central Asia, however, discuss only the effeminate, sometimes cross-dressing, *bacha bazi* (professional boy dancers). Schuyler (1876) and Polovtsoff (1932) traveled through Central Asia in the late 1800s/ early 1900s, and both provide first hand descriptions of the *bacha bazi*, highlighting their low status, yet popularity, within the male community. Koepke’s fieldwork amongst the Tajiks of Afghanistan (2000a) documents the prevalence of these “dancing boys” in oral history as do Doi’s fieldwork in Uzbekistan (2002) and Swift’s

¹¹ Sufism is generally referred to as mystical Islam and is practiced throughout South and Central Asia, amongst other regions. Various branches, brotherhoods, and definitions of Sufism exist simultaneously.

history of dance in the U.S.S.R. (1968). Shay (2002) infers that Soviet state dance companies in the former Uzbek S.S.R. attempted to “save” dance by sanitizing and de-sexualizing it. Doi’s ethnography focuses on gender issues and is also full of references to “dancing from the heart;” an oft-repeated aesthetic of Uzbek and Tajik dance.

I believe this “dancing from the heart” shares an aesthetic basis with Sufism. Al-Ghazali, one of the most widely read Islamic philosophers, articulates the meaning of the heart as a concept of Islamic mysticism (1980). Grocer discusses the aesthetics common throughout Islamic art (1999), and although he does not apply these aesthetics to dance, Nor shows how they are reflected in Malaysian dance (2003), and Shay discusses their manifestation in Iranian dance (1999).

Schimmel’s *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975) is the basis of my knowledge of Sufism, and her analysis of the feminine in Islam (1997) also aids in explaining some of the ambiguities of sensuality and mysticism in Sufi poetry and practice. Arabov (2004) briefly but insightfully discusses Sufism as it is generically and commonly practiced in Tajikistan. Baldick’s book on the Uwaysi Sufis of Central Asia (1993) includes a section on thirteen women mystics and discusses the integration of spirituality and sensuality in mystical practice.

My knowledge of sexuality as it is condoned or discouraged in Islamic practice relies on Mernissi’s feminist viewpoint (1987 and 1991). I have gravitated towards other feminist-oriented histories of Islam, such as the works of Stowasser (1994) and Ahmed (1992).

A number of ethnomusicology studies have examined the relationship between spirituality and music in this area of the world. Most relevant to my study is Koen’s

dissertation, *Devotional Music and Healing in Badakhshan, Tajikistan* (2003b), and his more specific article “The Spiritual Aesthetic in Badakhshani Devotional Music” (2003a). The relationship between Iranian music and spirituality is discussed by During, Mirabdolbaghi, and Safvat (1991), and During (1988) focuses on the use of music in Baluchistan (Southeastern Iran/Southwestern Pakistan) to heal spiritually. Levin (1999) discusses the *bakhshi* (alternatively, *baxshi*), shamanic healers who use music and movement to heal, and Varzi (1988) writes of the spiritually and emotionally cathartic function of social dance within the Iranian *bazm* (party or gathering).

The sexuality and political ambiguity of dance is addressed by a number of authors. Shay (1995) discusses the politically subversive and sexually satirical use of dance within Iranian women’s parties, the ambiguous nature of Iranian dance (1999), the legitimacy of dance in Islamic jurisprudence (2005b), and the ambiguity of male dancers in the Middle East and Central Asia (2005a). Koepke (2000b) focuses on the political implications of dance performances in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as well as sexuality and transgender in dance performance. Sakata (1976) exposes the relationship between prostitution and dance in Afghanistan.

Within the field of dance ethnology, I am strongly influenced by recent work on aesthetics (Kaeppler 2003; Giurchescu 2003; Grau 2003) as well as Kaeppler’s notion of “ethnoscience structuralism” (1978), which I feel is related, since all three researchers integrate dance aesthetics with other aspects of culture. Ness (1992) uses a similar approach as she discusses cultural aesthetics that are present on many levels. Ness also focuses on the centrality of the body, including the body of the researcher in “doing ethnography.” I also believe bodies are inscribed by their culture, and I am influenced by

the many recent theories concerning bodily practice and embodiment (e.g. Buckland, 2001; Grau, 2005; Sklar 2000).

I am particularly interested in the intersection between dance and cultural politics, which has been the focus of much of Giurchescu's work (2001, 1991, and 1987). The dance scholars Quigley (2001), Ozturkmen (2001), Shay (2002), and Nahachewsky (2003 and 2006) also investigate the concepts, such as "national" dance, and contexts surrounding dance and governmental policies.

In the discussion of movement, I am determined to "capture the *dancing*," as Van Zile has put it (1999), through the use of Labanotation and Effort Analysis. I also find great value in both Van Zile's (2001) and Ness's (1992) poetic movement descriptions, which are accessible to non-movement specialists.

When it comes to presenting research, I look to Abu-Lughod's example, as she expertly finds a way to present both "outsider" and "insider" perspectives, keeping in mind the usefulness of both the objectivity and subjectivity of the researcher (1993). I am also indebted to Van Zile's organization of "perspectives," as she weaves movement descriptions, politics, and personalities into her discussion of dance in Korea (2001).

My contribution to this body of literature is the addition of new voices from Tajikistan within the context of dance ethnology. While many studies of this region link music and spirituality, none have investigated the relationship of dance to mysticism nor considered that both spirituality and sensuality may co-exist in performance.

Dance: History and Overview

Dance performances in Tajikistan can be found on television, at pop music concerts, and on concert stages. People dance socially at weddings, birthdays, and other festive parties. Celebrations almost invariably include dance, whether it is informally performed, in the case of a wedding, or formally presented and sponsored through the state or federal government, as in the case of Independence Day or *Nowruz* (New Year/Spring Equinox) celebrations. In parts of Badakhshan, funeral dances can be found, although they were more commonly practiced in past eras.

Central Asian dance has a very long history. When Alexander the Great entered Soghdia around 300 B.C.E., he was entertained by “thirty high-born maidens, including the satrap’s [ruler’s] daughter Roxane” (Shahbazi 1993, 640). Representations of both male and female dancers can be found etched into silver vases dating from the Sassanid period, 226-651 C.E. (Harper 1978, 60-61; Rice 1965, 114; Shahbazi 1993, 641). Wall murals found during archeological digs at ancient Panjikent (western Tajikistan) depict dancers and musicians, both male and female, and date to approximately the same time period (Azarpay 1981, 189, 196, 197). During the Islamic period, miniature paintings from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries illustrate festive scenes with both male and female dancers (see Canby 2000, 60,61; 1998, 56; Ferrier 1989; Robinson 1976, 251-258). Female dancers are often depicted, but specific time periods seem to portray more young male dancers, usually dressed as women. It may be that some rulers tolerated females performing in public and others allowed only males to perform publicly. Since women should veil according to Islamic orthodoxy, a more orthodox ruler might not

allow women to dance in public. However, Jewish, Christian, and other non-Muslim women were granted exceptions to this prohibition, again dependent on specific rulers.

The most documented dancers in Central Asia in oral history and traveler's accounts from the past several centuries were dancing boys (*bacha bazi*) (Doi 2002, 44, 55; Schuyler 1876; Shay 2005a; Swift 1968, 180). These boys were usually selected for their youth and beauty and most quit dancing once they began to grow a beard. They wore makeup and jewelry, plaited their long hair, and were known for their effeminate attractiveness and charms. They worked with organized performance groups in urban areas, and they were usually recruited as desperate orphans, born into the profession, or sold into it by family members at a young age. The *bacha bazi* were sexually active with their patrons, and fights often broke out between men vying for access to particular boys (Koepke 2000a, 95-96). There were also accounts of dancing boys being kidnapped and stolen by zealous lovers (Sakata 1976, 124). The *bacha bazi* were likely the only dancers that men saw, especially foreign male travelers, since their performances could occur in public spaces. Women's parties, which usually took place inside private homes, presented a different situation.

In Bukhara, women's parties were often entertained by professional female dancers, called *sazanda* (Nurjanov 1995). These *sazanda* performances were linked with spiritual enrichment, according to Nurjanov, in a way similar to the emotional and spiritual release brought about by classical Iranian music in the *bazm*, a special gathering for this purpose (Varzi 1988, 4-6). Thus, although these performances did not involve direct religious instruction, they provided a space in which spiritual reflection or emotional release was encouraged. However, Levin's research shows that the *sazanda*

also acted as cross-dressing actors and comedians (1999, 120). These entertainers were nearly always Jewish women, since they did not face the same modesty restrictions as Muslim women. *Sazanda* were also employed in the Emirs' courts, presumably to entertain the women of the court.

Today, the situation is very different; both men and women perform in public spaces and sexuality, as in the case of the *bacha bazi*, or spirituality, as in the case of the *sazanda*, is not so clearly presented as a main motivation for performance. When men dance, generally speaking, they usually avoid effeminate movements. Men who dance professionally are far more common in Badakhshan than in other areas of Tajikistan. For example, the large state-sponsored dance ensembles of Dushanbe are almost entirely composed of young women; it is very rare to see men dancing professionally in Dushanbe. The dancing boys (*bacha bazi*) are wholly a thing of the past; as one Tajik man commented when I asked him about the *bacha bazi*, "Today, people don't want to sell their boys into dance" (personal communication, September 30, 2006). It is better, he stated, that they become economists or businessmen.

Most public dance performances today are presented as symbolic of national, ethnic, or regional identity. During the Soviet period, dancers were encouraged to develop their "national" dances and perform them in Moscow (Shay 2002, 64; Swift 1968, 159-160); the connection of dance to regional and ethnic identity was certainly strengthened by this influence. Politically themed dances were also created under Soviet influence to celebrate workers and "emancipated" (unveiled) women, villainize the *basmachis* (those who fought the Bolsheviks), or satirize religious leaders (Swift 1968, 162-183). Today's politically themed dance performances celebrate the independence of

Tajikistan, the unity of its regional groups (each group represented by a specific dance), and the antiquity of Tajik culture. “National” dances are by far the most popular dances in Tajikistan. Although there are many genres of Tajik “national” dance, only several are discussed here. The three dance genres I examine are *rapo*, *shashmaqam*, and Kulobi.

Rapo is the most common dance form of Badakhshan. The term “*rapo*” is used by Badakhshanis to designate a particular 2/4 rhythm, usually accompanied by a particular dance style. However, *rapo*-like movements can also be seen in social dance, even when accompanied by rhythms other than *rapo*. Therefore, the term “*rapo*” is rather fluid; it refers to both a dance style and a particular rhythm that usually accompanies that dance style.¹² I use the term to designate a dance genre; while some Badakhshanis would also use the term in this way, others may use it exclusively to refer to a specific rhythm. *Rapo* is sometimes instrumental and sometimes accompanied by poetry written by well-known Sufi poets, such as Shamsi Tabriz¹³ (Rumi), Nasser Khusraw, or Hafez; all of these poems are in Tajik (Persian) language. In addition, *rapo* may be accompanied by Shugni language poetry.

Shashmaqam is the name given today to the “classical” music of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Bukharian Jews. The term actually means “six *maqam*” (“*shash*” + “*maqam*”). The *maqam* are related, in various ways, to the Persian *dastgah*, the Turkish *maqam*, and the Indian *raga* (for example see Zeranska-Kominek, Kostrubiec, and

¹² Robyn Friend noted that *rapo* may even designate a particular melody (personal communication, February 13, 2006). I have based my description of the term on my own observations and on the perspectives of the Badakhshanis with whom I interacted during my fieldwork.

¹³ Mevlana Jalaladdin Rumi (1207-1273 C.E.) is one of the better-known Sufi poets and the founder of the Mevlana order, commonly known as the “whirling dervishes” since they practice a devotional dance based on continual turning. In Badakhshan, Rumi is referred to by the name of his spiritual mentor, Shams-e Tabriz, to whom he dedicated a book of poetry (*divan*).

Wierzejewska 1982). Currently, dance performances to *shashmaqam* music in Tajikistan are associated with antiquated and spiritual notions of Central Asian regional or Tajik national identity. *Shashmaqam* dance performances can be found in state holiday celebrations, at “cultural” events, on television, or in “cultural ambassadorial” concert tours abroad. The Academy of Shashmaqam, based in Dushanbe, has performed with dancers at the Fes Festival of Sacred Music (Morocco); they are one of the only groups to perform at this festival and include dance as a part of their presentation. *Shashmaqam* lyrics are based on Sufi poetry written by many of the same poets mentioned above (Rumi, Khusraw, Hafez, Sa’adi, and others). For centuries, the *shashmaqam* tradition was largely carried by Bukharian Jews. *Shashmaqam* was not only “classical” music and dance performed at the court of the Emir; it was also “popular” music and dance performed at weddings (Levin 1999, 111-115).

Kulobi dance is a genre from the region of Kulob, in the south of Tajikistan. Music and dance from the Kulob region is very popular throughout the country. On radio and television, Kulobi influence can be heard in pop music and seen in dance performances. I was surprised to hear Kulobi pop music played alongside Badakhshani pop music at the two weddings I attended in Badakhshan. In addition, the main public dance class in Dushanbe, which is attended mostly by foreigners, is heavily reliant on Kulobi technique. Because this class is advertised as a “Tajik” dance class, many foreign students retain the idea that Kulobi dance *is* Tajik dance. The Kulob region is the birthplace of the current president, who has been consecutively re-elected since independence in 1991.

Because I only examine three dance genres as they are practiced in two regions, my discussion cannot directly apply to the whole of dance practice in Tajikistan. Although *rapo*, *shashmaqam*, and Kulobi are the three most prominent genres of “traditional” or “national” dance in Tajikistan, other dance genres can be found, such as contemporary/modern dance, ballet, Arabic dance, Indian “Bollywood”/film dance, break-dance, and MTV-style pop/video dance. Contemporary/modern dance, as it is known in the United States and Western Europe, is rare. However, pop songs (*estrada*) are often accompanied by contemporary/modern Tajik dance, which is usually a derivative of the Kulobi national style mixed with a wide variety of global influences. Ballet is mostly seen on Russian television programming. Arabic, Bollywood, break-dance, and MTV-style dancing are popular, but are less featured in performance than any of the national dance styles. Even within the three genres discussed, my focus is narrowed to only four specific dance pieces. Nonetheless, I have tried to give a larger perspective of dance in Tajikistan by using a wide focus on contextual information and by drawing in examples from other experiences of dancing that I witnessed, such as dancing at weddings, on television, or in dance studios. In this way, I hope that I have allowed for both a detailed look into a microcosm, specific instances of *dancing* in Tajikistan, and given a sweeping glimpse of the macrocosm.

In the following two chapters, one on Badakhshan and one on Dushanbe, I first provide social, political, and environmental context pertinent to understanding dance, music, poetry, or the position of dancers within each region. Then I discuss the two specific dance pieces from each location. In the final chapter, the relationship between dance, mysticism, and sensuality is given more theoretical attention.

CHAPTER 2

BADAKHSHAN

Khorog is the administrative center and largest city of Tajikistan's Badakhshan, officially known as the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO).¹⁴ Just across the Panj river (also known as the Amu Darya or Oxus), is Afghanistan's Badakhshan, a corresponding semi-autonomous region (refer to Figure 1; Afghani Badakhshan is to the west and south of the GBAO). The Badakhshani population is, essentially, split between borders. However, after several generations of separation, family and tribal affiliations that span the river have been nearly forgotten. Tajiks use either "Pamirs" or "Badakhshan" to refer to the GBAO, and "Afghani Badakhshan" to specify the corresponding region in Afghanistan; I use the terms in a similar manner.

Although Badakhshan comprises about forty percent of Tajikistan's landmass, less than five percent of Tajikistan's population resides in the region, according to a 2000 census. The Pamir mountain range divides the GBAO into many isolated valleys and regions; towering mountains, high plateaus, and rivers dominate the landscape. Accessibility is limited. In the winter months, there is no traffic into or out of Badakhshan; roads close due to avalanche danger, and the weather is too unpredictable to fly. In the spring, melting snow often makes roads muddy and impassable. The landscape and the natural environment have a huge impact on life in Badakhshan.

¹⁴ One reason for using the term "Badakhshan" in this thesis rather than "GBAO" is that the region of Murghab, while a part of the GBAO (Figure 2), is not always included in generalizations about "Badakhshan." Primarily Kyrgyz, Murghab's indigenous music and dance traditions differ significantly from the rest of the GBAO; therefore, they are not fully addressed in the following discussion.

In contrast to the rest of Tajikistan, which is mostly Sunni,¹⁵ a large percentage of Badakhshanis are Ismai'ili Muslims, a minority branch of Shia Islam, whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan, one of the wealthiest men in the world. He funds many current development projects, and he is credited with “sustaining life” in Badakhshan during Tajikistan’s Civil War (1992-1997) because of the financial support he gave the region. As a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammed through his daughter, Fatima, and her husband, Ali, he is revered as a spiritual leader. In contrast to orthodox Islam, which has a tenuous relationship with music, Ismailis embrace music as a part of everyday spiritual practice. *Madoh* is a common form of devotional music that is found throughout the Pamirs, and *madoh* singers are widely thought of as being especially spiritual people.

Shugni is the colloquial language of Khorog. However, just one hour away, in Roshan, another dialect is spoken, and just two hours further, up the Bartang Valley, yet another dialect can be heard in every day use (Figure 2). The isolation of different valleys from one another no doubt contributes to the plethora of languages/dialects¹⁶ found in the region. Despite colloquial language differences, many Badakhshani songs are based on Tajik-language poetry. A *madoh* is based on poetry with a devotional theme, while a dance song is based on poetry with a love theme. Interestingly, both kinds of poems may actually have been written by the same Sufi poet (e.g. Hafez or Khusraw).

¹⁵ Sunni and Shia are the two main branches of Islam. This split arose shortly after the death of Mohammed in a dispute over who was to lead the community of followers—Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, or Abu-Bakr, one of the Prophet’s close companions. Very broadly speaking, Sunni Muslims rely more heavily on well-established schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Malaki, Shafi’i, or Hanbali) for deciphering their responsibilities as Muslims, while Shia Muslims look to the descendants of the Prophet’s bloodline through Ali for spiritual guidance. A huge majority of Muslims are Sunni.

¹⁶ A Dushanbe Tajik corrected me when I commented on how many languages were spoken in Badakhshan. He insisted they were all simply dialects of Tajik because they did not have their own writing system (personal communication, July 12, 2006). Linguists and most Badakhshanis disagree. The Pamiri language family, however, is distantly related to Persian/Tajiki since both are descended from Soghdian.

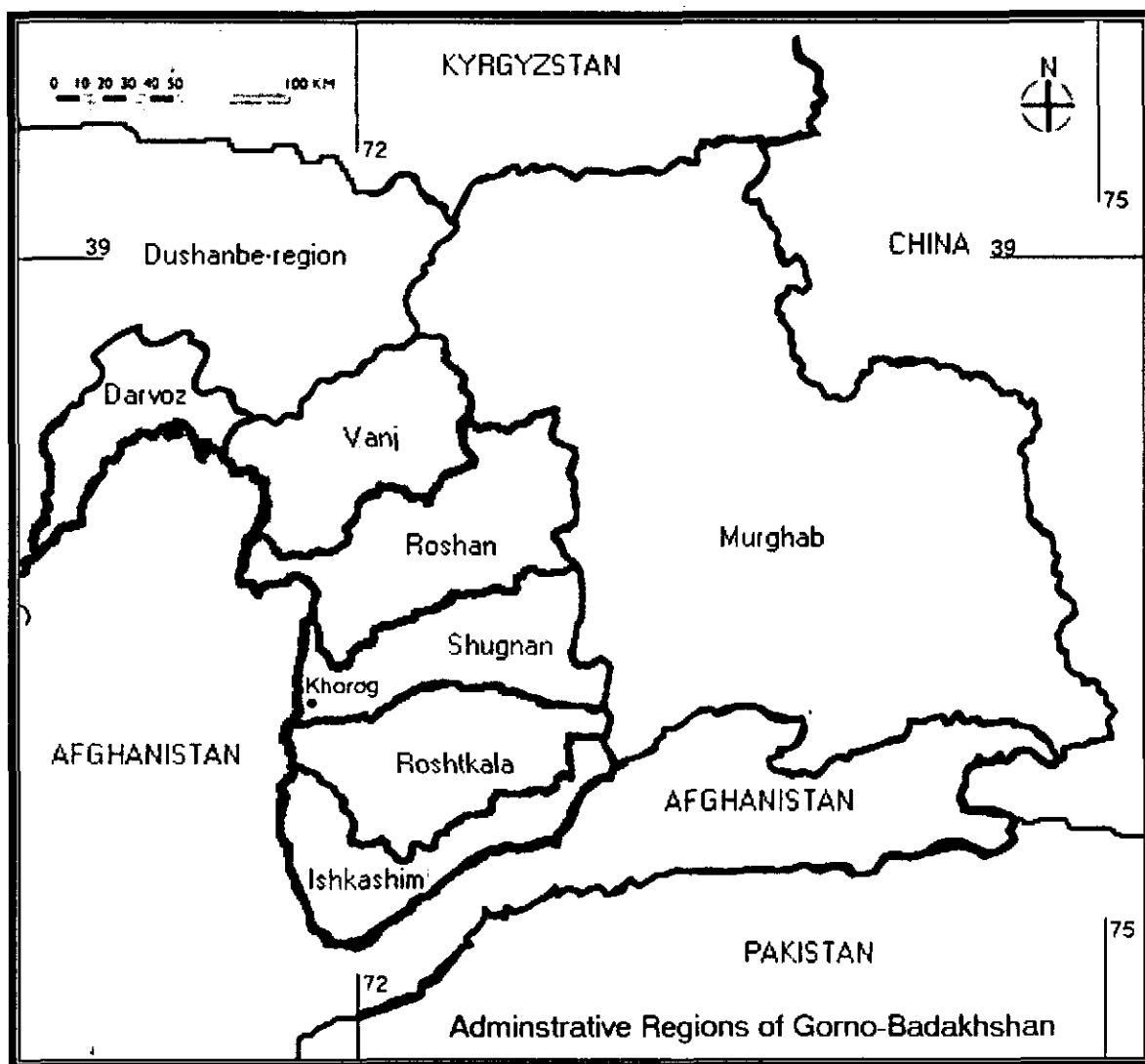


Figure 2: Map of Badakhshan

In this section, I first explain the conditions under which my research was conducted, which affected how I experienced dance and dancing in the Pamirs. Secondly, I consider the overwhelming importance of land and how it affects and reflects spiritual practice, poetic traditions, and movement. I then explain the importance of poetry and *madoh* in order to contextualize dance and artistic expression in the Pamirs; I believe a spiritual aesthetic for Badakhshani expressive art is rooted in the exemplary model of *madoh*. Next, I consider the position of dancers in Badakhshani society and the aesthetics of *rapo*, utilizing the perspectives and reflections of Badakhshani dancers and musicians as well as my own experiences as an observer and student of Pamiri dance. Lastly, I investigate two specific dances: *Raqsi Tabaqcha*, a *rapo* dance taught to me as a performance piece, and one performance of *raqsi asp* (horse dance),¹⁷ performed in a well-known *madoh* singer's home. In conclusion, I synthesize context, dance, and poetry to determine how mysticism and sensuality are embodied in Badakhshani dance.

Research and Performance Context

I was in Badakhshan not as an independent researcher but as part of a team project (the Tajik Dance Initiative, hereafter referred to as TDI) funded by a grant through The Christensen Fund. The team consisted of four Tajiks (three of whom are from Badakhshan) and four Americans, and although we were based in Khorog, we conducted field expeditions to six of the seven regions of Badakhshan (Figure 2). Many of the Tajiks on our team expected to see “good” playing and dancing and were

¹⁷ “*Raqsi Asp*” (all capitalized) is used to refer to the specific dance discussed in this chapter, since this is considered the title of the dance piece. However, “*raqsi asp*” designates a category of dances, since many variations of “horse dance” exist.

disappointed when the performers were, by their standards, mediocre. This afforded me a close view into multiple perspectives of dance aesthetics from an audience point of view. The short-term objective of the initiative was to document dance practices, interview dancers, and interest young Tajiks in “traditional” dance; thus, the focus was on older rather than more contemporary dance forms. The long-term objective of the initiative is to establish ongoing programs to support dance and dancers and continue the development and sustainability of Tajik dance.

Our field expeditions consisted of arranged performances of music and dance in people’s homes in the different regions of Badakhshan. Usually, Uvaido Pulodov (our Khorog Logistics Consultant) would travel with one or two of us in advance to arrange a performance for the following day.

Uvaido played a central role in my research; he organized performances, acted as an impromptu interpreter, and was always willing to talk and answer questions during the long drives between regions. His background as a musician undoubtedly influenced the perspective of Badakhshani dance he presented to us. As a pilot project, it took several performances before our research team figured out the best and most efficient research methods. At the first several performances, Uvaido became the main interpreter by default, but he did not seem happy with this task; he often appeared impatient, condensed and summarized responses, or answered questions himself that were directed to performers. After we discussed translation issues with him, we came up with an alternate system; after each performance, our team split up into four groups consisting of one Tajik and one American team member, who would each interview and videotape a musician or dancer. Nonetheless, Uvaido’s biases and influences certainly affected my perspective of

Badakhshani dance. Not only was he effectively my “main informant”; he also became a good friend, one whose opinion I respect.

The musicians and dancers at these performances were usually well known within their community for their talent, and they, along with Uvaido, were very invested in showing us a “good performance.” Except for two weddings I attended, I did not see “naturally” occurring dance performances. Rather, I saw carefully constructed concerts designed to showcase Badakhshani regional identity through music and dance. The location was invariably a traditional Pamiri home (Figure 3).

Traditional Pamiri houses are imbued with esoteric meanings. We heard many different versions of the spiritual elements embedded in each pillar, platform, and beam, ranging from associations with pre-Zoroastrian shamanism to Zoroastrianism to Islam. The main room of a Pamiri house contains five pillars, four platforms of increasing height, and a skylight surrounded by concentric squares (Figures 4 and 5). There are also a set number of cross beams and roof beams that compose the ceiling. Every number has esoteric significance: the five pillars signify either five angels of Zoroaster or Ali, Fatima, their two sons Hussein and Hassan, and Mohammed; the four platforms are said to relate to the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water (in that order of ascendancy); the square skylight is representative of the four angels of God in the Islamic tradition. These are but a few examples of the mystical significance of these homes. In addition, Nasser Khusraw, an Ismaili poet and philosopher of the eleventh century, is sometimes credited with inventing these ingenious houses that are rumored to be earthquake-proof and are cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Like everything else originating in the intense landscape (including music and dance), the homes reflect the influence of the

environment. Made from stones and earth and built to insulate from the elements, homes of this sort are found on both sides of the border, in Afghani Badakhshan and Tajiki Badakhshan. Nearly all of the dancing that we saw took place on the central floor between the platforms (Figures 6, 7, and 8).



Figure 3: Exterior view of a traditional Pamiri home, August 2006



Figure 4: Skylight in a traditional Pamiri home



Figure 5: Interior of a traditional Pamiri home



Figure 6: Nadir Delovarov dancing at Ali Akbar Odinamamadov's home in Roshtkala, July 27, 2006



Figure 7: Zuhro Matramova dancing in Ishkashim, August 20, 2006



Figure 8: A couple dancing in one of the oldest houses in Ishkashim, August 19, 2006

In addition to watching these arranged performances, I studied Pamiri dance with two instructors in Khorog—Mahingol Nazarshoeva and Zaragol Iskandarova. Mahingol is an actress and dancer who directs the Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan, a group that includes five female dancers, and works at the Khorog Theater and Music School. She is in her fifties. Zaragol is a retired dancer, singer, and actress in her late sixties/early seventies. Although both came to our house in Khorog to teach, I also attended and participated in some of Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan's dance rehearsals. Through interactions with my teachers and other students, I developed a perspective of Badakhshani dance aesthetics from a dancer's point of view. This perspective is based not only on my own experiences but also on the words and actions of other dancers.

Land

The landscape of Badakhshan, as previously mentioned, is impressive. Khorog's altitude is about seven thousand feet, and mountains tower on all sides, reaching even higher. All of Badakhshan is either mountains, high steppe, or nestled valleys like Khorog; everywhere there are mountains and everywhere there is water in the form of lakes, rivers, streams, waterfalls, or snow. The land of Badakhshan is life-giving and life-taking. It provides clean water, land for farming and grazing, stones and earth for building, minerals, and gems. It is prone to rock slides, avalanches, and steady erosion. Winter snows and spring rains limit transportation into and out of the region. It is isolated from the rest of the world and is high above it; a common English epithet for the Pamirs is "the roof of the world." When one is discussing Badakhshan, it is impossible to not discuss the land of Badakhshan. The land is indirectly related to the body and the senses both through everyday interactions with the landscape and, in at least one particular case, through poetic imagery in which the land transforms into a beautiful and charming girl. Naturally occurring formations, revered as shrines with spiritual power, directly associate specific sites with mysticism. Land, then, is both mystical and sensual, and influences all aspects of life in Badakhshan, including dance and other artistic expressions. (See Figures 9 and 10.)



Figure 9: Bartang Valley, August 2006



Figure 10: Ghund Valley, August 2006

Badakhshan's landscape is dominated by mountains. In many religions, mountains have been connected with spiritual power and mystical symbolism. Moses went up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. The home of the Greek pantheon was high on Mount Olympus. The stereotypical wise guru lives high on the mountain. In Bali, the mountains are associated with gods and the sea with demons. Many more examples attest to the spiritual significance of towering mountains that reach towards the heavens. A Badakhshani friend commented that every time he comes to Badakhshan, he must first take some time alone on the mountain; "It is such a spiritual place, you know, I just want to be alone and to think, then maybe after some time I can talk to people" (Samandar Pulodov, personal communication, August 25, 2006).

Badakhshan is also particularly well known for its abundance of shrines (*mazar*), specific sacred sites associated with mystical personages (Sufis) or spiritual power. People travel to these sites to pray for specific things or simply to increase their *baraka* ("abundance" or "blessing," with a spiritual connotation). According to Jo-Ann Gross, who recently conducted research in Tajikistan:

First, the presence of shrines, some of which pre-date Islam, was and continues to be an important feature of the urban and local landscape of Tajikistan. Pilgrimage is common outside the capital of Dushanbe. Although Soviet policy dramatically interrupted the communal and religious life embodied in shrine culture, caused the complete dissolution of Sufi leadership and communities, and in some cases destroyed the shrines themselves, shrines dot the landscape of Tajikistan. (2004, 3)

Shrines are usually directly connected to the land. Not simply a structure built on top of the earth, they are a feature of the earth itself that is believed to hold spiritual power.

In addition to being connected with spiritual powers and mysticism, the land is something visceral, something that one can feel and see and smell. Thus, it is of the senses. Tajik language poetry may refer to land in mystical and spiritual tones, but land may also symbolize earthly love and sensuality. In the following poem, to which the dance *Raqsi Tabaqcha* is set, the land of Badakhshan is transformed into the body of a beautiful girl. (Refer to Appendix A for a transcription in Tajik):

Oh, Badakhshan, mountainous land
So pleasant your climate, your waterfalls
We are all like children,
Happy, because of our dear, dear land
Dear, to search for you, I went to the Pamir Mountains
The mountains, connected, were like a chain
On their summits, the weather was good
The blue sky embraced us
Height picturesque you have, hey charmer, you brought me happiness
Eyebrows black you have, hey charmer, you brought me happiness
Hey, charmer, careless, one day you appeared
In my eyes, you are like the moon, hey charmer, you brought me happiness
I found myself far from home, your love became medicine for my heart
With this poem, said Shofitur, “charmer, you brought me happiness.”

Although the poem begins as an ode to the land of Badakhshan, it ends as an ode to a charming girl. Nasiba Imomnazarova, who helped me translate the poem, explained that the term “charmer” (*dilbar*)¹⁸ usually refers to a beautiful girl. The height and eyebrows, features of the body, are singled out for comment. In this particular poem, then, the land is linked to a sensual body.

Moving through the landscape

Although it is possible to learn the movements of Badakhshani dance in Dushanbe or other places, I feel I have gained a much deeper appreciation and understanding by learning Badakhshani dance in Badakhshan; I have a sensory memory of the land. When I dance *rapo*, I have in mind an image of towering, austere, and protective mountains reaching towards the heavens, and clear, turquoise streams twisting down through green fields. I remember what it felt like to walk and move in that landscape, and I believe the experience of moving in that unique environment lends a special quality of movement to Badakhshani dance. I conducted several intentional explorations of the environment while in Badakhshan with the purpose of determining how the unique landscape affected everyday movement styles.

After seeing a performance in Bartang Valley, I walked towards the river with several others until we came to a footbridge leading to the other side. Footbridges are a common part of the environment throughout Badakhshan since there are many rivers to

¹⁸ *Dilbar* is also translated as “sweetheart” or “beloved.” It literally translates as “one who has taken the heart.” In this poem, I have chosen to use “charmer,” since this is the way several Badakhshani friends suggested to translate it and because it was written by a Badakhshani poet (i.e. perhaps in Badakhshan, the English connotations of “charmer” are more appropriate). However, in poems written by ethnic Tajik or Iranian poets, *dilbar* is often translated as “beloved.”

cross. Some are very tenuously constructed, and they may or may not have a “handrail;” usually simply a rope strung at waist level, sometimes lower. This one was relatively sturdy, wide, and well constructed with a handrail. As we walked across, the whole bridge began to sway from side to side. Robyn¹⁹ commented on how when the Bartangi women walk across it, the bridge does not move. When Robyn and her husband walked across it earlier, a local woman waited for them to finish crossing and the bridge to stop swaying, and then she went across it with ease; the bridge did not sway at all. I decided I must try to figure out how to cross the bridge without causing it to sway from side to side; I began to experiment with walking styles. I found that if I thought of my center of weight as a tray that must be carefully carried, I could cross the bridge without causing it to sway. I did not sink into my feet nor relax into my hip sockets; I carried my weight forward on a steady trajectory, as if it were suspended in the center of my body, floating above the bridge and not affecting it.

The following morning, I got another lesson in moving through the landscape. Robyn, her husband, Andy (my fiancé), and I decided to hike up the mountainside and explore the caves we had been eyeing (Figure 11). They appeared to be close, but the hike was very steep and tenuous. Rocks and sand slipped away from beneath our feet, and it was very difficult to get a stable grip. Andy did reach the top, after much difficulty, but I realized I was going to have to give up, and I started descending very carefully, keeping my weight very low to the ground in order to avoid tumbling down the mountainside. Robyn’s husband also decided to descend and slid the whole way down

¹⁹ Robyn Friend is associate director of the Tajik Dance Initiative and director of the Institute of Persian Performing Arts (Los Angeles, CA). She holds a doctorate in Iranian languages, is an independent dance researcher and scholar, and is a well-known performer and instructor of Iranian dance.

on his backside. By this time, we had attracted an audience; everyone wanted to see what the crazy foreigners were doing! Suddenly, a dozen or so children started scrambling up the mountainside. I was amazed. They simply skittered up the side, without any apparent difficulty, and caught up with Andy in a fraction of the time it took him to get to that height. A young girl gripped Robyn's hand and helped her down, while Durдона, our hostess, came to retrieve me. I didn't think I needed help, as I was carefully picking my way safely down on my own. However, Durдона showed me a new way to descend; we simply walked down the mountain. No, the path was not stable. Rocks and dirt slid from beneath us. The ground was literally moving beneath us as we casually walked on top of the moving pile of earth and stones.



Figure 11: The hillside we attempted to climb in Bartang Valley, August 2006

In Ishkashim I also noticed the quality of movement needed to negotiate the mountainous, rocky, stream-filled landscape. I watched a woman navigating the many streambeds and spongy earth and her steps, as well, seemed spongy. She leapt from one side of a stream to another, sometimes landing on unstable rocks. She never let her weight sink into the earth; her use of weight was also spongy or springy. If she stepped on an unstable rock, she simply leapt to another. The instability of the landscape did not hinder her movement in any way. It appeared that she did not rely on the earth alone to hold her up, by allowing her body weight to sink into it with each step. Instead, by keeping herself in constant motion, by not relaxing into each step, she relied on her ability to dexterously control her weight placement.

I realized the use of the body's weight is crucial. To cross the footbridge, the center of weight needed to be carefully stabilized above the earth on a constant trajectory forward. To descend the mountain, it also needed to be stabilized, as if hovering down the mountainside rather than sinking into it. When jumping over small streams and landing on spongy earth, it needed to be dexterously controlled and kept in motion. These everyday movement qualities can also be found in Badakhshani dance, particularly in women's dancing, which rolls above the ground, like water flowing. In every way, Badakhshanis are dependent on the rhythms of their environment; the short growing season dictates the cycle of agricultural work just as the landscape requires certain qualities of movement that are reflected in dance.

Poetry and Music

Tajik-language poetry is widely found in Badakhshan and is used in both devotional and non-devotional music. At the first performance I attended in Badakhshan, I was told that *madoh* (devotional music) is always sung in Tajik language because it is based on the poetry of Shamsi Tabriz, Hafiz, Khusraw, and other poet-philosopher-mystics who wrote in the Tajik (Persian) language.²⁰ Dance music (non-devotional music), on the other hand, may be sung in local colloquial languages. Dance music may also be set to the Tajik poetry of these same poet-philosopher-mystics, as long as the content of the poem is about love rather than God. I asked, “Is there ever dance to *madoh*?” “No!” was the response from more than a few voices.²¹ I was informed that when *madoh* is playing, you should listen to the poetry, which are prayers, and focus on God. How then, I wondered, do the singers decide what poetry is about God and what poetry is about love? As Thackston states, the great Persian poets “imbued every word with mystical signification. . . . Of course, some poets wrote poetry that is overtly and unmistakably mystical and ‘Sufi.’ It is much more difficult to identify poetry that is not mystical” (2000, xi). The object of love and affection in poetry, the beloved, may refer to God even as the poet seems to describe an earthly lover. Although I never came to any definite conclusion, I was led to believe the meaning of the poetry is either set by

²⁰ Some accomplished *madoh* singers also compose their own poetry and, following the tradition of the great masters, compose it in Tajik language.

²¹ Sharlyn Sawyer, director of the Tajik Dance Initiative, and Robyn Friend, associate director, are certain they saw a dance performance to *madoh* while they were in Badakhshan during the summer of 2005. In my opinion, they likely saw a funeral dance performed to music very similar to *madoh* in rhythm and structure, but not usually identified by Badakhshani as *madoh*. However, their identification of this music as *madoh* is based on the statement of a Badakhshani who informed them they were watching dance to *madoh*. This confusion attests to the fluidity of categories and terminology in Badakhshan. I have based my opinion (that there is not dance to *madoh*) on Koen’s dissertation, which focuses on *madoh* (2003b), as well as on the invariable “no” answer of every Badakhshani to whom I asked, “Is there ever dance to *madoh*?”

tradition—for example everyone knows one poem can be used for *madoh* and another for dance—or interpreted by the *madoh* singers, who are also considered spiritual teachers and leaders. In the thirteen performances I witnessed, *madoh* singers were clearly the authority figures and sang both *madoh* and music for dance. Because *madoh* singers are the primary interpreters and singers of poetry, including poetry used for dance songs, their identity, especially their role as spiritual leaders, needs further elaboration. Many of the dance performances I saw in Badakhshan took place in the homes of *madoh* singers, and their spiritual presences often created a reverent performance atmosphere.

***Madoh* singers as mystics and Sufis**

Sufism is a very broad category, widely defined as mystical Islam since the goal is communication and union with the divine. Many different branches exist throughout the Islamic world. In most cases, people belong to specific brotherhoods that trace lineage to a specific individual and follow a particular practice and philosophy. These brotherhoods often hold weekly gatherings where they perform *zikr* (recitation of the name of God, silently or aloud, with movement or without) or *sama'* (whirling ceremony, as in the Mevlevi order) or another form of worship. Two Sufi orders have historically been common in Tajikistan, the Naqshbandiyya and the Qadiriyya, but based on my limited interactions, Sufism is generally thought of as a kind of vague esotericism or mysticism, and *madoh* singers are generally thought of as Sufis, a term generically applied to all Islamic mystics.²²

²² Arabov notes the blending of orthodox Islam and Sufism in Tajikistan; many Tajiks may not know quite how to describe or identify Sufism, even as aspects of it are blended into their everyday religious practice (2004). Throughout Tajikistan, Sufism is a part of popular Islam.

¹ We visited a small museum in Ishkashim dedicated to the “Sufi” Mubarakkadem, a nineteenth-century philosopher, astronomer, mystic, and *madoh* singer. One of his descendents gave us a tour of the museum and we asked him, “What makes a Sufi a Sufi?” Uvaido translated and added his own summary: “Basically, it is about asceticism” (personal communication, August 19, 2006). When we asked Mubarakkadem’s descendant if he considered himself a Sufi or if there were other Sufis in his family, he replied no, they cannot become Sufis because they look to women, drink alcohol, and are not always and only focused on God. There was no mention of brotherhoods, weekly meetings, *sama*, or *zikr*, the elements usually associated with Sufi orders. Significantly, Mubarakkadem played *rubob* (the main instrument of *madoh*, a five-string lute) and sang *madoh*; the ability to play *rubob* and sing *madoh* is perhaps the most common feature of a mystic in Badakhshan.

Uvaido often equated *madoh* singers with Sufis and considered them very knowledgeable in matters of religion. He stated, “What is a Sufi? This man plays *madoh* all day, he knows many things, you will see, he is like Sufi. You can just ask him anything” (personal communication, July 31, 2006). After several expeditions, as we approached another *madoh* singer’s home, he said, “Now, this man, you know, he is very great. He knows everything, you know, not just music, not just singing, he knows everything about religion, about life, about God” (personal communication, August 4, 2006). When two of our team members returned to interview the *madoh* singer Sultonazar Saidnazarov, a *khalifa* (spiritual advisor/leader) was also there and the two of them were engrossed in intellectual debates on religion. It was clear that each respected the other as a spiritual authority.

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However, *madoh* singers in Badakhshan also sing other types of music. Although they are usually acclaimed as “*madoh* singers,” at every performance we attended, they sang both *madoh* and songs for dance—both poetry about God and poetry about love. Sultonazar remarked that sometimes he doesn’t sleep for three days in a row because he plays at funerals every night and at weddings every day (personal communication, August 22, 2006). Badakhshani funerals (*davat*) are accompanied by nightlong *madoh* sessions, while weddings are generally accompanied by dance music.

***Madoh* as a basis for spiritual aesthetics**

After the first few field expeditions, I asked Uvaido why *madoh* was always included in the performances we saw, since there is no dance to it and our research was about dance. He looked at me, completely incredulous: “It is the most common music in Badakhshan and it is our real Badakhshani music” (personal communication August 18, 2006). *Madoh* is so strongly associated with Badakhshani identity that, for Uvaido, it would be impossible to present a performance without it.

Because of the importance of *madoh* and its strong association with Badakhshani identity, I believe it is a model on which other Badakhshani arts are based. The most important characteristic of *madoh* is its function as devotional music; its primary aesthetic is a spiritual one. As Koen notes:

Broadly speaking, the aesthetic quality of devotional music can be viewed as being dependent upon its ability to create a rarified, altered state of consciousness in performers and listeners—whether it is a prayerful, meditative, *trance*, *trance-like*, or ecstatic state. (2003a, 77)

This correlates with the repeated comments I heard from *madoh* singers and listeners; when *madoh* is being played, one should listen to the words and think of God. In addition, the best *madoh* players are those who create a special atmosphere conducive to spiritual reflection or emotional pacification. Koen's dissertation explores the healing aspects of *madoh* and its ability to induce emotionally or spiritually ecstatic or cathartic states (2003b). Our research crew often talked about the performance we witnessed at Sultonazar's home in Ghund Valley and compared it to others. According to a majority of our team, this was one of the "best" shows because of the special environment created by Sultonazar's powerful spiritual presence and the emotional purification many of us felt after the performance. It is his role as a *madoh* singer that gives him the ability and responsibility to create a rarefied atmosphere conducive to catharsis.

The spiritual aesthetic of *madoh*, then, is dependent on its ability to transport performers and audience to a spiritual, mystical, or emotionally ecstatic or cathartic state. Although foundationally a spiritual aesthetic, because it is based in devotional music and spiritual reflection, this aesthetic can also be considered mystical and emotional for it may also lead to mystical and emotional states. The effect of *madoh* may be mystical, linking the listener to God or an alternate reality. The effect of *madoh* may be emotional, resulting in a peaceful or ecstatic emotional state. These spiritual, mystical, or emotional states are sensually induced via the sense of sound—by voice and music.

Dance in Badakhshan aims for a similar aesthetic by using the sense of sight as well as the kinesthetic sense to contribute to a spiritual, mystical, or emotionally transformative state in both performers and audience. The aesthetics of *rapo* are

discussed in further detail below, where I will return to this idea of a spiritual-mystical-emotional aesthetic based on the model of *madoh*.

Dance in Badakhshan

Propped against a wall and a cushion, I am soft, introspective, lulled to a state of extreme relaxation by the soothing sounds of the *rubob* and *setar*, Badakhshani lutes. The powerful voice of the *madoh* singer stirs me, every syllable carries weight, length, importance, and I strain to catch the meaning of the words. I feel like I am being carried through rapids and torrents, then emerging again to the calm wide space in a lazy river, over and over again, following the rising and falling of the steady current. After a timeless eternity, the song crescendos and ends with a chorus of voices, “Eh . . .” The music begins again, the drums join in right away, everyone sits a bit straighter, wakes up a little . . . it is a dance song. A young woman and a young man casually circle the small floor space available to them, greeting us with an internal smile. They are calm; they follow gently the reverent atmosphere left by *madoh*, softly rolling around one another. The young woman is so smooth; watching her is like following the motions of a kite blown by a steady, gentle wind. She never stops moving and, although her movements are neither virtuosic nor acrobatic, I cannot take my eyes off her. She seems the incarnation of grace. If I could trace the figures she makes with her arms, hands, the path of her steps, what a beautiful arabesque it would make, symmetrical, flowing, circular, like the designs of Persian calligraphy. I tear my gaze away to watch the young man. He is obviously delighted to be entertaining us, and his wide grin is infectious. He slides his head from side-to-side, making eye contact with me, then juts his chin forward and back

a few times, like a pigeon, and quickly spins away. He is showing off, flirting with everyone. Every now and then, he approaches the young woman, slips his arm behind her back, dances next to her for a moment, looking at her intently, trying to catch her eye, and then spins away to again engage us, his audience, his guests. In contrast to his energetic and charming manner, the young woman is so demure, so softly understated. The tempo of the song increases, the singing seems louder, and the dancers start to spin faster and faster. The energy is infectious; everyone begins to clap along with the music, and some people begin to sing along as well. This time I feel I am swimming through the rapids myself, my heart is racing, the bodies spinning in front of me are whirlpools and I am being sucked in, my soul is soaring. Everyone's eyes are on the dancers, including the musicians, and the longer we watch, the faster they whirl. It seems that no one wants the song to end; it continues on and on at this same high level, everyone blissfully drowned in a timeless moment. At last, the music and dance end naturally, the sounds of the music rolling out of the room with the dancers, as if rolling off the edge of a long waterfall. We, too, are carried over the edge and into the open air.

Dance is very popular in Badakhshan (as well as the rest of Tajikistan) and can be found at weddings, circumcisions, birthday parties, even funerals, as well as on concert stages. Men and women often dance together, but usually without physical contact. Most Badakhshanis experience dance in the context of weddings and parties, where it is usually an interactive social activity rather than a presentation; people actively dance at, to, with, or towards one another with the purpose of interacting in a playful manner.

Although I saw dancing at two Badakhshani weddings, I mostly observed dancing via arranged performances in people's homes, invariably traditional Pamiri houses, or during the course of a dance lesson where I was being trained in the manner of a professional dancer. My experience of Badakhshani dance was heavily biased towards a presentational format because of my position as a dance student and a foreigner. In my position as a student of dance, I studied presentational dance or participated in the dance rehearsals of a professional company. In my position as an outsider and a guest, my hosts wanted to entertain and showcase Badakhshani cultural identity through music and dance.

About half of the dancing I saw in people's homes was performed by "professional" dancers who worked through state-sponsored "Culture Houses" (discussed below). The other half was performed by well-known "good" dancers within the community or musicians' family members and neighbors. The professional dancers and musicians often wore historical costumes, which varied slightly from region to region within Badakhshan (see Figures 6 and 7), while the good dancers wore everyday dress (see Figure 8). All dancers wore something on their feet, usually socks, as the floors of Pamiri homes were often cold, and shoes were not normally worn inside. Professional female dancers often wore colorful wool socks, while professional male dancers sometimes wore soft leather boots. The attitude was usually rather informal, one of a host entertaining his guests. We were always expected to eat a meal with the family, an event which seemed to establish a host-guest relationship. The performance nearly always culminated in an interactive dance event where everyone took turns dancing, including members of our research team. Perhaps because of the low status associated with professionalism, dance was often presented to us in this way, as a gift of entertainment

from host to guest, rather than as a formal event (although it was still in a presentational format).

The status of professional dancers

Despite the extent to which Badakhshanis enjoy dancing, the occupation of a professional dancer is one of low status. As one professional Badakhshani dancer stated, “People don’t want to be dancers. Our people say to be a dancer is a bad thing” (Tahmina Fayzakova, personal communication, August 11, 2006). In addition, both Mahingol and Zaragol identified themselves, firstly, as actresses, although they were better known in their community as dancers. In many areas of the world, professional dancers have a very low status in society, even if they occupy important roles within the culture. In Badakhshan, one explanation for this attitude is economic; another explanation relates to the historical associations of dance with sexuality and low status.

Throughout Badakhshan, professional musicians and dancers are given a meager salary by the state to work through “Culture Houses,” small theaters situated in each region or district. They are often used as “cultural ambassadors” by the local and federal government, and their music and dance performances represent the cultural traditions of their particular region (usually one of the valleys of Badakhshan). Their monthly salary is under ten U.S. dollars, not enough to buy even a pair of shoes. Most Badakhshanis, including musicians and dancers, grow crops, keep animals, and are almost self-subsistent. Yet, they still need money for items they are not able to produce for themselves, and this meager income is not enough. Many musicians supplement their salaries by performing at weddings, birthdays, circumcision parties, or other occasions.

Dancers are rarely hired for these parties, however, since these are occasions when dance is usually interactive rather than presentational. Thus, dancers are even one step lower than musicians, who are already low on the socio-economic scale. The condition of belonging to a low socio-economic class is associated with a bad reputation and a low status. As one professional dancer stated, “Here people in organizations are looked at as good people, but not dancers, because it is not a profession that makes money” (Atrigol Akramjonova, personal communication, August 11, 2006).

Another reason for viewing dancers as low class could have to do with the historic associations of professional dancers with sexual promiscuity and low status. In the past in Central Asia, young boys (*bacha bazi*) or Jewish girls and women (*sazanda*) were usually the only professional dancers. The young boys were used as sexual playthings, as the term *bacha bazi* implies; it translates literally as “boy play,” “boy toy,” or “boy game.” Jewish women and girls performed in the homes of the urban wealthy or in the courts of the Emirs. Jewish women were not put under the same social constraints as Muslim women, but they were considered lower status and less virtuous than Muslim women by the Muslim majority. A respectable Muslim woman should hide the sensuality of her body by dressing modestly and covering her hair, bosom, and adornments. This admonishment is based on a verse of the Quran:

And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward; and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers . . . [or their sons, brothers, women, etc.]; nor let them stamp their feet, so that their hidden ornament may be known. (24:31)

Thus, a respectable woman, according to a traditional Muslim perspective, should not willingly display her body to the gaze of strange men, let alone dance in public (Adra 2005; Shay 1999).²³ This stems from the idea that women are dangerously sensually alluring and should therefore modestly downplay their enchanting sexuality rather than openly displaying it (see Ahmed 1992; Mernissi 1987 and 1991; Stowasser 1994).

Throughout the history of the Islamic Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, music and dance have been performed as expressions of popular culture and sometimes even incorporated into religious practice. However, the lawfulness of music and dance has been disputed by religious and political authorities, usually because of their association with sensuality. The questionable legality of dance may help to explain why professional entertainers often occupied a lower status in society and were associated with sensuality and sexuality. At different times, religious and political authorities have outlawed music and dance, allowed only men to perform in public, or employed scores of dancers and musicians, both men and women, to work as entertainers in the courts. In addition, different Sufi orders have either incorporated music and dance into spiritual practice or discouraged them as distractions from the spiritual path. In the opinion of al-Ghazali, a prominent and influential theologian of the eleventh century:

The effect of music and dancing is deeper in proportion as the natures on which they act are simple and prone to emotion; they fan into a flame whatever love is already dormant in the heart, whether it be earthly and sensual, or divine and spiritual. . . . Therefore if a man has in his heart that love to God which the law enjoins, it is perfectly lawful, nay, laudable in him to take part in exercises which

²³ Cowan (1990) has documented a similar attitude in (non-Muslim) Greece.

promote it. On the other hand, if his heart is full of sensual desires, music and dancing will only increase them and are therefore unlawful to him. While, if he listens to them merely as a matter of amusement, they are neither lawful nor unlawful, but indifferent. (al-Ghazali, as translated by Field, 1991, 57-58)

Even this one opinion contains varying interpretations of the legality of music and dance, depending on the context and intention of the dancer or observer. Thus, the diverse interpretations of dance as a sinful, versus an enjoyable, secular entertainment or a path towards, versus a distraction from, spiritual enlightenment is reflected in people's ambiguous and divergent opinions of dancers. Dancers embody a practice that is varyingly lawful, unlawful, sensual, and spiritual—as a contested practice, its practitioners were often from the marginalized classes. (For a more thorough discussion of dance in the Islamic Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, its ambiguous status in Islamic jurisprudence, and resulting attitudes towards dance and dancers, see Shay 2005b.)

Badakhshan today is by no means a bastion of orthodox Islam; Ismai'ili Muslims are generally viewed as very syncretic, and devotional music is a dominant feature of their spiritual practice.²⁴ Nonetheless, professional female dancers in Badakhshan still encounter stigmas associated with their profession. One young female professional dancer complained, "With our profession, no one likes to marry us" (Atrigol Akramjonova, personal communication, August 11, 2006). This is likely due to the historically based assumption that a professional dancer is a morally vacuous woman who

²⁴ Because Ismai'ilis are more accepting of music than other branches of Islam, they may also be more accepting of dance; a more thorough investigation of this aspect of Ismai'ili jurisprudence and its historical implications is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in Dushanbe, which is mostly Sunni, people seemed equally accepting of dance as an expression of Tajik culture.

would not make a respectable wife. The daughter of a *madoh* singer complained to us that her father did not let her, her sister, or her mother dance, sing, nor wear Western dress. Nonetheless, he was happy to play and sing dance songs at weddings and in his home for our research team, right alongside *madoh*, and his niece danced for us. The members of our research team all agreed that he was concerned with maintaining the respectability of his daughters and wife and, in turn, himself, especially since he was viewed as a spiritual leader within his community. Within Tajik culture (and many other Islamic cultures), a man's respectability is based on the modesty and honor of his daughters and wife. A *madoh* singer, respected as a spiritual leader within his community, may take extra care to ensure that no one could say that his daughters or wife were participating in any kind of questionable activity.

Thus, new state-sponsored professional dancers are contending with centuries-old stereotypes and judgments. People's attitudes towards professional dancers are based in either ideas of past eras or in the lack of money garnered from the profession. However, it is not the act of dancing that is seen as questionable, today, but rather the type of person who historically performed for a public audience.

A gift from God—The role and healing function of dance

Despite the low status of professional dancers, the role of dance and dancers in Badakhshan is not viewed negatively. Dance, like *madoh*, is attributed with spiritually and emotionally healing functions and the talent to dance is seen as a gift from God. Many professional dancers and musicians in Badakhshan referred to the inescapability of their profession; they did not choose dance or music, God gave it to them:

Dance was given to me as a gift from God. (Mahingol Nazarshoeva, personal communication, August 11, 2006)

You know, everyone has his own opinion about art and of course just God gives it to the person. I am an artist, another one is a carpenter, and another one is a driver and each talent is given by God and he finds interest for his job.

(Tohirkhon Odinabekov, personal communication, August 20, 2006)

One time, there were many people and they pushed me and said do *zarb* [hit the rhythm] and they said you have a good talent to dance. One woman showed us dance and looked at me and said you have talent. Then I went everyday to dance and it wasn't my wish to be a dancer. (Atrigol Akramjonova, personal communication, August 11, 2006)

The general attitude is that although you can train and better yourself, you are always left with the fate God has decreed for you. There was a similar attitude amongst the dancers of the Khorog-based Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan (Mahingol's students); they accepted that each of them had their own talent to contribute to the ensemble. As one of them stated, "We don't have any envy between us. . . . You know one dancer can do this movement and another dancer can do another movement. Every dancer is good at different movements" (Tahmina Fayzakova, personal communication, August 11, 2006). Every talent is God-given, whether it is to dance, to play music, or to work with wood. Thus, every activity can be imbued with spiritual significance, including dance.

When asked what their life would be like without music or dance, many performers alluded to the healing or emotionally cathartic aspects of music and dance:

“We have many problems but if we don’t dance and play music, it will be worse.

(Ali Akbar Odinamamadov, personal communication, July 31, 2006)

[Without dance] my heart would shrink²⁵ and I will feel myself uncomfortable.

(Odinamo Mubashirova, personal communication, August 20, 2006)

If you hear music, you will be peaceful. Without music, the heart of man shrinks.

(Shamsriddin Rahmazonov, personal communication, August 29, 2006)

If sometimes I feel myself bad, I put the music on and with my dances I can spend this time. (Atrigol Akramjonova, personal communication, August 11, 2006)

Koen devoted a dissertation to exploring the healing aspects of *madoh* (2003b), but research on the therapeutic power of dance in Badakhshan remains to be done. What can be inferred from the above comments, however, is that dance and music together provide an emotional, psychological, or spiritual release from everyday problems—at least according to musicians and dancers.

Types of dance

The most often-heard term relating to dance in Badakhshan is “*rapo*,” which is actually the name of a 2/4 rhythm²⁶ to which dance is usually performed. In Badakhshan, *rapo* is usually used as an umbrella term for a variety of Badakhshani dances, and I use the term in a similar way. These dances share a broad set of aesthetics and movement characteristics and are performed to the *rapo* rhythm. In the simplest and most generic

²⁵ In the Tajik language, the expression “the heart shrinks” is used in a similar way as “to miss” is used in English. If one longs for or misses something, it means the heart has shrunk.

²⁶ This is the Tajik-language name for this rhythm; in Shugni language, this rhythm is called *rostow*. However, *rapo* is the name heard most often, especially in relation to dance music.

terms: “Badakhshani dance” is a broad and all-inclusive category; “*rapo*” is a category defined by rhythm that includes most, but not all, Badakhshani dance; and there are specific named dances that may or may not be considered “*rapo*,” depending on the accompanying rhythm. The concept of categorizing dances into genres and types is foreign to Badakhshan. Most people either use the term “*rapo*” or else call a dance by its specific name. When dances are specifically named, the term *raqs* is used, the Arabic term for “dance.” Specific dances are named after props utilized in the dance, such as *raqsi kuza* (jug dance) or *raqsi qoshuk* (spoon dance). Dances are also named for animals or people represented or imitated by the dance, such as *raqsi chupone* (shepard dance), *raqsi asp* (horse dance), or *raqsi oqob* (eagle dance). Finally, dances may be named after regions, such as *raqsi Bartangi* (Bartang dance), *raqsi Vakhoni* (Vakhon dance), or *raqsi Roshani* (Roshan dance).

Some of the dances which do not fit into the category of “*rapo*” but are nonetheless Badakhshani dances are *raqsi poqche* (clapping/slapping dance), *raqsi semo* (sky/heaven dance), and several dances that have been created for the stage, such as *sezarb* (three rhythms) and *kish kish* (a dance with *doira*, a frame drum).²⁷ These dances are all significantly different stylistically than *rapo* and are performed to different rhythms. The majority of the following discussion concerns *rapo*, since it is the most commonly practiced kind of dance in Badakhshan, and the two dances analyzed in depth at the end of this chapter belong to this category. However, some attention needs to be given to *raqsi semo*, since it is the only dance clearly identified by Badakhshanis as “spiritual.”

²⁷ *Kish kish* was taught to me by Zaragol as a dance with frame drum created for the stage. However, it was originally a dance style performed as a “house-welcoming dance,” with or without frame drum, on the completion of a new house, and it is also the name of a particular rhythm, as is *rapo* (personal communication, Robyn Friend, March 29, 2007).

***Raqsi semo* (sky/heaven dance)²⁸**

Raqsi semo is a funerary dance originating in the region of Roshan and Bartang. Although it has spread to surrounding areas of Badakhshan, it is rare to see it outside its area of origin, and fewer and fewer people are performing it in its original context at funerals. In Bartang, the dancer Sarkori Davlatnamadov demonstrated some movements from *raqsi semo* during our interview with him. In Ghund, the *madoh* singer Sultonazar Saidnazarov and his male friend, a religious leader (*khalifa*), also discussed some of the movements and significance of this dance. In addition, our project director (Sharlyn Sawyer) witnessed and videotaped a staged performance of *raqsi semo* in Ghund Valley in August 2006, and I was able to see this videotaped version. It is on these two interviews, the videotaped performance, and a short demonstration during a dance lesson with Zaragol, that my discussion is based.

Sultonazar was directly asked if there was a dance in Badakhshan that praised God the way that *madoh* music praises God. He answered, “There is such a dance but it is not our dance. This dance, our brothers from Bartang do. Who dances this dance, he shouldn’t raise his hands above his shoulders” (personal communication, August 22, 2006). Sultonazar was contrasting the movements of *raqsi semo*, which are primarily focused and directed towards the ground or in towards the body, to other Badakhshani dances, which often express joy through light, upward and outward arm motions, or finger snaps and forearm rotations above the head. There is at least one upward moving gesture in *raqsi semo*, contrary to Sultonazar’s comment, which was demonstrated by Sarkori. This movement, however, is intended to address God, who is assumed to be

²⁸ Also called *raqsi poya mal* (foot dance) and *raqsi motam* (mourning dance).

above the earth, and the movement is sustained, somber, and weighted; the palms face the sky and the arms are extended forward and upward, the arms then drop down towards the ground, slightly to one side of the body or the other. The eyes are generally directed downward rather than outward, except in a few cases where they are directed upward, towards God. Specific meanings are associated with particular movements. When the dancer slaps her own face, it means “now I have no one in this world” (Sarkori Davlatnamadov, personal communication, August 29, 2006). When a single clap is made in front of the face of a bereaved relative, it signifies that “you stay alive and are now without your loved one” (Ibid.) or, in an alternate phrasing, “the dead have left this world” (religious leader, personal communication, August 22, 2006). When the arms lift to the sides and then wrap around the body, one to the front and one to the back, Sarkori translates the movement as signifying “everyone will die, we came from God and then we die” (personal communication, August 29, 2006). Although some movements have very specific meanings, the dance is not typically “read” in such a highly codified fashion; only philosophically minded Badakhshanis, knowledgeable in religion, music, or dance, are aware of these meanings.

Nearly every discussion of this dance form alluded to its spiritual or mystical significance. No one stated it more directly than the *khalifa* (religious leader): “When someone dies and people dance, people call it *raqsi semo* and *raqsi semo* is the sign of Sufi people” (personal communication, August 22, 2006).²⁹ Any dance performed in a funeral setting is termed *raqsi semo* and contains a similar movement vocabulary. The religious leader elaborated further on the philosophical religious meanings associated

²⁹ Further study is needed to examine the linguistic, historical, and movement similarities and differences between *raqsi semo* and *sama*’ (the whirling ceremony or “dancing” of the Mevlevi Sufi order).

with three specific arm positions: when the arms are outstretched at shoulder level, it signifies *sunnat* (tradition); when the arms are stretched towards the ground on the right side of the body, it signifies *farz* (theory, assumption); when they are directed towards the left side of the body, it signifies *vojib* (obligation). When asked what “*semo*” means, he replied “sky” and then quoted:

Mo zi boloyemu bolo merevam.

Mo zi daryoyemu daryo meravem.

(We come from high and we return to high.

We are from the river and we return to the river.)

Here, the *khalifa* suggests that the name of the dance, “*semo*” (sky), is linked to God through the land, God’s creation; the quoted passage could be interpreted, as I believe he intended, “We come from God and we return to God.”

The importance of *raqsi semo* to this study is its strong ties to mysticism. Everyone had his or her own interpretation about the spiritual significance of certain gestures, just as everyone tells a different story of the religious meanings embedded in a traditional Pamiri home. Because this dance is frequently discussed in a philosophical manner amongst religious leaders, *madoh* singers, and dancers alike, I believe *raqsi semo* is a clear example of mystical dance in Badakhshan.

Aesthetics of *Rapo*

“Aesthetics” historically defines a branch of science or philosophy that endeavors to discover the qualities or characteristics of beauty. Many scholars, however, have adapted the word more holistically to apply to what makes something “good” or what

makes it essentially belong to a certain category, i.e. what makes dance, dance, or art, art. (For examples in dance scholarship, see Giurchescu 2003; Grau 2003; Kaeppler 2003.) It is with this latter definition that I utilize the term “aesthetics.” I am interested in what makes *rapo* “*rapo*.” It is usually these same defining or essential characteristics that, when embodied fully and excellently, make a “good” *rapo*; in this sense, a series of characteristics may contribute to creating a particular aesthetic.

Because dance and music are so intertwined in Badakhshan (for example, the name “*rapo*” actually comes from a musical rhythm), I have relied on input from both dancers and musicians for discerning the aesthetics of *rapo*. Comments relating to the aesthetics of music are often echoed by those relating to dance aesthetics, and vice-versa, as the following discussion shows. Kinesthetically and visually, *rapo* is based on the characteristics of rhythm (*zarb*), spinning (*charkh*), repetition, and lateral symmetry. Many movements are also associated with coquetry or flirtation (*noz*), and a dancer is expected to be charming and sensually appealing. Philosophically, many of the components of the *rapo* aesthetic stem from concepts such as “heart,” *mast* (intoxicated, drunk), and *kaif* (extreme pleasure, ecstatic state). Not surprisingly, the *rapo* aesthetic is also influenced by the land. I believe these aesthetic components contain a mixture of sensual and spiritual attributes; both mysticism and sensuality define *rapo* dance.

Zarb, charkh, repetition, and lateral symmetry

Rapo-styled movements can be seen in both presentational and interactive social dance. The majority of the movement is in the hands, wrists, and arms. The shoulders, head, facial expressions, and upper torso play a secondary role while the feet consistently

keep time with the *zarb*, or rhythm, of the music. Spinning or turning (*charkh*) is a central feature, as well as circular and/or curvilinear motions of the arms and hands. Repetition and lateral symmetry are common in all Badakhshani dance. These characteristics of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry are not only sensually pleasing, in that they please the visual and kinesthetic senses, but they are also common characteristics of “Islamic” art, in a general sense.

Many variations of *rapo* can be found from region to region and individual to individual that nonetheless conform to this brief outline. For example, in Ishkashim, dancers may use a stepping pattern that includes three steps within every $2/4$ measure; starting with the right foot, the first step hits the first beat, the second step is quicker and comes just before the third step, which hits the second beat. During the second beat, the lower left leg kicks back and the right leg bends slightly to lower the center of weight. A slight pause follows before starting the pattern again, this time beginning with the left foot (slow, quick, slow, pause: see Figure 12). Dancers in other places of Badakhshan, however, tend to always step on the beat with the right foot, in contrast to the alternating right-left pattern in the Ishkashim variation. This is done by replacing the pause with a fourth step (slow, quick, slow, quick: see Figure 13). In addition, female dancers in most of Badakhshan (if not performing the Ishkashim step variation) tend to hold the center of weight in a constant horizontal plane (notated in Figure 13). Most importantly, in any variation, a step falls on every beat of every measure.

Men and women’s dance differs, too. Men’s steps tend to be larger, while women’s steps are very close together. Although both men and women use lower arm rotations that result in rotations of the hands, women’s wrists and fingers are usually

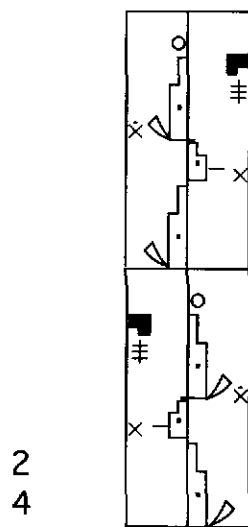


Figure 12: *Zarb*, basic footwork variation found in Ishkashim

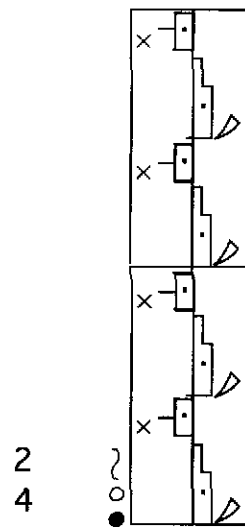


Figure 13: *Zarb*, basic footwork with right foot consistently on the beat

articulated; their wrists may fold and unfold and their fingers curve towards the palm or hyperextend away from the palm. Men's hand movements are largely a result only of the rotation of the lower arm; their wrists do not usually bend or fold so the hands are simply carried along as the lower arm rotates, causing the palm facings to change. Men's fingers sometimes curve in to a fist, and many of their movements tend to be more forceful, as they begin with strong and rapid impulses. As a woman, I learned more about the movement styles and aesthetics of women's dance, which is given the most attention in the following discussion.

After the very first performance we observed, one of our team members (Nasiba Imomnazaraova) asked, "How do we know it is Pamiri dance?" The female dancer replied, "With *zarb* (rhythm) and *charkh* (turning)" (Hava Bahriva, personal communication, July 31, 2006). As she said "*zarb*," she stomped her right foot into the

floor. *Zarb* has several translations and is used in a number of ways. It can mean “blow,” “strike,” “bump,” “drum,” “meter,” “multiplication,” “rhythm,” and it is used to refer to the rhythm of music (it has this *zarb* or that *zarb*) or, in this case, the way a dancer steps with the rhythm on the beat, or “hits the rhythm.” Although the step/stomp may produce a sound, it also may not, depending on the dancer and his or her mood; it is not the percussive stomping of many kinds of Indian dance, but more like a gentle tapping to keep time with the music. In dance lessons with Zaragol and Mahingol, both of them insisted that we always step with the right foot on the beat. It did not matter if it was a step onto the whole foot or the ball of the foot as long as it came on the beat. I witnessed this same tendency in nearly every dancer throughout Badakhshan, although a unique variation exists in Ishkashim, as explained above (Figure 12). However, if a dancer did not step with the rhythm, meaning hitting each of the two beats of the measure, it meant he or she had no *zarb* and would not be considered a good dancer.

Turns, or *charkh*, are certainly a defining feature of *rapo*. *Charkh* may translate as “turn,” “spin,” “wheel,” or “whirl.” With Mahingol’s students at the Khorog Theater, we practiced a series of exercises across the floor every day before rehearsing specific dances. At one point, Aliah Najmabadi (an American member of the research team), realized that every exercise was actually a turn of some sort or another; the focus of the exercise may seem to be on the horizontal or pulling movements of the arms, yet still there would always be a turn included in it (see Figures 14 and 15 for notated examples of two very common turns found in *rapo*). The exercises culminated in a series of turns performed on the path of a large circle. Clearly, importance was given to the ability to spin well and repeatedly. Uvaido (our performance coordinator/ logistics consultant) did

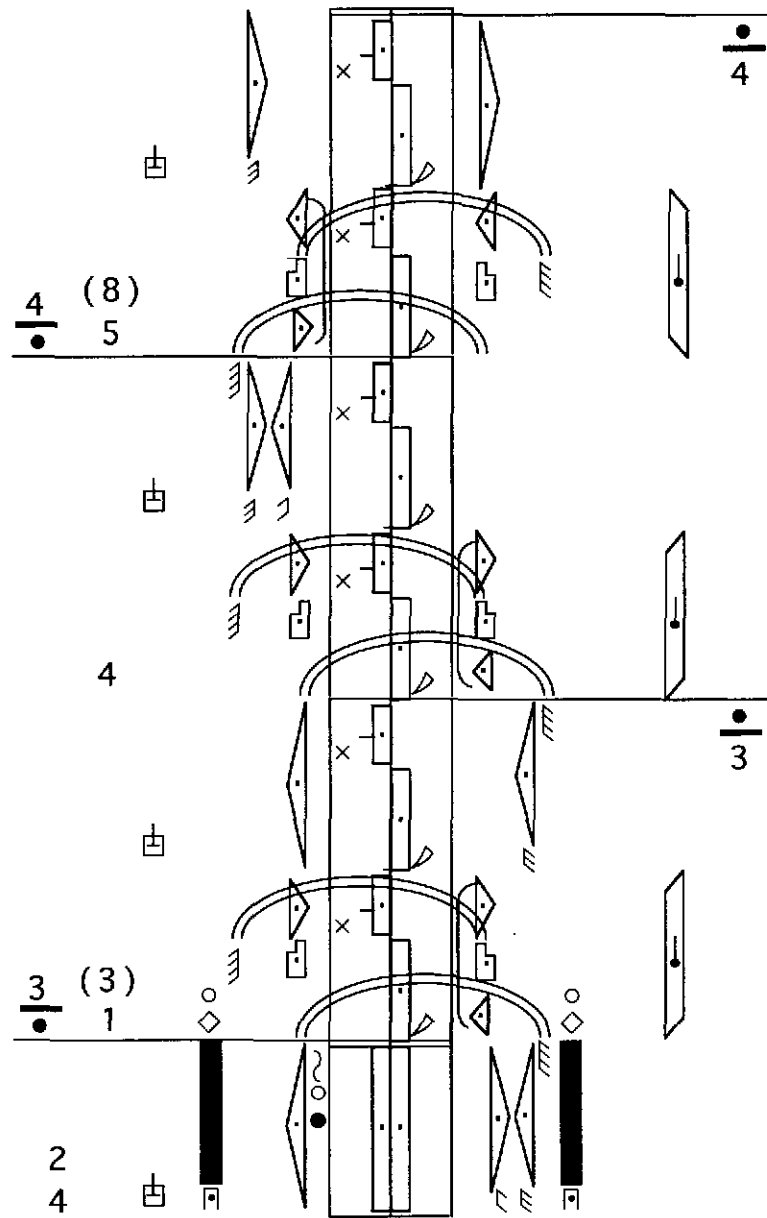


Figure 14: *Charkh*, focus is on the arms as they move in the horizontal plane; each hand slides along the length of the opposite arm for as long as the movement allows; the upper body is included in the movements of the right arm in measures 1-4 and the left arm in measures 5-8

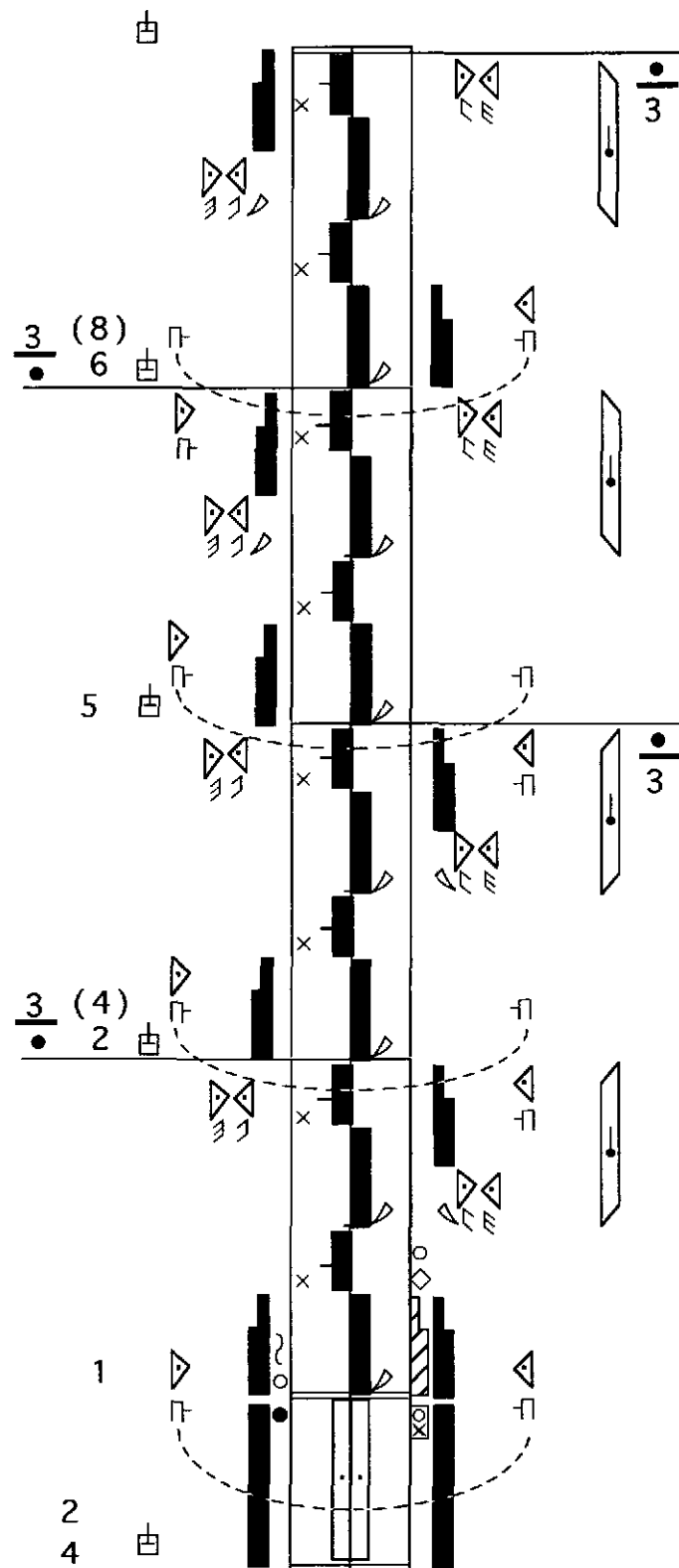


Figure 15: *Charkh*, focus is on the accented inward pulling motion of the right arm in measures 1-4 and the left arm in measures 5-8

a large, emphasized, and sustained turn every time he entered a dance floor, his arms outstretched, in order to announce his arrival. When I attended a wedding with him, every person he pointed out as a “good” dancer was someone who turned often. The more he or she turned, the better Uvaido thought he or she danced. He often told us, “You know, when you dance, you must turn. Just every three or four movements, make a turn.” Thus, *charkh* are an essential and important movement characteristic of *rapo*, contributing to its pleasing kinesthetic and visual aesthetic.

Repetition is also featured in *rapo*. It is very common to see a movement phrase repeated many times before transitioning into a new phrase. It is rare to see a single execution of a movement phrase or many different types of phrases following one another. In addition, the footwork remains nearly constant, changing only if a dancer descends to one or both knees. This repetition contributes to the maintenance of a constant rhythm; it also results from the use of sequential lateral symmetry, as movements executed on one side of the body are then repeated on the other.

Many different types of symmetry are possible in dance; symmetry may be apparent in postures and positions, movement sequences, locomotion patterns, and the use of rhythm (see Van Zile 1987). In *rapo*, lateral symmetry is prominent in the use of movement sequences, locomotion patterns, and the arrangement of dancers in choreography. By using the term “lateral symmetry,” I refer to the equal use of the space on the right and left sides of the body—but this space can be used either simultaneously or sequentially. By far the most common form of lateral symmetry in *rapo* is in the movement of the arms and upper torso, as a movement sequence is performed on one side of the body, and then repeated on the other—sequential lateral symmetry. If the arms and

torso are not involved in sequential lateral symmetry, they are usually involved in simultaneous lateral symmetry. The feet, however, are asymmetrical since the right foot consistently hits the *zarb*. In group choreographies, such as *Raqsi Tabaqcha*, the locomotion patterns of groups of dancers use simultaneous lateral symmetry, resulting in a mirrored effect, even as the locomotion patterns of each individual dancer within the group often rely on sequential lateral symmetry (see appendix B for the floor plan of *Raqsi Tabaqcha*). As we rehearsed with Mahingol, she was always sure to adapt the choreography she taught us to the number of people present in order to maintain lateral symmetry in both the arrangement of dancers and the locomotion patterns, constantly resulting in a mirrored image. The postures and positions of individual dancers, however, are often asymmetrical.

After seeing a performance in Ishkashim, Nasiba (one of our Badakhshani team members) complained that the “female dancer couldn’t dance because she does one movement on one side but then can’t repeat it on the other side” (personal communication, August 19, 2006). Later, she asked the dancer Sarkori if her assessment was correct and he replied, “You should repeat every movement on both sides. No, what the girl did was not the dance. From right side to left side. From left side to right side” (Sarkori Davlatnamadov, personal communication, August 29, 2006). Although the footwork is asymmetrical, it is not a focus of the dancing, as these comments attest—“a movement” was considered to be one of the arms accompanied by the upper body. Every dance that Zaragol and Mahingol taught us was based on this ideal of lateral symmetry; movement phrases were sequentially repeated on each side. In addition, nearly all of the improvised dancing I saw in Badakhshan used this sequential lateral symmetry.

This aesthetic rooted in rhythm, the circle (in this case, referring to turning, spinning, circular, and curvilinear motion—all derived from the circle), repetition, and symmetry is based on the geometrical foundation of Islamic calligraphy, which often acts as a model for other Islamic arts (Gocer 1999). Interestingly, Gocer hypothesizes that this aesthetic is spiritually and morally based (1999). His argument links Islamic and Platonic aesthetics, and he asserts this aesthetic basis is grounded in the belief of God's perfection, beauty, and harmony, which should be reflected in art; thus, art that adheres to this aesthetic contributes to moral and spiritual well being. Dance in Islamic contexts tends to conform to this visual or geometric aesthetic, yet in a more visceral way, since it is based in the moving body (see Nor 2003; Shay 1999, 48-55). *Rapo*, then, does conform to a certain "Islamic" aesthetic, even though this aesthetic may have been present before the advent of Islam in the region. While this aesthetic may be philosophically oriented towards spirituality and morality, when it manifests in dance, it appears primarily to be pleasing to the senses. Based on the perspectives of the Badakhshanis quoted above, a dance containing these elements is visually and kinesthetically pleasing.

Noz

Some movements are referred to as "*noz*," which translates as "coquetry," "amorous teasing," "whim," "caprice," "flirting," "influencing," "captivating," "pampering." These movements are very sensually oriented, since they purposefully draw attention to the body and have a direct aim to be sensually charming. At the same time, in mystical poetry, the alluring beloved is the metaphor for God and is associated

with “perfect” *noz* (Schimmel 1975, 291). This is because union with the divine can be interpreted as beckoning and flirtatious and, possibly, just out of reach.

Eye movements and glances are often said to be “*noz*.” These do not follow a prescribed movement sequence, but are considered ornamentations added by talented performers. These movements may include direct eye contact, sidelong glances, quick looks that shyly retreat, or any number of expressive eye or eyebrow movements, and may be directed towards musicians, other dancers, or audience members. Head movements usually accompany eye movements and add to the intended effect; for example, a quick look forward that shyly retreats downward and sideward would likely be accompanied by a rotation of the head and a tilt downward to emphasize retreat and shyness (Figure 16).

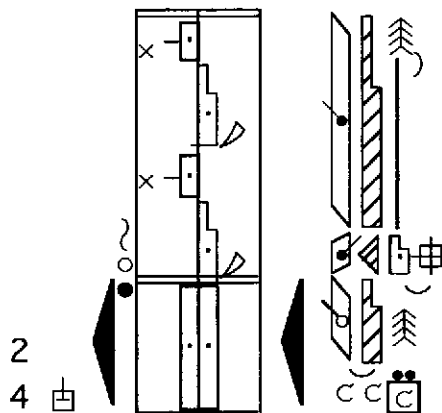


Figure 16: *Noz*, a shy glance

The eyes are especially prominent in Islamic culture and numerous references to the expressive eyes of a lover can be found in poems, songs, and stories. In traditional Islamic culture, the sexes did not intermingle, and speech between an unrelated male and

female in public (outside of business transactions) could warrant a social disaster and destroy family reputations. Eye movements, however, could be used to communicate wishes, intentions, and affections in a quick, discrete, and nonverbal manner. Even a heavily veiled woman still had her eyes to use for communication.³⁰ Therefore, eyes have historically been featured in poetry and expressive performance as well as used in daily nonverbal exchange throughout the Muslim world.

A five-year old boy danced for us in Roshtkala, and everyone agreed that he was on his way to being an extremely talented dancer. Several Tajiks in our group commented on his use of eye movements, which were unusual for such a young dancer. I believe his ability to charm his audience through the use of his eyes was one of the main features that made his dancing “good.” In contrast, *madoh* singers often cast their gaze upward, toward the sky and toward God, and tend to avoid direct eye contact. Likewise, in *raqsi semo*, the eyes are usually directed towards the ground or, occasionally, towards the sky; the intention is not to seduce, charm, or captivate audience members with the eyes, as it can be with *rapo*.

Very quick vibrations of the hands and fingers close to the eyes could also be considered a part of the *noz* category; both hands vibrate via tiny rotations of the lower arm, sometimes accompanied by additional up and down vibrations of each finger. A common movement of *rapo* is a gesture that begins with both hands at eye level, on either side of the head. The elbows are lifted and pointed to either side and the hands quickly vibrate, as described above. One arm is moved forward, out from the eyes, and the torso rotates slightly to allow the hand to go as far forward as possible. The head

³⁰ A Moroccan friend once gave me this explanation as the justification for the subtleties and expressiveness of the eyes in Islamic culture.

accompanies the upper torso and turns slightly away from the hand, although the eyes continue to look forward. As the hand returns along the same trajectory to its position near the eyes, the other arm is moved forward from the eyes and the torso rotates slightly away from the forward-moving hand. (Refer to Figure 17.) When I asked Mahingol about this movement, she replied, “It is *noz*, it is like seduction, to charm” (personal communication, July 28, 2006).

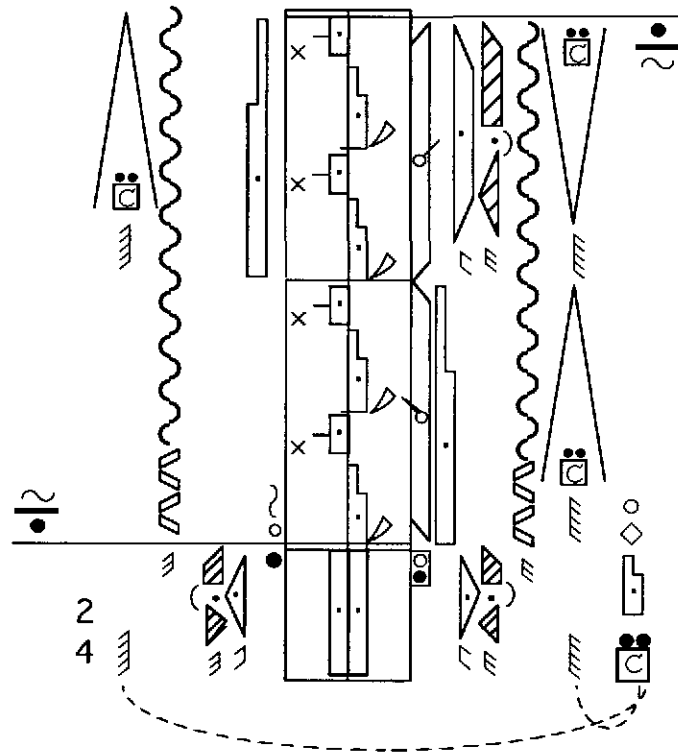


Figure 17: *Noz*, vibrating hands

Several additional movements that I would place in this category of *noz* are a part of the *Raqsi Tabaqcha* choreography discussed below. *Noz* movements are, in my opinion, central to the *rapo* aesthetic; a good dancer should charm his or her audience and

one of the methods of doing this is by drawing attention to the body and senses. After the audience is charmed through the senses, a further aim may be to emotionally transport the audience via “*mast*” (intoxication) to a state of “*kaif*” (extreme pleasure); both of these states or conditions muddle the boundary between sensuality and mysticism.

Music, heart, and *mast* equal *kaif*

They said, ‘Zaragol Iskandarova, dance.’ But I said, ‘This music doesn’t move my heart.’ They were surprised; ‘Does music move the heart?’ And I said that until music moves the heart, the body can’t dance. (Zaragol Iskandarova, personal communication, August 11, 2006)

In ancient times, when people dance, they listen to the music and if this music comes to their heart, they can dance. If they can’t feel the music, they can’t dance. And if they don’t like this music, they don’t dance. Dance depends on music and if there is a good relationship between the music and the movements of the dance, the people can *kaif* [feel extreme pleasure]. (Mahingol Nazarshoeva, personal communication, August 11, 2006)

If the music comes to my heart, I can lose my temper, I become *mast*. (Sarkori Davlatnamadov, August 29, 2006)

Music must enter your heart and make you *mast*; then, the people can *kaif*. This is one of the lessons I learned during my time in Badakhshan, both as a student of dance and as an observer of dance performances. This statement implies that dance is dependent on music, the heart is the doorway to abandonment or intoxication, and a dancer’s role is to elevate an audience to a state of extreme pleasure.

Dance without music is a rare phenomenon in Badakhshan; dance is almost always completely dependent on music for inspiration and direction. As one dancer stated, “If there is a good song you dance well. But if there is no song you can’t dance. For a dancer music should enter your heart” (Sarkori Davlatnamadov, personal communication, August 29, 2006). The only acceptable excuse for not dancing at a wedding or a party is to say the music does not move you to dance or does not enter your heart. With this comment, even the most insistent person will instantly understand and accept the validity of your excuse. What, then, does it mean for music to enter the heart? First, I must attempt to define the concept of “heart.”

My understanding of the concept of heart is based on the discourse of al-Ghazali,³¹ an influential philosopher of Islamic theology who was successful in incorporating ideas based on Sufism into his works and disseminating them to a wide audience. He went to great lengths to understand the meaning of the heart, for as he wrote, “Knowledge of the heart and of the true meaning of its qualities is the root of religion and the foundation of the way of those who follow the path” (al-Ghazali, as translated by McCarthy 1980, 310). Importantly, al-Ghazali used the Arabic term “*qalb*” in his discussion, and his purpose was to unravel the different layers of meaning involved in the concept of *qalb*. In Tajikistan, the Tajik term “*dil*” is commonly used in reference to the heart, in both poetry and everyday speech, while the term *qalb* is rarely found. Despite this fundamental difference in terminology, I find al-Ghazali’s description of the heart (*qalb*) as both a corporeal entity and a source of otherworldly knowledge, as both the essence of an individual and that which connects the individual to the divine, very

³¹ Al-Ghazali lived from 1058-1111 C.E., but his works are still widely read today.

helpful in understanding the way the term *dil* is applied in Tajikistan.³² However, *qalb*, not *dil*, is the term identified with Sufism throughout the Islamic world.

Al-Ghazali's definition of *qalb* included many aspects, namely that the heart is both a corporeal entity grounded in the individual being and a philosophical or mystical source of knowledge. While the heart is based in the body, it is a vehicle with which to transcend the senses and the material world. Al-Ghazali likens the heart to a well, which is filled by the five streams of the senses (see Albertini 2005, 6). Every so often, the streams must be stopped and the well cleaned of refuse; this implies that the knowledge of the senses cannot be relied on alone, as this sort of knowledge carries clutter, even as it serves to fill the well of the heart. Knowledge of the heart entails knowledge of the self as well as knowledge of God. He advises those on the path to God to turn their hearts into mirrors to reflect all there is to know about God and self. This sentiment is often echoed in mystical poetry; as Schimmel writes, "The ideal lover [found in poetry] turns his heart into an unblemished, polished mirror in which he finds reflected the beloved who is now closer to him than he is to himself" (1997, 113). The beloved in poetry refers to either God or a human lover or even both simultaneously. In this sense, the heart is spiritually and mystically defined as a point of contact with the divine. It is, at the same time, the source of the self both physically and philosophically. Thus, for "music to enter the heart," music must enter both the body and the soul, spirit, or mind of the dancer. There is not a conceived separation between body and soul, for the concept of "heart" applies to both. When music enters the heart and the dancer becomes *mast*, he or she

³² I also believe his discussion helps to clarify the many uses of the term "heart" in English. For example, phrases such as, "he/she has a good heart," "from the bottom of the heart," or "put your heart into it," all point to the mystical or otherworldly connotations of the concept of heart: it cannot be simply defined as a physical entity located in the body.

portrays both the physical sensation of intoxication and the mystical drunkenness achieved by the dissolution of the individual self in the divine.³³

One of my most memorable moments with Zaragol was when she explained dance in terms of intoxication. Unhappy with our movements, she stopped us and said, “You must become drunk on the music!” (personal communication, August 9, 2006). She raised her arms overhead and began to snap her fingers, her torso pulling her first one way and then another as her feet seemed to just barely keep up with her drunkenly swaying body. She had a blissful look on her face and continued to demonstrate additional movements with this mood of abandonment. We asked, “You mean drunk, like on *piva* (beer)?” She replied, no, “Drunk on the music.” The body, she said, is a skeleton only; the music fills it and gives it blood and spirit. It is our responsibility as dancers to allow the music to fill it and make us *mast*.

The concept of “*mast*” is often used as a metaphor to explain the intoxication of love. This term is heard as often in contemporary popular music as it is found in old Sufi poetry. It is also used in southwestern Iran with the connotation of “state of trance” and is usually associated with music and/or ecstatic dance (During 1988). The representation of *mast* is sensually displayed and communicated via the dancing body. At the same time, the philosophy behind the concept of *mast* is steeped in mystical connotations.

How do people *kaif* (feel extreme pleasure, ecstasy) by seeing a dancer who appears *mast*? I believe it is through kinesthetic empathy; when you see someone who is tense, you begin to feel tense; when you see someone who is smiling, you begin to smile;

³³ See the comments on pages 53-54 here—even as al-Ghazali discusses the lawfulness of music and dance, his argument centers on the role of the heart and its tendency towards intoxication (sensual or spiritual love) due to the influence of dance and music.

likewise, if you see someone who is *mast*, you begin to feel *mast* and from this feeling you can *kaif*. This feeling is sensually induced via the dancing body, however the concept of *kaif* can also refer to the sensation of abandonment that occurs when the individual is transported beyond him or her self to a state of ecstasy, whether that ecstasy is divine or earthly or both. During those moments of watching a really excellent performance of music or dance, the individual can be subsumed into the performance and forget, momentarily, that he or she exists outside of that moment. *Kaif* is a word that our group of researchers ended up using often in Badakhshan since it is not easily translated and can be used in any number of cases. When we saw performances that were particularly “good,” someone almost always said “*kaif*,” or referred to one of the musicians or dancers as obviously “*kaif*-ing,” as we added an English suffix to a Tajik word.

This aesthetic of *rapo*—music, heart and *mast* equal *kaif*—contains an emotional element because not only should the dancer *feel* the music in his or her heart, he or she must also communicate this feeling of *mast* kinesthetically and emotionally in order to affect the state of *kaif* in the audience.

The concepts of heart, *mast*, and *kaif* represent an aesthetic component of *rapo* that is not easily definable. Each of these terms contains both sensual and mystical aspects, as well as simple and philosophical definitions, and each infers that emotional communication between musicians, dancers, and audience must take place for a truly exceptional performance. Although sensuality and mysticism are often placed in opposition to one another, the concepts of heart, *mast*, and *kaif* suggest a unity of these “opposites.”

Like water flowing

Whenever I listen to traditional music, I feel like I look to the natural environment and hot springs (*garm chashma*). When I play *setar* (lute) instrument, I feel like water flowing through the river. (Sholi Ghumolaliev, personal communication, August 8, 2006)

For our dancing, our art, our mountains, our rivers, our nature, helps us to know our culture. The mountains, the nature, water helps our art and culture. If people look at many dancers, they act like the wind and mountains. The movements show the wind, mountains, how the mountains were created.

(Zaragol Iskandarova, personal communication, August 11, 2006)

Land, also, constitutes a part of the aesthetic basis of *rapo*. Dance (and music) is linked to the natural environment, especially to water. As one dancer stated, “There are some literal movements to show beauty, [but in general] we show that Badakhshan has water” (Gulzar Dalatshoeva, personal communication, August 5, 2006). A common pantomime found in *rapo* uses the theme of water. The dancer kneels on the floor and moves her hands circularly through an imaginary pool of water. She then scoops some up and drinks, or perhaps washes her hair, splashes her face, offers it to another dancer, or throws it joyfully skyward. In addition to pantomimic movements, which directly draw attention to water, there is also an aesthetic of *rapo* that links dance movement with the flowing quality of water. Zaragol stated, “From Badakhshan, with water comes the *rubob* [lute used in *madoh*] and *rapo* dancing . . . the European people say that the water is coming when they see the Pamiri dancers” (personal communication, August 11, 2006). (She was referring to people she met while on tour in Europe.) Mahingol also

told us during one of our lessons that we should move like water—smoothly (personal communication, July 28, 2006).

Previously, I discussed the way the landscape affects movement style, in particular the use of weight. A specific energetic use of the body's weight is required to navigate a sandy, rocky, eroded, and unstable mountainside or a spongy, stream-filled meadow, and I believe it is this weight use that is reflected in the aesthetic of moving “like water flowing.” The body's weight is centered, stabilized, and held within the body so that it does not sink into the ground, nor energetically leave the body by “spilling” out of the hip sockets. The quality of this movement is weightless (in Effort Analysis terminology), for it neither emphasizes strong, weighted movement nor light, effortless movement. Rather, it is very evenly balanced between these two extremes (strong and light) and constantly maintains this balance, resulting in smooth, constantly rolling, and flowing motions. Land, then, not only subliminally affects dance and everyday movement, it is also consciously thought of as reflecting a particular movement aesthetic. A good *rapo* dancer moves “like water flowing.”

How does this aesthetic fit into the context of this study—is it mystical, spiritual, emotional, sensual, or sexual? I believe it is both sensual, since it is kinesthetically based, and indirectly mystical or spiritual, since it is based in land that is imbued with mysticism and spirituality. Not only are shrines directly connected with the spiritual power of the land, but many Badakhshanis indirectly reference the mystical and spiritual significance of the land of Badakhshan. When the *khalifa* (religious leader) was discussing *raqsi semo* he stated, “We come from high and we return to high. We are from the river and we return to the river” (personal communication, August 22, 2006),

which means, essentially, “We come from God and we return to God.” In this case, land is equated to God. I heard many similar statements while I was in Badakhshan that connected the land with God, spirituality, and mysticism.

Summary—Aesthetics of *rapo*

Rapo dancing incorporates mystical, emotional, spiritual, and sensual aspects. The “best” performance of *rapo* should be charming and sensually alluring at the same time that it should aim to be spiritually uplifting or powerful, even as it is accompanied by non-devotional music. *Noz* movements make dance sensually pleasing by drawing attention to the body and the senses, and the character of a flirt is likened to the Sufi ideal of the beloved. The essential characteristics of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry aid in creating a visually and kinesthetically pleasing experience. These four essential elements are grounded in an aesthetic shared with other arts of the Islamic world, and they primarily constitute a sensual aesthetic. The land-based aesthetic of moving “like water flowing” suggests the importance of the land to Badakhshanis; it includes sensual, kinesthetic elements and also references the abstract mysticism of the land. The concepts of heart, *mast*, and *kaif*, when applied to dance, include sensual, emotional, and mystical referents. The heart is both a physical entity and the gateway to the divine. When music intoxicates the dancer’s heart, he or she represents this drunkenness kinesthetically with the intention of elevating the audience to a state of *kaif*. Thus, via the medium of sensuality, a mystical experience is the ultimate aim, similar to the spiritual aesthetic of *madoh*.

Dance and Poetry: Specific Examples

Raqsi Tabaqcha

When we first arrived in Khorog, we arranged for *rapo* dance lessons with Mahingol Nazarshoeva, the director of the Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan. During the first few weeks, she came to our home and began to teach us a choreography to the song *Raqsi Tabaqcha*. Later, we went to her studio and rehearsed this dance along with her students. It should be kept in mind that *Raqsi Tabaqcha* was created for the stage. In contrast to most of the dance performances I saw in Pamiri homes, it is choreographed rather than improvised.

“*Raqsi tabaqcha*” actually translates as “small wooden dish dance” but is translated on the *Expressions of the Pamir* album (2000), on which it is recorded, as “dish and spoon dance.” However, neither wooden dishes nor spoons are utilized in Mahingol’s current rendition of the dance nor are they referred to in the poetry (see Appendix A). At the time of the original recording, the dance was likely performed as a “dish and spoon dance”; this means dancers either balanced wooden dishes on their heads and palms or used wooden spoons rhythmically as they danced, or a combination of the two. The song, however, is simply a *rapo*, which means any number of dances under the *rapo* genre could accompany it, and it is easily adaptable to being danced with or without props. The song is a composition of the music ensemble working through the Khorog Theater, where Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan is based, and is accompanied by the poetry of the Badakhshani poet Shofitur (death date unknown).

Raqsi Tabaqcha contains several movements I would place in the category of *noz* (flirtation, coquetry). These movements draw attention to the body, specifically the

height or figure of the dancer (Figure 18) and the eyes and eyebrows (Figure 19). The dancer outlines her figure, from the shoulders to the hips, while keeping her hands close to her body (Figure 18). Meanwhile, she rotates her upper body slightly back and forth, playfully drawing even more attention to her figure. The eyes and eyebrows are highlighted by coquettishly rotating and tilting the head while outlining the eye area with the fingers (Figure 19). The English translations of specific lines of poetry are given with each figure below; these are lines of poetry sung simultaneously while the notated movement sequence is performed. Each line of poetry is repeated twice, as is the movement sequence. (See Appendix A for the full poem, in both Tajik and English.) These two movement sequences definitely embody a sensual aesthetic. They are also the only two movements in the dance given specific literal meanings, both in their alignment with the poetry and in the method of instruction. During lessons (and before I was aware of the song translation), Mahingol repeatedly instructed us to draw our hands close to our bodies to show their outlines when she was teaching the movement of Figure 18. During the instruction of the movement of Figure 19, she advised us to show our eyebrows through our hand motions.

Besides these literal movements, Mahingol also instructed us to move smoothly, like water (personal communication, July 28, 2006); she drew our attention to an underlying aesthetic connected to the land. The song, too, is about the land of Badakhshan and love for the land is equated with, or transformed into, love for a charming girl.

Throughout the dance, the defining characteristics of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry are found. The dance is laterally symmetrical not only in the

“Height picturesque you have hey charmer, you brought me happiness”

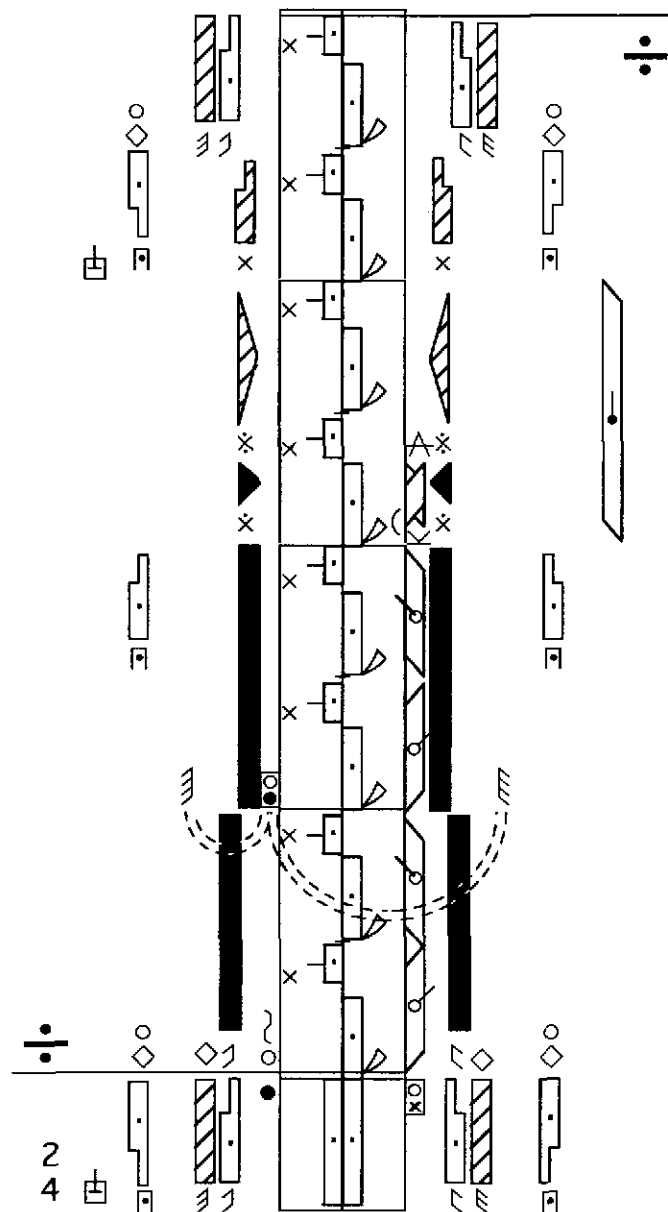


Figure 18: “Height picturesque”; as the arms lower and rise, the hands stay close to the torso, outlining its length without actual contact

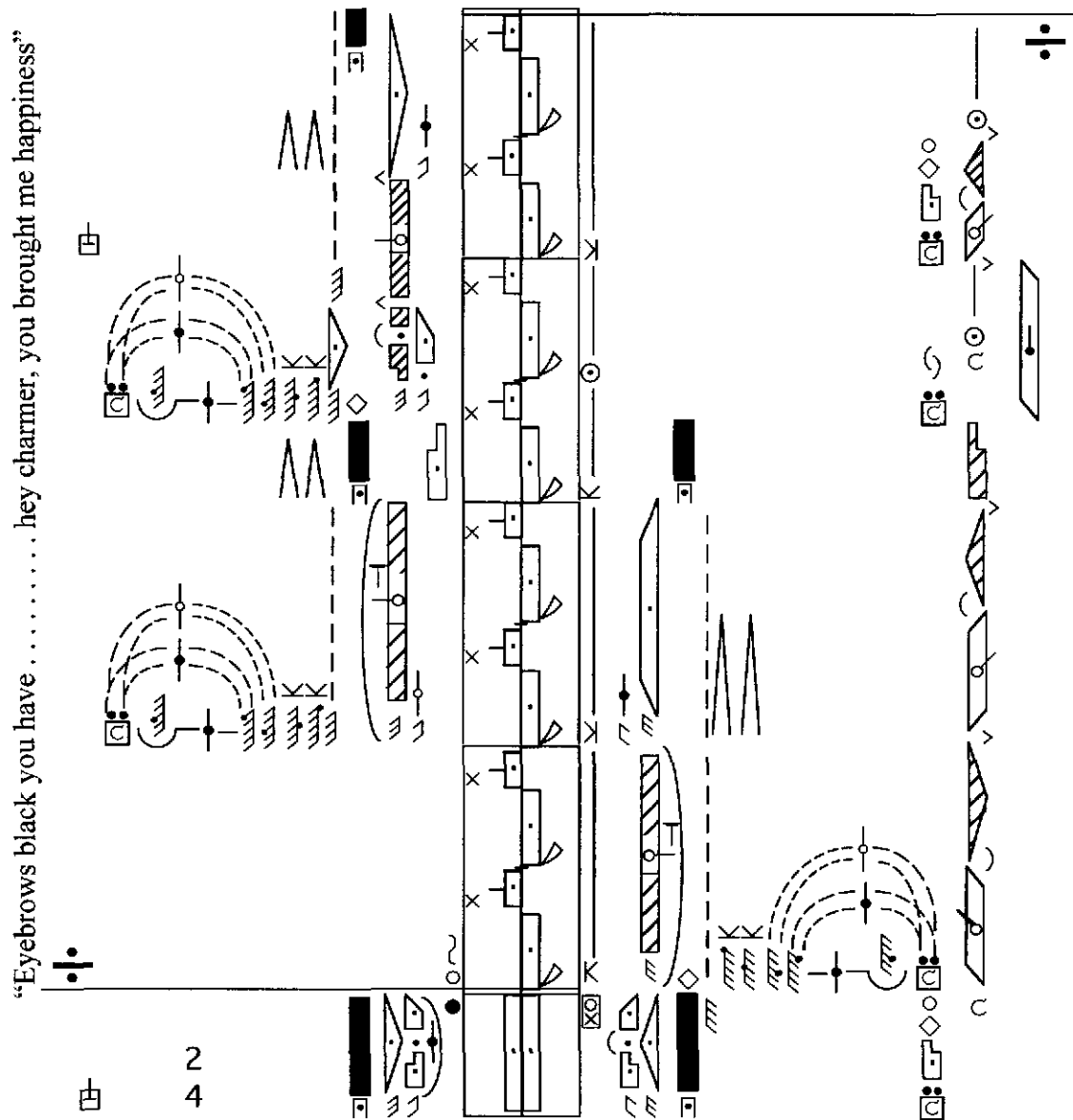


Figure 19: “Eyebrows black”; the thumb and middle finger outline the eye area as the head twists and tilts

arrangement of dancers in the performance space (the floor plan is given in Appendix B) but also in the sequential use of movements. For example, a sequence of gestures with the right arm is usually followed by a similar sequence with the left arm or a sequence of clockwise turns is usually followed by a sequence of counterclockwise turns. The *zarb* is kept even and constant throughout the dance; the right foot always marks the beat (see step pattern notated in Figures 13, 14, 15, 18, or 19; even if a turn is involved, the right foot always steps with the beat). Repetition is created through the constant *zarb*, the sequential lateral symmetry, and the frequent use of *charkh*; every movement sequence includes a turn. About halfway through the song, the tempo increases. It is at this point that the *noz* movements, referred to above (see Figures 18 and 19), are performed. The heightened energy created by the increased tempo is maintained throughout the rest of the song by a change in the way the poetry is sung. Each line of poetry is quickly echoed by, “Hey charmer, you brought me happiness.” Accompanying the continually building energy of the last half of the song, a series of *charkh* culminate the dance; a *charkh* accompanies every one of the last thirty-two measures of the song.

Raqsi Tabaqcha definitely embodies a sensual aesthetic through its use of *noz* movements and the sensually pleasing characteristics of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry. Its embodiment of a spiritual aesthetic is more tenuous. It was not (and is not) performed in the context of a mystical environment, such as one created by a *madoh* singer in a Pamiri home. It also does not clearly aim to be spiritually powerful or transforming; the dance was not taught nor explained with this motive, even though Mahingol stated during her interview that dance, in general, should make people *kaif*. The geometrical characteristics of *Raqsi Tabaqcha* share an aesthetic with other Islamic

arts; Gocer argues that this aesthetic reflects God's perfection, harmony, and beauty. In this sense, it is a spiritual aesthetic. However, I believe this aesthetic is equally attributable to culture, history, and worldview as it is to religious philosophy, and it may have even existed before Islam; it is difficult to separate these influences and simply call it a "spiritual aesthetic." There also may be an assumption that these characteristics, if fully embodied, can aid in elevating the audience to a state of *kaif* and, thus, the dance's performance may contain a mystical element; however, this connection was not clearly made. I believe *Raqsi Tabaqcha* is primarily a dance created for the sake of charm and beauty, and its main aesthetic is sensually based. Nonetheless, it draws inspiration from a mystical landscape and has the ability to sensually charm an audience to a mystical state of *kaif*, given the right context, dancers, and audience; it is not simply dismissible as an example of dance's sensuality.

Raqsi Asp

One performance of *raqsi asp* (horse dance) I witnessed contained a unique mixture of spiritual, mystical, emotional, sensual, and sexual aspects. Danced in the Pamiri home of a *madoh* singer, preceded and followed by devotional music, and performed in an atmosphere charged with spiritual poetry, the dance was surrounded by mystical elements. At the same time, there was an undercurrent of sexuality. Danced by a young male and female, a courting theme was apparent and some movements of the male dancer seemed sexually referent or erotic. The poetry of the song contains mystical and sensual elements as well.

The dancers of *Raqsi Asp* are not professional dancers, simply two young people known in their community as talented dancers. In contrast to some of the other performances we saw, each wore everyday dress rather than a special costume, except of course, for the horse costume. As can be seen in the photo below (Figure 20), the horse consisted of a wooden platform fastened about the waist and draped with fabric. A wooden horse head rose up from the front of the platform and was also decorated with fabric. The neck of the horse was held and manipulated by the male dancer, either through reins or by hand. The neck was able to move forward and backward from its point of attachment with the wooden base, a feature that enabled the dancer to simulate the head movement of a horse in motion.

The overall performance context was imbued with the reverence of devotional music and the spiritually powerful personality of Sultonazar Saidnazarov, the *madoh* singer in whose home the performance took place. After a forty-five minute *madoh*, the two young dancers featured in the horse dance (Figure 20) performed a *rapo* dance. This was followed by a second *madoh*, after which the same two dancers performed *raqsi asp*. After a meal, the evening concluded with a final *madoh*. Altogether we were at Sultonazar's home for over six hours, but it felt like only two; Sultonazar's *madoh* were some of the longest we heard, and we all agreed they were also some of the most spiritually powerful. By this I mean that many of us experienced a sense of emotional or spiritual release, and felt we had been mesmerized by the music and transported to an otherworldly atmosphere where time lost significance. We truly couldn't believe we were there for so long.



Figure 20: Oyatsho Shohidaryoev and Qimatgul Masumova performing *raqsi asp* at Sultonazar Saidnazarov's home in Ghund Valley August 1, 2006 (photo courtesy of Tara Pandeya)

By the time *Raqsi Asp* was performed, the atmosphere was charged and the energy was very high. The dance itself helped to increase the energy as family members, neighbors, and our research team all clapped along with the music, enchanted. As emotionally and spiritually uplifting as the performance was, it also contained a number of sensual and sexual aspects. It was one of the few *rapo* dances I saw in Badakhshan that involved physical contact between a male and female.³³ Several times during the dance, the male slipped his arm under one of the female's arms, as she held them outstretched while dancing, and moved circularly around her, causing her to turn on the spot. He also leaned his head against hers and hung the head of the horse over the crook of her arm, all the while dancing with her. The most directly sexual aspect of the dance was his manipulation of the horse's head. The neck was fastened to the wooden platform at hip level and the pivot point of the horse's neck was just in front of the male's pelvic area. Thus, if the male dancer pronouncedly swung the horse's head up and down or shook it with his hands, it seemed obviously phallic. Towards the end of the dance, when the energy of the room was highest, the male dancer fell to his knees, arched his back, and "reared" the horse's head with a tense vibration. The American contingent of our research team was the first to bring up this reference to sexuality when we were later discussing the dance and compiling research notes. When the Tajik members were first asked about it, they burst into embarrassed laughter. Then one of them spoke, "Yes, he wanted to show how he can perform [deliberate pause] in bed." This was followed by more laughter. Everyone agreed the dance contained a phallic element, but it was difficult to tell if some of the Tajik members of our team were just reluctant to openly

³³ The earlier *rapo* they danced involved similar physical contact to what is described here. I do not recall seeing such contact between genders in other performances.

talk about sexuality, or if the Americans or other Tajiks had planted the idea in their heads. The Tajik team member (who made the above comment) clearly recognized the sexual reference of the dance, but did not want to be the first to bring it up; she was actually the first person to state the sexual reference in such an explicit way. I was lead to believe that everyone recognized the sexual elements of the dance, but was too shy or too modest to discuss them without prodding.

The male dancer was very flirtatious with the female as well as us, his audience, and thus utilized the aesthetic of *noz*. He constantly circled the female and often placed his arm behind her back or brought his face close to hers. He also moved his hips slightly to make the horse's body sway from side to side, as he strutted about the floor space. His eyes often made contact with ours as he shifted his head from side to side. The female dancer was much shyer in her movements, but also used her eyes, usually casting them downwards in response to his forward actions.

The characteristics of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry were all included in the dance performance. In many ways the dance was very repetitive; the female dancer had a very small repertoire of movements. She often used the space on both sides of her body, as she lowered and raised her hands to or from her shoulders, with many variations, but nearly always with sequential lateral symmetry. For example, one arm would be extended down to one side, while her other arm was folded with the hand near the shoulder and the elbow pointed sideward. The extended arm would then fold, placing her other hand near her other shoulder, while the previously folded arm would extend down (see Figure 21). Rather than simply folding and extending, however, her arms moved with lightness and buoyancy, as she lifted and lowered or lifted and folded

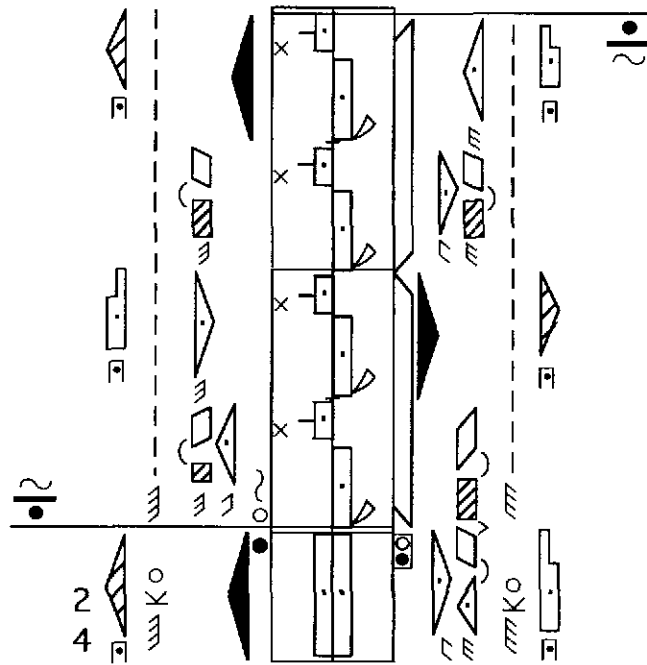


Figure 21: folding and extending the arms;
the steps keep the accents and timing but
may be performed in any direction

each arm. Her torso usually rotated slightly from side to side as she performed this movement. She varied this basic movement by placing the hand of the folded arm on her head, adding different lower arm rotations to create extra flourishes of the hands and wrists, raising the height of the extended arm to shoulder level, or placing the hand of her lower arm on her waist. Primarily, however, she spun. She is one of the most talented spinners I have ever seen; she performed *charkh* after *charkh* and then exited them smoothly as she nonchalantly proceeded to the next movement. There was a constant flow and rhythm to her motion that made her turns blend effortlessly into the following movements—like water flowing in a river. The near constant use of *zarb* also added to the repetition in the dance. Lateral symmetry in locomotion patterns or mirrored

arrangements was not apparent in this dance, in contrast to *Raqsi Tabaqcha*, perhaps due to the small floor space (about three by six yards) and the improvised nature of the dance. The small floor space did not allow for many geometric floor patterns and symmetry was not choreographed into the dance. Nonetheless, the dancers often utilized sequential lateral symmetry in their improvised arm movements and spins.

The influence of the land of Badakhshan was apparent in the dancers movements, not only in their use of weight that resulted in flowing and weightless motion, but also in movements that mimicked the gathering and drinking of water. Several times the female dancer knelt to the floor, cast ripples with her hands in an imaginary pool of water, then scooped some up in either her hands or her hat, subsequently offering it to the male. The male dancer either drank some or gave it to his horse to drink. The male dancer performed a similar pantomime as well, giving his horse water to drink. Each time after drinking, the energy of the horse increased; its head would rear, it would “buck” via a jump from the male dancer, and/or it would begin to gallop around the room.

The two songs (or poems) that accompanied the dance were the culmination of a suite of music. Three poems set to music came before the horse dance and contributed to setting the mood and building the energy of the suite. This arrangement of songs/poems into suites is common and is found in both *madoh* (which usually consists of three separate sections accompanied by three different poems) and dance music. The skill of the singer lies partially in selecting and arranging the poetry to transport his audience to a state of *kaif*.

The introductory (*rez*) or first song of the *raqsi asp* suite greeted and welcomed us as guests and set a mood of friendship and temporality (only selections of all of the

subsequent poems appear below, refer to Appendix A for the full translations as well as the Tajik-language transcriptions):

Hey friend, come, welcome to my country

Today in this party, all together

From talking with each other, some moments we are resting

We hold each other precious

Tomorrow, who knows where we meet

The second song was set to a poem by Rumi (Shamsi Tabriz), one of the most globally known Sufi poets. His poetry often contains references to both spirituality and earthly sensuality, as does the following:

In our two worlds, we have no one but God

Except God, we do not worry about what another does

We are drunk from food, drink, and music

We do not care how much we drink

We are like a poor parrot that tastes sugar from the reed

We are not like the black crow, we don't desire bad things

We are religious people

This poem references God, religion, and intoxication (*mast*—both sensual drunkenness and the intoxicating effect of mystical knowledge). It contains both a basis in spirituality and religion and an acknowledgement of the sensual joys of life.

The third poem begins by discussing separation: “The friend has been unfaithful to us, he/she wants to separate from us.” Separation from the beloved is a common

theme of mystical poetry, and the beloved is at times God, at times an earthly sweetheart. Likewise in this poem, the “friend” becomes a “sweetheart:”

Hey, Muslim, hear my yell

That sweetheart/girl separated from us

The girl is a dam in the path of love

He begs a kiss from her lips

This is the last poem before the dancing begins and it succeeds in shifting from an emphasis on friendship and God to an emphasis on earthly lovers.

The fourth and fifth songs are accompanied by the horse dance. The fourth song is set to the poetry of Husayni Balkhi and is in the Tajik language. The fifth poem is set to anonymous, traditional (*khalqi*) Shugni language poetry. The poem of Husayni Balkhi begins with the claim, “I love you so much in both worlds;” the world of earth and the world of heaven/God/divine are still united. Later in the poem, three pairs of lovers are mentioned, Layli and Majnun, Shirin and Farhad, and Yusuf and Zulaykho. There are six pairs of lovers who are famous in Islamic literature, including the above three; their all-consuming earthly love is often equated with pure, divine love for God and their imposed separation from one another likened to separation from God (Schimmel 1997, 99). The theme of separation again surfaces in this poem as a call and response between Sultonazar and the other musicians. The ensuing intensity of the music heightened the pace of the dance and the energy of the performance:

To the summit/climax, she is carried (When I will be separate from you)

Inside the net, she is taken (When I will be separate from you)

Oh, oh, from this separation (When I will be separate from you)

The possible sensual reference of carrying her to the summit or climax was prefigured by the rearing horse's head (see Figure 22), coming just shortly before these lines of poetry. After the dramatic rearing of the horse's head, the male dancer cracked his whip, backed up a few paces, placed his head down next to the horse's, and charged forward blindly, inadvertently running into the female dancer who casually spun away. All this accompanied the above lines of poetry. In the closing line of the poem, the author advises us to "read this stanza beside the goblet at the gathering place of mankind on the Day of Judgment." Although this line references religion, there is also an ambiguous reference to the goblet, associated with wine, intoxication, and sensuality.

The last poem was sung in the Shugni language. It further increased the energy of the performance by maintaining the call and response pattern but shortening the lines of poetry, which had the effect of speeding up the overall pace of the performance. The male dancer again reared the horse's head, but this time, even more dramatically, he fell to his knees and theatrically flung his head and upper torso backwards. The last line of the poem, and its response, were repeated over and over again until the dancers stopped several minutes later. This continual repetition, coming at the end of the song, helped to create the most intense energetic level of the evening as the singing resembled the hypnotic rhythm of chanting.

This dance performance was at once the most spiritual-mystical and the most sexual-sensual dance I saw in Badakhshan. It was also one of the most aesthetically pleasing, according to several of the Badakhshani team members, several of the American team members, and myself. Sultonazar's family members and neighbors who were present also seemed affected by the high energy of the performance; everyone was

talkative, animated, and appeared slightly dazed for some time after *Raqsi Asp*. (This was my interpretation of their wide smiles and glassy eyes.) What qualities made it so aesthetically pleasing? The dance contained the characteristics of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry. It contained an aspect of *noz*, as the male dancer, especially, flirted with the female and with us. It also referenced the land through pantomimes involving water, and the female dancer expertly embodied the aesthetic of “flowing like water.” But, perhaps most importantly, the powerful spiritual presence of Sultonazar and his use of mystical poetry created a transformative atmosphere; the overall performance made us *mast* (intoxicated) and we *kaif*-ed. This performance of *raqsi asp* erased the boundary between spirituality and sensuality.

Summary: A mystical land

While I have only analyzed two dances in detail, these two were selected out of the many performances of music and dance I saw in Badakhshan. These dances were chosen for more detailed analysis because, although each is wholly unique, in many ways they are representative of two main tendencies, one towards dance choreographed for stage, the other towards improvised dance performance in a small, informal gathering in a family home. In the following summary, I rely not only on the specifics of these performances, but on all of my observations of dance in Badakhshan.

Except for *raqsi semo* (dance of sky/heaven), dance in Badakhshan is not wholly spiritual or mystical. The genre of *rapo*, however, often utilizes spiritually based aesthetics and can be surrounded by mystical elements. Even though dance is accompanied by non-devotional music, I witnessed it being preceded and followed by

devotional music; it was performed in an atmosphere of spiritual reverence, although the dance, itself, was not performed with the intention of worship or devotion. Excellent dancers, however, are expected to transport their audience to a state of extreme pleasure, similar to mystical ecstasy. The poetry of *rapo* often contains mystical undertones or religious references and is sometimes arranged by a *madoh* singer, locally considered a spiritual leader.

At the same time, *rapo* is inherently sensual, but not only because it uses the body. Aesthetics based on flirtation, charm, or seduction are central features. Dancers also aim to please the visual and kinesthetic senses through the use of *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry. Indirect references to sexuality may even be made in dances performed by a male-female couple. *Rapo* can also be accompanied by poetry that extols earthly, sensual love.

The most aesthetically pleasing dance is that which blurs the boundary between the sensual and the spiritual by using sensuality as a bridge to a spiritual or mystical experience. This occurs only in specific performance contexts. Dances that are created for stage performance differ greatly from improvised dances performed in the spiritually referent environment of a Pamiri home and accompanied by the presence of a *madoh* singer. Each dance performance, although, always depends on the music, the intention of the dancer, the expectation of the audience, and the particular performance context.

In general, dances created for stage have a greater connection to sensuality. In the particular case of the Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan, I think this association is partially dependent on the young, unmarried, female composition of the group, a tendency echoed by large performance groups in Dushanbe. Young, unmarried females, especially, are

viewed within the culture as particularly sensually appealing and a possible distraction from the spiritual path (refer to Ahmed 1992; Mernissi 1987 and 1991; Stowasser 1994). I believe there is also a heavier reliance on sensual aesthetics in the creation of choreography. Spiritual aesthetics are more difficult to teach and impossible to simply insert into a choreography. The spiritual aspects involving heart, *mast*, and *kaif* are dependent not only on the heart and intention of the dancer, but also on the music and context. A dance accompanied by a *madoh* singer, who is hypothetically an expert in creating a spiritually transformative atmosphere, is much more likely to embody a spiritual aesthetic.

Rapo dance in Badakhshan is also intimately connected, inspired by, and grounded in the land. Most, if not all, Badakhshanis are very proud of the land of Badakhshan, its height, its clean air and water, its beautiful mountains, and of their isolation from the rest of the world caused by the landscape, which has allowed them to “preserve” their unique Ismaili culture and traditions, including music and dance. When foreigners and guests are entertained in Badakhshan, the spiritual landscape and culture is constantly brought to attention; shrines are pointed out, the paths of ancient mystic-poet-philosophers through Badakhshan are discussed, the purity and morality of the rural or village lifestyle is highlighted, and the esoteric meanings of Pamiri houses are a frequent topic of conversation. Guests are also entertained with Badakhshani music and dance, and its spiritual and mystical elements are highlighted. Whenever possible, Badakhshan is articulated by Badakhshanis as a mystical land with mystical dance traditions, and overt statements concerning the sensual or sexual aspects of dance are not often made.

Nonetheless, *rapo* dance in Badakhshan contains a mixture of spiritual-mystical and sensual-sexual aspects. Whether it is performed formally on a stage or informally on the floor of a Pamiri home, its aesthetics are rooted in both sides of the assumed divide between sensuality and mysticism.

CHAPTER 3

DUSHANBE

Until the creation of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929, Dushanbe was a quiet village known for its Monday market; it was therefore simply referred to as “Monday,” or “Dushanbe” in the Tajik language. As the capital of the newly created Soviet republic, it was renamed “Stalinabad” and the village became a city through the relocation of people from all over the Soviet Union to work in the newly constructed silk and cotton factories. In 1961 the city reverted to its former designation of “Dushanbe,” a name it has kept, along with its capital status, since independence in 1991.

Dushanbe appears very much to be a Soviet-built city. One wide, tree-lined avenue runs through the center of the city and is flanked by many large, Soviet style cement buildings. Busts of Lenin and sculptures of Soviet-era heroes can be found in prominent places in squares adjacent to the main avenue, along with newly created monuments to ancient Tajik or Pan-Iranian heroes. Stretching out for several blocks on either side of this wide central avenue are tall, cement-block apartment buildings with small shops occupying the ground level. The further one moves from Rudaki Prospekt (the main boulevard, formerly called Lenin Prospekt), the more traditional, single story homes (*howli*) and fewer monuments one sees and the dustier and rougher the roads become; the well-maintained central avenue is the area of focus and the pathway of all holiday parades, which inevitably terminate at the Ismail Somani statue, located in the central square.



Figure 23: Ismail Somoni monument in downtown Dushanbe, November 2006

The towering figure of Ismail Somoni, placed prominently in the central square of Dushanbe, reflects the importance of history to the national identity of independent Tajikistan. Ismail Somoni (alternately spelled Samani or Somani) is considered the “father” of Tajik nationality and is the namesake of the national currency (the *somoni*). He was the founder of the Samanid Empire (875-999 C.E.), based in Eastern Iran and Central Asia. The Samanid Empire was composed of Zoroastrians who had converted to Islam and is credited with restoring pride in Persian culture and language after the Islamic conquest. The Samanid Empire also had ancestral ties to the pre-Islamic, pan-Iranian Sassanian Empire (226-651 C.E.), an empire most famous for establishing a pan-Iranian identity. This monument to Ismail Somoni replaced a statue of Lenin in 1999, to

commemorate the 1100th anniversary of the Samanid dynasty. At the beginning of important events, such as the installation of the president after elections or the opening ceremony of the *shashmaqam* festival I attended, a bouquet of flowers is placed at the feet of Ismail Somoni, to respect “the ancient founder of the Tajik republic.” Through this visual display, Tajikistan’s identity is linked with a glorious, pan-Iranian past rooted in both Zoroastrianism and Islam and a territory that expands beyond the confines of its current national boundaries.

The Tajik republic, however, is new. While I was in Dushanbe, the republic of Tajikistan celebrated its fifteenth year as an independent nation. Prior to this, Tajikistan spent over sixty years as a Soviet Socialist Republic. And prior to this, a “republic” of Tajikistan did not exist. However, Central Asian civilization and culture stretches back thousands of years. Tajiks and Uzbeks both strive to lay unique claims to traditions that are actually shared between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, such as *shashmaqam* music and dance. Therefore, the antiquity of “Tajik” traditions and even the republic of Tajikistan is a common theme in the capital city of Dushanbe, the only city many foreign dignitaries are likely to see and the center of power and politics.

Dance in the capital is closely related to politics; a prosperous and spiritual past is linked to a prosperous and moralistic future through the symbolic medium of dance. Mosaics of dancers and musicians adorn centrally located buildings, wearing the “traditional” dress of hundreds of years ago, which is very similar to the performance costume of today, creating a sense of timelessness and visually linking the past to the present. Nearly every dance ensemble in Dushanbe is state-sponsored and most political holidays or events (such as Independence Day, the President’s Inauguration, the 2700th

Anniversary of Kulob, or the First International Film Festival held in Dushanbe) are accompanied by dance performances. Even if important political events are not directly accompanied by dance, excitement for these events is created by constant television broadcasting of patriotic music and dance concerts as the event approaches.

How are mysticism and sensuality involved in dance in Dushanbe and what do these have to do with politics? After sixty years of Soviet atheism as the “state religion,” independent Tajikistan is carefully constructing its new spiritual and national identity. Dance is an effective vehicle for expressing this identity, an identity rooted not only in an ancient concept of “Tajik-ness,” but also in a benign form of Islam, an Islam heavily influenced by pre-Islamic traditions and mysticism, as well as adaptable to a modern and secular world: in the words of Levin, a “secular Islamic nationalism” (1999, 111).³⁴ While dance’s mystical and spiritual components are explicitly articulated, in actual performance the focus is on presenting a sensory image. Highlighting the spiritual and moral qualities of dance also helps to justify the existence of dance as an “art” form, worthy of state sponsorship, rather than merely the sexual or sensual entertainment of past epochs. The sexuality associated with professional boy dancers during the Islamic era is downplayed and the professional dancers of today are linked to the dancing girls of pre-Islamic times.

In this chapter, I first address the context in which my research was conducted, the nature of the performances I witnessed, and how I studied *shashmaqam* and Kulobi dance. I then discuss the environment of Dushanbe, the interaction between Soviet atheism, Islam, and culture, and the structure of power, money, and politics. Next, I

³⁴ He actually uses this term in reference to Uzbekistan, but it is equally applicable to Tajikistan.

consider the similarities and differences between popular and “classical” music and the use of poetry in each genre. Following this discussion of music and poetry, I address the context of dance and dancers in the capital—the official perspective of dance, the status of dancers in society, and the roles of dance. I then give attention to the aesthetics of dance, in a general sense, before looking at two specific dances in detail. In conclusion, I summarize the way sensuality and mysticism are integrated in dance in Dushanbe.

Research and Performance Context

In Dushanbe, I was both an independent researcher and a student of Kulobi and *shashmaqam* dance. I spent a great deal of time at Theater Padida, the home of Ensemble Padida, a dance company run by the former dancer Sharofat Rashidova³⁵ with the assistance of her husband, the actor Habibullah Abdurazzokov.³⁶ Ensemble Padida is one of the only private dance companies in Dushanbe; nearly all others are state-sponsored.³⁷ Its private/independent status was responsible for my involvement with the theater, since access to the government ensembles takes a certain amount of bureaucratic maneuvering and a good deal of time. My involvement only with Padida contributed to an important delimitation in my research; I worried that I might negatively affect Sharofat’s or Padida’s reputation if I was seen spending time at nightclubs—in order to get to know and interview dancers working there—since most women seen at nightclubs, whether

³⁵ Sharofat danced for over twenty years with Ensemble Lola, the first “traditional Tajik” dance ensemble, established in 1965; she is therefore amongst the first generation of Soviet-era, professional female dancers.

³⁶ Habibullah is a well-known actor in Dushanbe and has worked in both Tajik and Iranian films.

³⁷ I was lead to believe, by Sharofat and Habibullah, that Padida is the *only* independent dance company in Dushanbe, or even in the whole of Tajikistan. I imagine, however, there may be other, smaller companies with independent status, of which Sharofat and Habibullah may not be aware.

dancers or not, are considered prostitutes. (However, it is possible my status as a foreigner may have made my presence acceptable.) Therefore, my research in Dushanbe focuses on the perspectives of dancers working in professional companies, especially those of Ensemble Padida. Future research focused on the perspectives of nightclub dancers would broaden the picture presented here. Besides taking private dance lessons with Sharofat, I attended Theater Padida's public "Tajik dance class," observed Ensemble Padida rehearsals, attended several of the ensemble's performances, interviewed dancers and directors, and observed many Padida dancers in televised concerts. At Sharofat and Habibullah's insistence, my fiancé³⁸ and I also participated in making a television program about our relationship to Theater Padida.

After several months of phone calls and persistence, I was able to attend the rehearsal of a state-sponsored company, Gulrez, and conduct informal interviews with the director and several dancers. Besides this one rehearsal, I was able to attend live concerts where the ensembles Gulrez, Jahonoro, and Zebo performed. I also saw countless televised concerts of these ensembles as well as others. Shahodat Abdurahmanova, a dance scholar, former dancer, and employee of the Institute of Culture and Information, loaned me a book and document on Tajik dance printed in Tajikistan (and therefore rare), and presented me with an "official" perspective of dance in Tajikistan.

The following discussion in this subsection concerns: the private status of Padida, its relationship with the government, and what Padida's reputation and position reflects about the other dance ensembles in Dushanbe; the intricacies of working with the government and the care given to the representation of national culture to foreigners; the

³⁸ My fiancé studied *tavlak* (hand drum), *doira* (frame drum), and *labchang* (mouth harp) at Padida.

importance of television in the presentation and promotion of dance (and culture); and the relationship between musicians, singers, dancers, and audience members at concerts. In general, I discovered rather quickly that dance is *inseparable from politics*.

“Independent” Theater Padida

Originally, Theater Padida was also a state ensemble. Sharofat and Habibullah founded the ensemble together in 1989, toured several times to Holland and Afghanistan, and after some years, decided they wanted to become “independent.” But they had no sponsor and no place in which to rehearse. In 2002, Habibullah wrote a letter to the President of Tajikistan and, in the words of Sharofat, “After one month, he gave us this theater” (personal communication, November 15, 2006). Ensemble Padida became the first independent ensemble in Tajikistan. But, with state-sponsorship of the arts as the norm, what does “independent” mean?

Sharofat and Habibullah pay rent and utilities directly to the government; the theater building is on lease, *although they are expected to make and pay for the many needed repairs out of their earnings*. New dance costumes, apparently necessary for each new choreography, are also paid for out of their earnings, as are the monthly salaries of close to forty people, including dancers and other employees. In contrast, the government covers all of these costs for the state-sponsored ensembles. This monetary issue seems to be the defining difference between independent or state status.

According to a *government employee*, the state ensembles are expected to perform at government functions at a moment’s notice, since the government covers all of their costs. However, several times while I was in Dushanbe, Sharofat had to cancel

pre-arranged concerts in order for the ensemble to perform at a party at the President's house or for visiting foreign dignitaries; these requests for performances from the President's office were usually made with less than twenty-four hours notice, and there was no possibility of refusing them. Other times, Sharofat re-arranged her choreographies in order to spare a handful of dancers to perform for a government event and still keep her concert engagement. Not only a hassle in terms of time management, these demand concerts are also without pay; the non-governmental concerts, usually with pop musicians, are the ones that bring in the much-needed income. Perhaps Padida could be defined as an independent ensemble with a sponsor—the President of Tajikistan. Sharofat and Habibullah both credit the President with giving them a building and allowing for their independent status, and it is the President's office that can request performances at a moment's notice.

Like all other ensembles in Dushanbe, Padida keeps "Tajik dance" within certain guidelines. At the same time, Padida has a reputation for being daring, pushing boundaries, and presenting the most modern (and therefore considered the most "worldly," "global," or "developed") dances. Unlike the state ensembles, which perform primarily "Tajik national dances" (mostly Kulobi, *shashmaqam*, Bukhori,³⁹ and, rarely, Pamiri) and occasionally "Uzbek" dances (Ferghana and Khorezmi), Padida performs modern/contemporary, jazz-inspired, Arabic, Bollywood, Afghan, Iranian, as well as the standard "Uzbek" and "Tajik" dances. While Padida fills a certain niche and benefits from its "modern" reputation, it also has a reputation for being risqué. For example, Padida was asked to contribute to the Independence Day Concert, to be performed in

³⁹ Dance from Bukhara is considered Tajik dance in Tajikistan, just as Bukhara is considered a Tajik city.

front of the President and later broadcast on television. Due to costumes that were a bit too revealing, an official from the Ministry of Culture berated Sharofat, “We’re sick of seeing Padida dancers’ stomachs!” (Tara Pandeya, personal communication, September 8, 2006). In the context of Dushanbe, this was a serious affront to the morality of the company. At the same time, Padida was asked to perform at the opening ceremony of the first ever International Film Festival to take place in Dushanbe. In this performance, they showcased only their modern/contemporary choreography,⁴⁰ as if to present an image of modernity and development to the visiting Iranians, Afghans, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs who were in attendance; these neighboring countries would be less impressed and/or interested in Tajik national dances, unlike a Western audience, which usually expects “authentic traditional” dance from “developing” nations.

Padida’s “Tajik dance class” is attended almost exclusively by Westerners, mostly French and American women who work for aid organizations. It is the only public dance class in Dushanbe featuring dance from Tajikistan. Interestingly, the repertoire of movements taught in this class is nearly entirely based in Kulobi dance style. Padida therefore communicates to foreigners that Kulobi dance *is* Tajik dance, even though other genres of Tajik dance exist. Padida’s performance repertoire of Tajik national dance also primarily includes Kulobi dance; I only once saw them rehearsing a *shashmaqam* piece and one other time a piece called “*shodinah*” (“happiness”) from Northern Tajikistan (Khujand). This preference towards Kulobi dance, however, is found throughout Dushanbe, and is discussed in greater detail below.

⁴⁰ Padida is one of the only ensembles in Tajikistan to have modern dance, as it is defined in the United States and Western Europe, as a part of their repertoire. Padida’s modern dance pieces are not exactly like those found in other areas of the world, however, as elements of “Tajik-ness” are apparent in both movement vocabulary and costuming.

Working with the government

After a month of trying to make contact with some of the state ensembles on my own, I finally realized I needed to go through the proper channels in order to track them down; I needed to work with their employer, the government. I went to the Ministry of Culture and asked for help, explaining my project. Instead of handing me a list of phone numbers and contact information, as I expected, a gracious official introduced me to Shahodat Abdurahmanova, a former dancer currently employed at the Institute of Culture and Information. When I asked her for an interview, she asked me to give her the questions in advance, so that she could prepare a written response. “It’s because you are taking the information to America,” the official said, “and we want to show everything the best” (personal communication, October 12, 2006). The “best” perspective took time to craft; I met with Shahodat several weeks later and she gave me her carefully constructed monologue. The book and article she loaned me on Tajik dance, produced through government channels, also added to this “official” perspective of the state of dance in Tajikistan. Hereafter, when I refer to the official perspective, I refer to the information in these three items: Shahodat’s monologue, the book (Ayubdjanova 2000), and the article (*Art and Culture* 2005).⁴¹ In contrast, I consider her not-so-carefully-constructed comments to me during informal conversations and settings to be more representative of her personal, rather than official viewpoint.

⁴¹ The book *Traditional Tajik Dances* was produced through the Khujand State University. The document *Art and Culture in the Republic of Tajikistan: Analysis of the current state of affairs*, although produced by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, was authored by Tajik citizens, undoubtedly art and culture “scientists and experts” under government employment; the analysis is targeted towards receiving foreign aid. Both the book and article are written half in English and half in Russian, rather than Tajik, another element that tells me they are both written for foreigners.

Why would Tajik officials take so much care to present a certain perspective of dance in Tajikistan? Why is there an official perspective that may differ from those of individuals? State-sponsored dance is used to express what it means to be a citizen of Tajikistan; it is a powerful visual symbol of political and national identity. The use of the arts to promote a “national culture” is not unusual and is especially prevalent in the former Soviet republics (e.g., Levin 1999; Giurchescu 1987 and 2001; Shay 2002). Thus, a good deal of care and attention is given to presenting the “best” perspective of dance in Tajikistan, since dance is not simply an individual artistic expression; it represents the identity of the nation as a whole. For this reason, Padida Ensemble, even though they are independent, conforms to certain guidelines for Tajik dance and is often criticized for pieces that are too individualistic or do not contain an element of “Tajik-ness.” Shahodat (from the Institute of Culture and Information) did not write about the *bacha bazi* (dancing boys) in her monologue, nor did she take me to restaurants or clubs to see dancing; these dancers do not represent a wholesome or spiritually oriented national identity. Her monologue focused on the spirituality and antiquity of Tajik dance and avoided any discussion of immoral practices associated with dancers. However, in less formal conversations, she discussed the low salaries of dancers and the stigma and immorality associated with their supplemental work as restaurant or club dancers. These are some of the differences between the official “best” perspective, in which there are no problems, and individual perspectives, which tend to be more realistic.

For any government-affiliated procedures in Tajikistan, the most effective route is not to try to do things yourself, but rather to be introduced to the right person who can help you get things done. Shahodat was the right person to meet and she had all the right

connections, but it was Ramadan by the time I had been introduced to her. (Ramadan is the Islamic month of fasting; from sunrise to sunset, no food or drink should be consumed. Even Muslims who do not pray or follow the other “five pillars of Islam” generally fast during Ramadan.) After postponements attributed to the lack of concerts and rehearsals during Ramadan, she took me to a Gulrez rehearsal, just several weeks before I was due to leave the country. Through the help of the director of Gulrez, she secured invitations for us to attend every concert of the upcoming *shashmaqam* festival, the first ever “International Festival of Shashmaqam,” sponsored by UNESCO.

The necessity of being introduced to the state ensembles and the desire to present the best of everything to me limited what Shahodat was able to show me, and limited my involvement with the state ensembles. Yet, the process of working with the government showed me the importance given to national dance and its representation to foreigners such as myself. For example, I later discovered that, although there were no concerts during Ramadan, rehearsals continued as usual; Shahodat probably postponed taking me to rehearsals because, since most dancers were fasting and their energy level was low, Shahodat felt I would not see the best rehearsals during Ramadan. Securing me an invitation for the *shashmaqam* festival was probably also a way of trying to present me with the best, since *shashmaqam* is considered the “classical” dance of Tajikistan and most representative of its ancient, urban, and highly civilized national culture.

Television and Concerts

Tajik national culture is a constant theme on all three of Tajikistan's state-controlled channels. Programs feature unique traditions from different regions of Tajikistan (such as cooking, hand crafts, and celebrations) and at nearly any time of the day, one can find a broadcast of a music concert, invariably accompanied by dance, and usually including at least one patriotically themed song. As important political events approach, the amount of televised and patriotically themed music and dance increases. Television interviews often include patriotic or nationalistic statements as well, such as, "My ancestors are from Bukhara; I am Tajik" (which highlights the importance of the ancient civilization of Bukhara to modern-day Tajikistan as well as the irritation of many Tajiks that it is currently a city of Uzbekistan). During Habibullah's interview for our program, he kept pointing out the contributions that Padida was making to "our dear Tajikistan (*aziz-e mon, Tojikiston*)" by teaching foreigners the customs and culture (i.e. music and dance) of Tajikistan.

Most live concerts are filmed so that they can later be televised. At every concert I attended in Dushanbe, except for two concerts of Badakhshani music, television crews were present and filming. Multiple cameramen stood directly in front of the stage, and a camera affixed to a large crane was constantly hovering directly over people's heads or descending into the performance space (Figure 24).



Figure 24: The hovering camera at the Festival of *Shashmaqam*, November 2006

Dancers seem quite used to this and often dance for the cameras rather than for an audience (Figure 25). When I performed at the television studio, Sharofat kept admonishing me to dance for the camera (Figure 26). This was an entirely new experience for me; I have always relied on the interaction between myself, musicians, and an audience to provide the emotional energy necessary for expression (as opposed to just doing the movements). I did not know how to conjure this energy from the unresponsive camera lens, and I felt the dancing I performed in this context lacked expression and emotional depth.

The importance of television, then, seems to present a new dynamic in dance performance. Unlike my experience in Badakhshan, where every performance I saw was small and intimate and the energy dynamic created between musicians, dancers, and spectators was of paramount importance, the majority of the performances I saw in Dushanbe were made for television. Even if I was at a live performance, the eye of the camera lens seemed to take precedence to my own.

Contributing to this different dynamic was the common absence of live music at concerts. Most concerts in the capital are of popular music (*estrada*), and nearly every one of these concerts that I saw (both live and televised) was performed to a recording; the singers lip-synced, and the musicians did not actually play their instruments. Nearly every *shashmaqam* song that I saw, in contrast, was not to pre-recorded music or singing. In Badakhshan, the importance of the music entering the heart of the dancer, the dancer becoming drunk on the music, and the audience *kaif*-ing on his or her drunkenness had been repeatedly articulated; how, I wondered, could this aesthetic work without the energy of live music? Or is this aesthetic unique to Badakhshan?



Figure 25: A Gulrez dancer performing for the camera at the Festival of *Shashmaqam*, November 2006



Figure 26: The author getting ready to perform Kulobi dance for the camera, December 2006

Of all the television programming I saw, Badakhshani music and dance appeared only a few times, and the two Badakhshani music concerts I attended in Dushanbe were not filmed. In contrast, Kulobi dance was constantly shown and seemed to provide the basic movement repertoire for dances accompanying modern popular music.

Environment

Not only visible in the construction of the city, Russian and Soviet influence is everywhere in Dushanbe. Russian language is heard spoken on the street or in businesses nearly as often as Tajik. Many Tajiks are educated in Moscow or St. Petersburg and, because of Tajikistan's high unemployment and poverty, many others work in Russia and send money back to their families. The ties between Moscow and the former Soviet Socialist Republic are strong and are especially noticeable in Dushanbe. The Soviet Union was responsible for building most of the administrative and ideological infrastructure of the country, which is the basis of Tajik politics today. I believe this infrastructure is responsible for the administrative "machine" of bureaucracy as well as an ideology that Levin has termed "secular Islamic nationalism" (1999, 111). Both of these structures influence the way dance is presented and interpreted in Dushanbe.

Secular Islamic nationalism

The term "secular Islamic nationalism" neatly summarizes what could be called the new "state religion" of many of the former Central Asian republics of the USSR. It integrates three concepts, secularism, Islam, and nationalism, and this "post-Soviet ethos" fills "the gap left by the retreat of ideological communism" (Levin 1999, 111).

Secularism can be explained, in part, as a result of years of official state atheism, as well as an adaptation to global politics, where “developing secular democratic” states are more likely to receive international assistance. The current government clearly articulates that Tajikistan is a “secular democratic” country, in contrast to the “Islamic republics” of Iran or Afghanistan. In a secular country, culture takes precedence over religion in the promotion of spiritual and moral ideals:

In a secular democratic state like Tajikistan, culture undertakes the task of preserving spiritual and moral landmarks of the society. It is the sphere of culture that shapes and predetermines new goals and values in the life of a society, and contributes to formation of a new ‘integral perception’ of occurring changes . . .

Colorful, rich, multiform ancient culture of the Tajik has at all times contributed to prosperity and spiritual health of the nation. (*Art and Culture* 2005, 69)

Islam is given official respect, so long as it remains out of politics and does not threaten the secular status of the country. In particular, Sufism is highlighted as a part of the country’s Islamic identity. Arabov describes the relationship between Sufism and the current administration as mutually beneficial; because Sufism diverges from orthodox Islam, it is better for the Sufi orders of Tajikistan to have a secular government rather than an extremist Islamic government, under which they would likely be persecuted. In turn, the current administration prefers the peaceful, non-political⁴² Islam practiced by the Sufi orders (2004). Thus, the Islamic identity of Tajikistan is tied to Sufism through celebrating famous Sufis of the past: television programming features their poetry or

⁴² Although the Naqshbandiyya order has historically been very politically active in Central Asia and Western China (Baldick 1993, 10) as well as Indo-Pakistan (Schimmel 1975, 365-367), its current role in Tajikistan is quite non-political.

plays movies about their lives; theaters, streets, and buildings are named after them; they are even featured on bank notes. In contrast, Islam, as it is practiced in some surrounding countries, is seen as a threat. According to one official perspective, “New geopolitical conditions provide broad opportunities for the penetration of new ideologies (including the ideology of Islam) that very often come against true cultural values” (*Art and Culture* 2005, 115).

The “true cultural values” of Tajikistan are manifested in ideas of “nationalism.” Nationalism is very related to former Soviet policy, which attempted to clearly delineate different ethnic groups in each of the former Soviet Central Asian republics, an area that had been ethnically mixed for centuries. Each republic was encouraged to develop its own “national” culture. This “culture” was invariably represented via the arts, especially literature/poetry, music, theater, and dance. This policy resulted in “Tajik” music and dance as opposed to “Uzbek” music and dance (among other distinctions), even though a hundred years ago, such distinctions could not have been made. Since independence, the idea of a “national” Tajik identity has picked up even more momentum; not only do national music and dance continue to represent Tajik culture and identity, their ancient roots are sought in order to authenticate a uniquely Tajik culture and identity.

The machine

The metaphor of an old and rusty machine works well to describe the way politics and bureaucracy function in Dushanbe; the machine is composed of many parts and pieces, some big and some small and, regardless of size, some pieces are integral and others are not. Most importantly, it needs constant oiling. The number of government

employees is very large, but government pay rates are generally quite small. Therefore, the system is actually dependent on bribes and “gifts” of money. For example, it is standard practice for police to stop drivers, with or without cause, along the length of Rudaki Prospekt (the central avenue of Dushanbe). If the driver slips a bit of money into the obligatory introductory handshake, he will be back on the road in no time. The driver is not obligated to pay anything, but if he does not, he may be detained for some time and a thorough search of his paperwork and vehicle may follow. Police, however, are dependent on these innocuous bribes; their monthly salary is around one hundred *somoni* (about thirty US dollars), an amount impossible for one person to live on in the city, let alone enough money to support a family. (Monthly apartment rental rates, in the cheapest outskirts of Dushanbe, are rarely below fifty dollars a month.) Many Dushanbe residents feel it is their duty to supplement the police’s income; others do not approve of the police system and refuse to give money, or “oil” the machine. While no one is compelled to give monetary gifts, the entire police system would collapse if no one gave these innocuous bribes.

Dancers in the state ensembles are also government employees and they make very meager incomes. Non-governmental dancers, of which there are few, also make very little money. During the Soviet era, dancers were all state-sponsored, and they actually made good salaries and were given places to live. Today, however, government (or in the case of non-governmental dancers, society) is unable to afford to give its dancers the same lifestyle. This has resulted in a certain demographic and a certain conception of dancers. Many of today’s dancers are young college students or have just graduated from university; they are unmarried and live with their families, so they do not

need to support themselves on their meager incomes. Once they get married or finish university, they will quit dancing to either move on to another profession or become a stay-at-home mother. So, one conception of professional dancers may be that they are young, innocent, unmarried girls who will only dance until they are married. A more common conception of dancers, however, is that they all must receive money on the side, just like police officers. Their extra income is assumed to come from dancing in restaurants or nightclubs, working as the Tajik equivalent of a striptease dancer, or from having patrons or boyfriends who give them gifts; both situations are considered equivalent to prostitution and contribute to the low status of dancers in Dushanbe.

Poetry and Music

Poetry is a part of life in Dushanbe. Speeches or toasts at weddings are usually poems. Poetry is memorized and recited by children in school and on television. Opening ceremonies invariably involve the recitation of poetry. If there is empty time between television programs, the state-sponsored channels display poems written in Tajik; the scene shows a book propped on a wooden frame, a candle, and a feather pen. These are the props associated with the famous mystic-philosopher-poets of days gone by (those same poets referred to here in the chapter on Badakhshan); the only difference is that the poetry shown is written in Cyrillic rather than Persian script.⁴³ These same mystic-philosopher-poets are credited as Tajik “national” literary heroes, and streets and squares in the capital are named after them. In formal settings, the ability to recite poetry

⁴³ Cyrillic has been used for Tajik language since 1940. From 1928 to 1940, the Roman alphabet was briefly used before Cyrillic was adopted after the Russian model. Before 1929, it was written in Persian-Arabic script. The Tajik government implemented a program in 1994 to switch to the Roman alphabet, but it has yet to be fully implemented.

(either old, well-known poems or poems created on the spot by the speaker) is a sign of class and style and instantly wins respect.

Music is also everywhere, and both new and old songs are based on poetry; instrumental music is far less common. Shops selling cassette tapes and video compact discs are on every corner, blaring popular tunes. Turn on the television at any time of the day and at least one of the three Tajik channels is likely to be broadcasting a pre-recorded concert or showing music videos. Old poems may be recycled into new popular songs, as in the case of *Gulamoy*, a poem discussed at the end of this chapter.

Both old and new songs frequently address “*Khoda*” (God); sometimes this reference to God has religious or spiritual connotations while at other times it appears to simply be a linguistic convention (much the way “Oh God!” is used in English, without particular religious significance). However, most genres of music, including *shashmaqam*, are officially considered “secular,” in accord with the ideology of secular Islamic nationalism. In this sense, even though there is “a demand for spiritual product” (*Art and Culture* 2005, 115), and a generic spirituality is accepted and encouraged, music’s secular status is emphasized and its religious connotations downplayed. In the official perspective, the origins of Tajik music (along with Tajik dance and identity) are traced to the pre-Islamic era rather than the Islamic era:

The origins of many contemporary genres go back deep into centuries—to the times of the Sasanid Empire (3-6 A.D.) when musical art had become an indispensable part of court ceremonies, that is the time of formation of the so-called secular music. (*Art and Culture* 2005, 110)

Yet music performance flourished during the Islamic era as it incorporated mysticism:

Musical art as well as musical science enjoyed great respect despite the fact that the Islamic Shariah [law] considered listening and performance of music close to a sin. . . . Availability of music and its recognition in official circles (in court and at literary gatherings) may be explained by the fact that traditional music (as well as classical poetry) was coated in a touch of mysticism and closely reflected the key provision of Sufi ideas . . . (Ibid., 110)

Today in Dushanbe, the music most often heard is a fusion of “traditional” (usually Kulobi) rhythms, modern instrumentation, and both new and old poetry—Tajik pop (*estrada*). *Shashmaqam* is treated as “classical” and “national” music and is unpopular among the younger generation, even though it may have been considered “popular” music in past centuries.

Pop reigns (and pays)

Tajik pop music (*estrada*), with a heavy Kulob influence, is a large industry and by far the most popular music in Dushanbe. It is rare to see a concert without dancers, usually using Kulobi-based movements to accompany the predominantly Kulobi-based rhythms of the music.⁴⁴ In Dushanbe, many dancers or dance companies make extra income by accompanying these pop singers; they receive a small amount of the money garnered by ticket sales. Padida Ensemble makes a majority of their income from pop concerts, whether the entire ensemble accompanies a singer, or only one or two dancers.

⁴⁴ This is my perspective as a dancer and a foreigner. Interestingly, Spinetti has documented that Tajik musicians may identify these rhythms as “urban;” therefore, musicians of non-Kulob origin may also identify with these rhythms and feel ownership over them, even though many are of Kulob origin (2005, 203).

Most concerts contain at least one or two patriotic or nationalistic songs. For example, in the particular concert mentioned above, one song linked the beautiful city of Dushanbe to ancient Bukhara. Another patriotic-sounding song about “Tojikiston!”⁴⁵ was sung in Russian. The final song was about the beauty of Tajikistan; all nine singers featured in the concert came onstage to sing it together, a row of dancers with long braids sang along and remained at the front of the stage, and a row of police officers marched onstage to stand behind everyone and join in the song.

No matter how contemporary the music, dancers accompanying pop concerts always maintain one element of historical Central Asian female dress: six or more long braids. Their costumes may vary in other ways and be quite contemporary, but interestingly these long braid extensions are always kept; it is as if no matter how modern and contemporary, a visible link must be maintained with the past.

Badakhshani pop music, however, is an exception to the above discussion. Although exceedingly rare in Dushanbe and elsewhere, Badakhshani popular/contemporary music follows a different pattern than that established by predominantly Kulobi-based pop music. Every Kulobi-based pop concert I saw was played to a recording; the singers lip-synced and the musicians did not really play their instruments. In addition, professional dancers were hired to entertain a seated audience. In contrast, the two Badakhshani pop concerts I attended in Dushanbe featured live singing and playing and were hosted in a small venue where the audience was expected to dance along to the music; professional dancers were not hired as a part of the show. I

⁴⁵ “Tojikiston” is a more phonetically correct spelling than “Tajikistan.” Although I have used the standard English spelling (Tajikistan) throughout, I here emphasize the patriotic significance of the song, which requires a more correct spelling.

believe the aesthetic of “music, heart, and *mast* equal *kaif*” is extremely important to Badakhshanis; this means that even contemporary forms of Badakhshani music would not compromise the emotional link between musicians and dancers/audience by using recorded (i.e. “dead” as opposed to “live”) music.

Classical, national *shashmaqam*

On November 7, 2003, UNESCO declared *shashmaqam* an intangible cultural heritage. Uniquely, this designation is shared between the cultures of two countries, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Most of the *shashmaqam* lyrics are the poems of Sufi literary greats (Hafez, Sa’adi, Rumi, and others) and were originally written in Persian language. During the push to create separate national identities between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, an Uzbek musician notated many *shashmaqam* pieces, but he was prohibited from publishing the accompanying lyrics, since most of them were in Tajik rather than Uzbek language (see Djumaev 1993 for a more thorough discussion). Today, there are two sets of *shashmaqam* lyrics: one in Uzbek language and one in Tajik language. Based on mystical Islamic poetry and often sung by Jewish singers, the music belonged to a world of spirituality and mysticism, as opposed to a specific religion (Levin 1999, 263, 275). Perhaps because of this, it was allowed to continue during the Soviet era. However, poetry that had too much of a religious tone was discarded, replaced, or altered.

Levin’s research revealed that in past generations *shashmaqam* music was common at weddings (1999, 269), while today pop music dominates this performance sphere. Because of this, *shashmaqam* was considered a popular, as opposed to a classical, tradition, despite the fact that it was also a court entertainment. As he reports:

The worker's state whose goal had been to eliminate class barriers in art had vilified the *Shash maqam* as an elite art and tried to expunge it from cultural life. When that had failed, it had then tried to transform the *Shash maqam* into a popular art. But Soviet cultural strategists had gotten everything reversed. In Bukhara, the *Shash maqam* and other "heavy" music *had* been a popular art. And when they had tried to turn this music into a national "folk" art, they had inadvertently created an elite art; elite, that is, because it had all but lost its audience. No one wanted to listen to a music whose soul had been usurped by the state. (1999, 114-115)

It appears to be an elite art in Dushanbe today and, perhaps for this reason, is commonly referred to as the "classical" music and dance of Tajikistan. The crowds attending the First International Festival of *Shashmaqam* (sponsored by UNESCO) were obviously the aristocrats of Dushanbe. Dressed in expensive clothes and jewelry, the audience members seemed to be making sure they were seen at the concert by saying hello to their neighbors and by lingering in the concert hall afterwards to mingle and socialize. A number of youth were brought in to fill up empty seats, perhaps because it was being filmed for television. They were obviously bored and restless, and when they tried to get up and leave between songs, they were reprimanded by a festival organizer and told to return to their seats to "listen to national art!"

Levin refers to *shashmaqam*'s soul being "usurped by the state" (1999, 115). Historically, *shashmaqam* was passed on from teacher to student by practice and memory (*ustod-shogerd* relationship), sung by a soloist, and performed with an underlying creative principle of inspiration and imagination, as opposed to mechanical repetition.

Today it is taught with notation in state-run academies, sung by ensembles, often played exactly the same each time, and played “squarely” rather than with an improvised rhythmic tension between melody and rhythm (termed *ghazalrani*; Levin 1999, 112-113, 272-273). Likewise, *shashmaqam* dance used to be passed on from teacher to student, based on an improvisation, and usually performed as a solo (this assumption is based on Nurjanov’s discussion of *sazanda* (1995) as well as on several discussions with Sharofat). Today it is taught and practiced primarily in the state-sponsored ensembles, is nearly always choreographed, and is often performed by twenty or more dancers at once.

Dance in Dushanbe

I enter the concert hall and search for my seat. All around me are mothers and children, a few fathers, a few teenagers, and half a dozen video cameras from the national television station. Everyone is excited and fidgets with anticipation. The lights dim and recorded music blares from the stage; the show has begun! Colored lights illuminate the large stage as a singer walks on, in the midst of a colorful array of young female dancers. The dancers all have long braids and wear bright, embroidered costumes. Energetically and percussively, they move their shoulders, torsos, heads, hands, and feet to the fast tempo. They move about the stage, forming a circle around the singer, opening out into two diagonal lines, and creating more intricate floor patterns to make use of the wide space. The singer gesticulates towards the dancers as he sings a love song, holding his hand over his heart, pleading with his eyes for his beloved to return his love. The dancers are coy, out of his reach, and they keep moving faster and faster, spinning, throwing their arms wide, and punctuating their movements with sharp, staccato wrist articulations. The

cameras hover, taking in everything; the boom lowers to the stage floor to get an angled shot of the singer or capture the rapid footwork of a dancer, then raises overhead and turns its lens to the audience to record the people clapping and singing along to the popular lyrics they know by heart, or to capture those who stare absentmindedly at the stage. The song ends and the dancers finish in a perfect tableau, resembling an opened flower with the singer at the center. As the dancers run off stage, the singer accepts bouquets of flowers offered by audience members. After several vocal pieces, we are treated to another dance number. Again, a dozen or more dancers enter the stage and move around a gesticulating singer. I cannot keep my eyes off them because they are moving so fast! I try to take in everything—their continuously rotating torsos, their complicated floor patterns, their flying braids, their colorful new costumes, and all this in stiletto heels! What a contrast to the colorful, homemade wool socks of Badakhshan!⁴⁶ The swirling colors and rapid movement transfix me and, over-stimulated, my eyes don't know where to turn. The song finishes in another carefully constructed tableau. Two minutes later, I cannot remember what I just saw, except that it was beautiful, colorful, and energetic, a sweet candy for the eyes to accompany the saccharine vocals of Tajik popular music. No matter, I think; I should have many more chances to observe the dancing on television, as the concert is certain to be rebroadcast many times.

Dance is often articulated, in both common and official perspectives, as one of the most popular arts of Tajikistan. The comment, “I think Tajik people cannot live without

⁴⁶ Just as all the female dancers I saw in Badakhshan wore socks, all the female dancers I saw in Dushanbe wore shoes. Their shoes were usually stiletto heels, especially if they were performing to Kulobi pop music (*estrada*), although I often saw dancers utilizing a lower heel when performing *shashmaqam*.

dance and music,” was the first response I heard to an explanation of my research in Tajikistan, and I heard it many times thereafter, both in Badakhshan and Dushanbe. In the official perspective, dance is not only described as one of the most popular arts, it is also invariably connected with spirituality:

A Tajik dance as well as music and traditional and classical poetry is the most favored and popular kind of art representing the plastic beauty and graceful movements of a human being, his spiritual motions and feelings, his attitude to the events of life. (*Art and Culture* 2005, 120)

In this section, I consider the official perspective of dance as a spiritual expression of ancient cultural values and the way the “gender issue” is handled in official documents. I then examine both official and individual perspectives of the status of dancers in Dushanbe and why dancers may be perceived as “sex bodies” and low class citizens. Finally, I summarize the roles of dance in Dushanbe.

The official perspective: dance equals culture (and both are ancient and spiritual)

The ancient origins of Tajik identity, the spirituality of Tajik culture, and the way dance represents this cultural identity are constantly reflected in the words chosen to discuss dance in official perspectives. For example:

Tajik people made a great contribution to [the] world’s culture and civilization and by all rights are proud of their rich and ancient culture. Created during many centuries it personifies [the] rich spiritual world of Tajik people, their love for freedom, humanism and high morality. Since ancient times, Art [*sic*] of dancing

has occupied its own important place in the system of cultural values of Tajik people. (Ayubdjanova 2000, 4)

While it is true that Tajik dance has a very long history, for centuries it has been professionally performed only by sexualized dancing boys or (primarily) Jewish women, both marginalized minority groups. This official perspective, then, disregards ten centuries of Islamic influence in Tajikistan and the low “cultural value,” rather than spiritual value, accorded dance and dancers during a majority of this Islamic time period. Because of this, current Tajik publications choose to present a perspective of dance that has an unbroken line of descent from the pre-Islamic, rather than the Islamic, era:

Historical-cultural monuments of pre-Islamic epoch testify that [*sic*] dances were greatly popular among our ancient ancestors. . . . Nevertheless, ancestors [*sic*] traditions and succession of dancing experience remain unchangeable both in Tajik-folk and classic dancing. Dancing as one of the ancient kinds of art to the present day stays the most favourite [*sic*] art of Central Asian people.

(Ayubdjanova 2000, 4)

Tajik choreographic art is one of the oldest and most important spheres of spiritual life with its own rich history. It is proved by numerous rock paintings of male and female dancers relating to the primeval period . . . In the V-VI centuries, the art of dance was so professionally developed in all regions inhabited by Tajik ancestors—Bactrians and Soghdians that the best performers were sent to China as the most invaluable gift. . . . Tajik dance is a peculiar chronicle of people’s life. It reflects their way of living, morals, customs and traditions, various sides of a

national character, their spiritual world and national thinking. (*Art and Culture* 2005, 120)

What is important to this study is the way the spirituality and antiquity of dance and, therefore, the spirituality and antiquity of Tajik culture is emphasized. Dance is assumed to reflect the “national character” of Tajikistan and represent the high morality of Tajik society. Yet, for over ten centuries, professional dancers occupied the lowest, most marginalized caste in society. I do not think this “official” perspective reflects the reality of dance or dancers in Dushanbe or Tajikistan, although it does reflect the way dance is used as a vehicle for politicized notions of national identity.

The official perspective: the “gender issue”

Throughout the document, *Art and Culture in the Republic of Tajikistan: Analysis of the Current State of Affairs*, each section (television, cinematography, theatrical art, musical culture, choreographic art, and fine arts) devotes a sub-section to the “gender issue.” This sub-section discusses the status of women in each field, how many women are currently involved, and provides suggestions for recruiting more. A concern with women’s status in public life is a familiar policy of the Soviet era.

The Soviet campaign to “liberate” the Muslim women of Central Asia aimed to place women and girls in prominent and visible places within society. One of these visible places was dance; girls, because of their youth and their gender, were aggressively recruited for the state-sponsored ensembles. At first, there was a great deal of turmoil as Muslim families did not want to see their daughters “disgraced” by performing in public. Yet, some girls did want to dance. Sharofat Rashidova was one of those girls, but her

mother objected, saying, “What would our relatives say, our society?” (personal communication, November 15, 2006). At that time, almost all of the public female dancers (as opposed to the male *bacha bazi*) were Jewish. In Uzbekistan, one woman’s story became famous; Khalchakhan (also referred to as Noor Khon) was killed, along with her husband, by her relatives who “murdered the woman for her dancing, and the man for allowing his wife to do it” (Swift 1968, 181). She became a Soviet martyr for Muslim women’s emancipation in Central Asia. After her death, girls were primarily recruited from orphanages since a girl with no family would have no one to object to her public dance performance (Doi 2002, 49). Sharofat first began dancing in the early 1960s; she stated that at that time, almost all the girls with whom she danced were either Jewish or orphans (personal communication, November 11, 2006). I believe this strategy—recruiting girls from orphanages—was one of the crucial ways in which females became the main public dancers. After this first generation of mostly orphaned female dancers retired, female public dancers had already become a norm.

The Soviet-era concern with the “gender issue” thus lingers in official documents and is concerned only with the position of women and girls under Islam, not with the position of men or boys:

Despite the known fact that in the Sassanids’ times women-musicians were favored by kings, during more than 1,400 year period of Islamic Shariah, women were deprived from creative art: for instance, women could not perform in public or be involved *in any other social activity*. (*Art and Culture* 2005, 116, emphasis my own)

Women participated in a number of social activities, just not men's activities and, as much as women were prohibited from participating in men's activities, men were prohibited from participating in women's activities; the separation of the sexes affected both sexes. Dancing in drag for entertainment purposes was a common feature in both men's and women's quarters; the *bacha bazi* entertained men with their feminine antics, while *sazanda* (female dancers and entertainers) often dressed up as male dervishes and entertained the women (Levin 1996, 120). Both of these practices were banned during the Soviet era.

The *bacha bazi* are rarely mentioned in the official perspective; if they are, it is not by name and only briefly and rather cryptically. Their overt sexuality, documented in travelers' writings and oral history, is not mentioned. Ayubdjanova's book assumes that dancers are generally female (she uses "her" and "she" throughout), but she does state, "Male dance not always had its own face as it was based on the elements of feminine plastic movements. Being full of fervor, courage, adroitness, boldness, it came to us from the Pamirs" (2000, 7). When I directly asked Shahodat (from the Institute of Culture and Information) about the *bacha bazi* she told me that they only existed because women were not allowed to dance in public. Now, she stated, there is no longer any need for them, since women are able to dance.

Dancers' status: low class occupation because of sex and money

The people look at a dancer and say, 'What is she? She is nothing; she is just a dancer.' They are just for entertaining the fat men so they can relax, enjoy, and watch the pretty ladies. . . . Oh yes, the fat men just look at them as a sex body.

Yes, of course, I can just be honest and say this is what most Tajiks see, bluntly, it's a sex body. (Jahongir Munzim, personal communication, October 17, 2006)

Regardless of the spirituality attributed to Tajik dance in the official perspective, dancers themselves are generally given a very low status by society, primarily because they are seen as sexually promiscuous or deviant. This is not only true in Dushanbe, but is a common perception throughout the Islamic world; whether they are male or female dancers. When I was in Bukhara on the way to Tajikistan, I was invited to a house to dance with some girls I had met, since they had deduced I was a dancer. The men were kicked out of the living room, the blinds were drawn, and we began to dance. However, our hostess declined to dance, responding that because my fiancé was there, her mother was worried she would be shamed; she could not dance in front of any men, even foreigners who do not hold the same social standards. The perspective that female family members should not dance in front of strange men is common amongst many practicing Muslim families, whether in Bukhara or elsewhere.

A common perspective about male dancers is that they are all homosexuals and, therefore, sexually deviant “bad” people, most likely a perspective stemming from centuries of *bacha bazi* entertainment. As Habibullah stated:

They played with boys in past times. But in Afghanistan and Pakistan they have them now. Also in Italy, Holland, in Europe, they have them, homosexuals. The men that take the boys, they live with them, they dance with them, they do things with them, and they put on the clothes of women, makeup, curl their hair. Also in Bukhoro and Samarkand they were. But in the Soviet time, they were banned. And in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, this bad, very bad work, the people forgot

about. . . . Because of this, Uzbeks and Tajiks don't like male dancers.

(Habibullah Abdurazzakov, personal communication, December 4, 2006)

It seems one of the main reasons dancers are considered so low status is because they make very little money and people believe, based on both past ideology as well as the way money circulates today in Dushanbe (the metaphor of the "machine"), a dancer can easily make money on the side by acting as a mistress, courtesan, or prostitute; in Dushanbe, this often simply means dancing at a restaurant. As one dancer stated:

When you want to become a dancer, you must first think about how society treats you, how they think about you. There are both dancers in ensemble and there are those who dance in the club and people think that those girls who dance in the club, they are dancers from the ensemble also. Not everyone respects you. And if the dancer dances just for money, she is not a real dancer. A real dancer must love dance and to be a dancer and she dances just for herself, but the dancer who dances just for money, when you look at her, you are ashamed for her, you can see it. And you know when you look at her, she dances just for money, not for art. And because of this, there are different kinds of dancers. To stay on this path [of being a dancer] is very difficult. You are always thinking about how society thinks about you, how they treat you. The most difficult is this problem with society. (Nadira Mazitova, personal communication, December 5, 2006)

This comment seems to echo the well-documented distinction between "professionals" and "amateurs" in Central Asia, Iran, and the Middle East. Historically, lower status was associated with professional musicians or dancers, defined as those who performed for money, in contrast to amateur performers who performed only for the sake of love, art, or

talent (e.g. Blum 2002; Farmer 1929; Koepke 2000a; Sakata 1976; St. John; 1995). This attitude may account for the way dance was usually presented to us very informally in Badakhshan, within the context of a guest-host relationship. In Dushanbe, it is a bit more complicated, since it is the dancers in the ensembles who are both more respected (if any dancer is to be respected) and considered more “professional” in contrast to nightclub or restaurant dancers. Since the dancing of restaurant/nightclub dancers is far more sexual and less innocent than that of the ensemble dancers, there may be an assumption that restaurant dancers perform only for financial gain.

I did get to see several restaurant/nightclub dancers perform while I was in Dushanbe, and their style of dancing was certainly different from the style of dance found in the “professional” ensembles. One evening, to celebrate a friend’s birthday, we ate a late dinner at an Arabic-European fusion restaurant that advertised belly dancers. We spent a good deal of time eating, talking, and watching the Tajik version of Arabic “belly dance.” Several dancers alternated performing solos in modern Egyptian style costumes with bare midriffs and long skirts. Their movements were concentrated in the hips and pelvis and accompanied by quick shoulder vibrations; for the most part, what we expected of Arabic dance. While we waited for our check, I was stunned to see a new act begin, apparently at the request of a group of men who had just entered. As the men quietly drank vodka in the corner, a dancer frantically gyrated or thrust her pelvis, jerkily propelled her chest forward, and writhed on the floor. Her costume consisted of a camouflaged bustier and very, very short shorts; it was the most revealing attire I saw during my entire time in Tajikistan. It was also the most overtly sexual dancing I saw, and it made even the Russian music videos seem tame.

Dancers are occasionally hired to perform at weddings. Nearly all weddings in Dushanbe are celebrated in restaurants, so these are also “restaurant dancers.” Although weddings are primarily occasions for interactive social dance, I did see one large and expensive wedding accompanied by two hired dancers. Many people still danced, and the hired performers danced with them. The hired dancers, however, seemed to target men; they made direct eye contact with them and were very flirtatious. Their costumes appeared to be Arabic “belly dance” costumes with conservative adaptations, such as long sleeves and only a sliver of midriff exposed just above the waistline. I noticed that one of the dancers, in particular, kept making direct eye contact with men and then looking down at her chest, which was vibrating, as if to purposefully direct their eyes at her bosom. It is not surprising these dancers targeted only men; men continuously put money in their hands in exchange for dancing with them. I saw many bills exchange hands, but never saw a woman give the hired dancers money nor dance with them; instead I saw women looking at them with raised eyebrows and narrowed eyes. It did appear that these dancers were dancing not for “art” but simply for money. However, as Shahodat said with remorse:

Life is busy, what can they do, they dance there [at the restaurants], they get money from there. Their parents say, ‘Don’t go to dance, go be a doctor, go be an economist, or quickly get married.’ They are afraid for their daughters.

(Shahodat Abdurahmanova, personal communication, November 25, 2006)

Thus, this may be one reason why some people in Dushanbe consider all dancers low status; the only way they can make a substantial income is through disrespectful work.

Since their official salaries, through the ensembles, are so low, it is assumed by many Tajiks that all dancers participate in such side work.

Dance's role: healing, national identity, distraction or escape from problems

Dance prevents a person from being hopeless in a difficult world. It brings a face to inspiration, good feelings, and being simple, clear, beautiful, and virtuous, it can protect the people from bad times. (Shahodat Abdurahmanova, monologue, October 2006)

During our first week in Tajikistan, a young Tajik implied that music and dance were used as a distraction from the country's many economic and social problems. To paraphrase: if you are in Tajikistan just to study music and dance, you will have a great time. But, you know, there are many problems, economic, social, political. Always music and dance, music and dance, and you never see the problems (personal communication, July 12, 2006). After spending time in Dushanbe, I began to realize what he meant: I heard stories of domestic violence and alcoholism; I became more aware of corruption; I experienced the common mid-winter power and water outages in a home that lacked insulation and central heating; yet, music and dance concerts were constantly broadcast on television, and nearly every weekend, except during Ramadan, live concerts could be found. By constantly promoting Tajik patriotism and nationalism through dance and music concerts, dance and music serve as an entertaining escape or distraction from problems as well as an ideological vehicle for nationalism.

Dancers have a slightly different explanation of this distracting function of dance, an explanation more personally felt and articulated. For many of the dancers I talked

with, dance is a way for them to keep not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally healthy, which allows them to feel positive, even if they are going through difficult times. In the perspective of one dancer:

For example, if I have a bad mood and I come to practice and I begin to dance, I forget about everything, I feel good. When I listen to music, I become the character and I think just about good things. I dance and I forget about my bad mood and about everything bad that I have in my heart. I can't explain what I feel, how can you understand? I can't express, it's in the deep of my heart. And everything in this day, all the bad news, during the dance, you forget about it. Just everything beautiful, good. If you come with bad mood, you go with good mood. (Nadira Mazitova, personal communication, December 5, 2006)

Dance in Tajikistan has a long history of being connected with healing functions. The *bakhshi* (shamanic healers) are spiritual doctors who cure through dance-like movements. Although some are still found in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, they were much more common in past centuries. According to Habibullah Abdurazzokov, the spiritual nature of dance is responsible for its ability to act as healing device for the *bakhshi* and the reason why it is used during funeral ceremonies in both Badakhshan and Kulob, to assuage feelings of grief (personal communication, December 4, 2006). This role of dance seems to be carried into the personal experiences of dancers, who use dance for their own emotional and spiritual health. The current political role of dance as a distraction from social problems could be seen as an abstraction of dance's healing role, as the government attempts to use dance as a salve for the country's problems.

Aesthetics

Dance does not have a linguistic duty, but it does have an educational or moral duty. The dance gives the audience high spirits, pleasure, and allows them to enjoy. And this role is one of the distinguishing traits of national dance.

(Shahodat Abdurahmanova, monologue, October 2006)

The Badakhshani aesthetic of “music, heart, and *mast* equal *kaif*” seems faintly echoed in Shahodat’s statement; high spirits, pleasure, and enjoyment are all aspects of *kaif*. As Shahodat articulated it, this state of *kaif* results in a moral or educational outcome for the audience, rather than a spiritual or mystical outcome, although these could be considered interrelated concepts. Other dancers in Dushanbe discussed the emotional and spiritual benefit of dance for dancers, rather than for audience members, and often stated that “dancing with heart” or “dancing with feeling” was one of the most important aesthetics of dance. Just as this heart-based, transformative aesthetic is manifested in one way in Badakhshan and a different way in Dushanbe, the aesthetics based in *zarb*, *charkh*, repetition, and lateral symmetry, *noz* and the beauty of the body, and land or region, all have a manifestation in the dance aesthetics found in Dushanbe.

In this section, I first discuss *charkh*, *plastica*, *zarb*, repetition, and lateral symmetry, how these elements are manifested in dance in Dushanbe, and how they contribute to a certain “Islamic” aesthetic. Secondly, I consider the aesthetic of flirtation and coquetry, defined as *noz* in Badakhshan, which draws attention to the beauty of the body. Thirdly, I examine the aesthetic of dancing with heart and feeling, which leads to a transformative experience, and how this relates to the Badakhshani aesthetic “music, heart, and *mast* equal *kaif*.” Lastly, I discuss the way an aesthetic related to land is

manifest in Dushanbe. Rather than influencing movement itself, as it does in Badakhshan, land indirectly influences the costuming and presentation of dance, since one of dance's most important aesthetics in the capital lies in its ability to reflect a regional or national identity.

Charkh, plastica, zarb, repetition, and lateral symmetry

God gives a person good plasticity [*plastica*] and a good ear to catch the rhythm, if the music and the movements of the body are parallel, and if also this person has wish and talent, he or she can become a very good dancer. Of course people can dance commonly, but if he or she wants to be a professional or work in an ensemble . . . posture and length, if everything is connected and becomes one, good choreography, good music, he or she can become a good dancer.

(Habibullah Abdurazzokov, personal communication, December 4, 2006)

The geometrical aesthetic common to Islamic art and based in rhythm, repetition, the circle, and symmetry (refer to Gocer 1999, Nor 2003) is embodied by dancers in Dushanbe and expressed in a slightly different way than it is expressed in Badakhshan. Of utmost importance are *charkh* (spins) and *plastica* (plasticity, flexibility). Of secondary importance are *zarb* (rhythm), repetition, and lateral symmetry.

In Dushanbe, rhythm manifests as an underlying but non-stressed foundational characteristic. The necessity and importance of *zarb* (rhythm) was not articulated as a defining characteristic of any other Tajik dances in the same way it was cited as a defining characteristic of Badakhshani dance. However, *zarb* was casually mentioned in several interviews (for example, Habibullah's comment, above) as a component of a good

dancer, and dance classes usually began with footwork, especially if a new rhythm or dance style was introduced. In the *shashmaqam* and Kulobi dances I learned, there are specific parts of the dances where the footwork is accented with audible stomps, usually to intensify the energy of the dance; otherwise, the footwork was rarely brought to my attention. Thus, while *zarb* was not a constant focal point, *zarb* was assumed to be the basis of movement and the foundation of a good dancer.

The circle manifests in both *charkh*, as in Badakhshan, and also in the term “*plastica*” (plasticity, flexibility), which stresses the ability of the body to adopt curvilinear body postures. Curvilinear motions and postures of the arms and hands are also common in Kulobi, *shashmaqam*, and other Tajik dances, just as they are in Badakhshan. The term “*plastica*” actually comes from the Russian language, and while it was used often in Dushanbe, I did not hear it in Badakhshan. In the ideal sense of *plastica*, the body nearly completes a circle as the dancer performs very deep back or side bends (Figure 27). Although singers often receive applause during the middle of a song, there were only two times I saw dancers receive applause in the middle of a dance. The first round of applause occurred when all twenty-two Gulrez dancers turned their backs to the audience and performed deep backbends. The second round of applause came later in the same dance, as one of the dancers performed a series of very rapid spins. This same dancer had been called to my attention by Shahodat Abdurahmanova when we went to watch the Gulrez rehearsal; Shahodat had stated that she was the best dancer because she was the one who could spin the best.



Figure 27: A Jahonoro dancer demonstrating her *plastica* at the Festival of *Shashmaqam*, November 2006

Symmetry, like in Badakhshan, usually manifests as lateral symmetry and can be found in movement sequences, locomotion patterns, and the arrangement of dancers in choreography. Ayubdjanova's arrangement for eight dancers at the end of her book *Traditional Tajik Dances* is sketched into a series of sixteen diagrams; in all but two, the arrangements and locomotion patterns of the dancers reflect perfect, simultaneous lateral symmetry, which result in mirrored floor plans (2000, 75-77). This use of simultaneous lateral symmetry in group choreographies was a near constant feature of the ensemble dance performances I saw in Dushanbe, no matter what style of dance was performed. The use of sequential lateral symmetry in movements of the upper body, especially the arms, is identical to that of Badakhshan and just as prominent; a movement or series of movements on or towards the right side of the body will usually be repeated on the left.

Also similar to Badakhshan, if a dancer was not utilizing sequential lateral symmetry in her upper body movements, she was utilizing simultaneous lateral symmetry, and individual dancers' postures and positions were often asymmetrical. Sequential lateral symmetry was also common in the locomotion patterns of individual dancers, and some examples can be seen in the floor plans of *Gulamoy*, one of the Kulobi dances I learned, although less of this sort of symmetry was apparent in *Qurbonat Manam*, the *shashmaqam* choreography I learned (refer to Appendix B).

The elaborately choreographed dances found on Dushanbe's stages use less repetition than the improvised dances I saw in Badakhshan. Most of the repetition in movement was derived from the sequential lateral symmetry of upper body movements. However, unending repetition and practice is the foundation of a professional dancer: "If she can practice, she can be a great dancer. But if she doesn't like to practice, she will never be a dancer. You must be a fanatic. . . . A dancer should practice 24 hours a day" (Sharofat Rashidova, personal communication, November 15, 2006).

In sum, the foundational characteristics of dance throughout Tajikistan are based on rhythm, repetition, the circle, and symmetry, just as other arts in Islamic cultures share these characteristics. Is this "Islamic aesthetic" a spiritual one? Although I do believe, as Gocer has indicated (1999), that this aesthetic can be linked to Islamic philosophy and ideas of God's beauty, harmony, and perfection, I do not think this aesthetic, as it manifests in dance, aims to be spiritual. It simply is a part of the culture and can be found in every aspect of art, craft, music, poetry, calligraphy, and dance. As it is manifest in Dushanbe, this kinesthetic and visual aesthetic requires that an ideal dancer be a trained and well-practiced professional who has mastered the rhythms of all styles of

Tajik dance, is able to perform deep backbends with ease, has an intuitive sense of lateral symmetry, and can spin incredibly fast for as long as she is required.

The beauty of the feminine body (*noz*)

There are a number of movements in Kulobi, *shashmaqam*, and other Tajik dances that direct attention to the beauty of the body; these movements echo the *noz* aesthetic found in Badakhshani dance. During my time as a student and researcher in Dushanbe, however, these movements were never articulated as “*noz*” and the aspect of beauty was highlighted over the aspect of flirtation. Ayubdjanova’s book *Traditional Tajik Dances* (2000) provides a plethora of examples. Photographs depict a dancer as she demonstrates named postures, such as “beauty of eyes,” “beauty of image,” “beauty of hair,” “a slender stature,” or “appeal.” In each of these poses, the dancer’s hands draw attention to the highlighted feature of beauty; for example, holding a braid aloft signifies “beauty of hair,” or placing one hand, with hyper-extended fingers, beneath the chin signifies “beauty of image.”

These movements seem especially plentiful in Kulobi dance and, although beauty is the articulated motivation for the movements, flirtation seems to be an underlying characteristic. Ayubdjanova calls these *noz*-like movements of Kulobi dance “embellishing movements” (2000, 50). Sharofat, in her public dance class, teaches some Kulobi movements with the admonishments, “What sweet and sugary lips you have!” or “Look at my sweet and beautiful teeth!” When my fiancé and I were learning a Kulobi dance and percussion duet, Sharofat advised me to play hide and seek with my eyes, directing them towards and away from my fiancé, essentially flirting with him. During

one of my private lessons with Sharofat, Habibullah (Sharofat's husband) animatedly interjected his explanation of the origins of Kulobi dance movements. He stated that women danced for other women in order to show off their talents and display themselves as potential brides. While some movements came from work-related activities, such as pounding and kneading bread, making noodles, or fanning oneself from the heat, he said, most importantly, "First, smile . . . look at how beautiful I am, look at how pretty I am, how beautiful every part of me is!" (personal communication, November 15, 2006).

Perhaps the female body does a better job of embodying *noz*. Although it was never directly articulated, it was clear that dance performance by young females was the preferred aesthetic of dance in Dushanbe; dancing girls were preferred to the dancing boys of past epochs. Females are the assumed gender of dancers in official documents and only one state ensemble, Lola, has male dancers; all the rest are entirely composed of females. Lola primarily uses its male dancers in choreographies based on folklore and theater where differentiation between the sexes is important (as opposed to non-theatrical, abstract dance). Sharofat had one young male dancer who taught children's classes at Padida, but he rarely performed with the ensemble. During rehearsals, he always looked as if he wanted to participate, but never fully joined in the rehearsals; instead, he mirrored movements in the background. The one time I saw him in a performance was during a theatrical dance piece where he was needed to symbolize a groom; he simply walked on and off stage.

Youth is also favored and dancers usually retire between the ages of thirty and thirty-five; they are dancing *girls* rather than dancing women. As one twenty-two year old dancer stated, "People more than twenty-five, twenty-six, close to thirty, maybe

thirty-five, it's not possible that they can dance . . . She can be like a teacher of dances” (Mariam Gaibova, personal communication, November 23, 2006). I was led to believe that this was primarily a visual aesthetic, since it depends on how old the dancer looks; if she looks young, she will keep dancing, if she starts to lose a youthful look, she will stop dancing. The average age for the Padida ensemble was around seventeen, while the average age for the Gulrez ensemble was twenty or twenty-one. Most dancers perform in the ensembles only while they are university students; after they finish school, they either find a better paying job or get married.

Why does the female body represent *noz* and beauty in Dushanbe instead of the male body? I believe the dancing male body is too strongly associated with sexuality in Dushanbe; professional male dancers, like the *bacha bazi* of past eras, are connected with homosexuality, a sexual orientation viewed as an anomaly and a perversion by a large majority of Dushanbe Tajiks. Male dancers in Badakhshan, however, do not seem to be viewed the same; perhaps the gender differentiation in movement styles allows for a Badakhshani man to remain “manly” while he is dancing. Or perhaps the host-guest relationship in Badakhshan, which stresses the duty of the host to entertain his or her guests, creates a less formal, less “professional” atmosphere, which allows men or boys to perform without the stigma attributed to professional male dancers. Perhaps it is the stronger Soviet influence in Dushanbe that has influenced people’s perceptions about male dancers. Shahodat Abdurahmanova alluded that people have always preferred female dancers, males only danced (and dressed up as females to do it) because females were not allowed to (personal communication, October 12, 2006). However, I believe

female¹ dancers are the norm in Dushanbe not because they have always been preferred to males, but simply because they do not embody a negatively viewed or deviant sexuality.

Dancing with heart and feeling (*his*) to become the character (*obraz*)

Heart is necessary, eyes are necessary, feeling is necessary. If your heart can't feel/perceive/sense [*his*] the melody of the music, you can't dance. First, the heart must become awake. After the heart awakens, slowly, slowly, it comes to the movements of hands, the wrinkles of the eyes. I, too, feel your feelings. . . . Like I said, dance is a different world. Believe it! But many dance just buh-buh-buh [lifting and dropping her shoulders] and they don't feel/perceive/sense. Dance is given from God. Feeling/perception/sense is necessary. If a dancer doesn't feel dance, doesn't feel God, she can't be a real dancer. (Sharofat Rashidova, personal communication, November 15, 2006)

In the ensembles, even if you have beautiful posture, face, smile, everything, but you are not a good dancer and can't show the imagination of the dances, you are not a good dancer. When you begin to dance and if you feel this dance, *obraz* [character/image], the dance comes itself. When you dance and you feel the music, you listen to it very carefully, everything will be okay. The most important for a dancer is to become the character and to feel the dance. (Nadira Mazitova, personal communication, December 5, 2006)

The aesthetic of dancing with heart is not only found in Badakhshan; it is actually quite common throughout Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (for a discussion of the heart in Uzbek dance, see Doi 2002, 77-78). Thus, I was not surprised to hear references to the

heart in nearly every interview I conducted in Dushanbe as well as throughout my dance lessons. When I asked Sharofat what “dancing with heart” meant, she replied, “From God, it comes. From above, it comes. When you look up, you feel God, and then you move” (personal communication, November 15, 2006). As I discussed in Chapter 2, the heart may be thought of as a gateway to the divine; it is a concept that blurs the boundaries between body and soul. This definition of the heart is found in Islamic philosophy and is put to use in mystical poetry. Even though the Persian term for heart used in Tajikistan (*dil*) is different from the Arabic term used in Islamic philosophy (*qalb*), the concept of heart in both languages is tied to mysticism, as Sharofat’s comment attests.

“*His*,” however, was a new term to my ears and I heard it over and over again during my lessons with Sharofat, especially as I learned *shashmaqam*. Shahodat Abdurahmanova also referred to it several times in her monologue, as did other dancers during interviews. The term translates with three meanings: feeling, perception, and sense. I find this three-part definition illuminating; in order to feel an emotion, one must perceive, in order to perceive, one must rely on sensory information. The act of feeling depends on the senses and the ability to perceive via sensory input. Likewise, the act of communicating a feeling, as good dancers are expected to do, is dependent on the ability of the dancer to accurately display the outward, sensory attributes of that feeling. An excellent dancer not only sensually displays the effect of a particular feeling; she also makes her audience feel. As Sharofat explained above, when these conditions are met, “I, too, feel your feelings.” According to Sharofat, *shashmaqam*, especially, requires *his*:

I said, you know, feeling/perception/sense is necessary for *shashmaqam*, heart is necessary. If you don't feel/perceive/sense, you can't dance *shashmaqam*. It is necessary to show the character of the eyes and the heart, the movements of the hands and eyebrows, *with heart and with body movement*. (Sharofat Rashidova, personal communication, November 15, 2006, emphasis my own)

The dancer uses both her mystical heart and her sensual body movements to become the character (*obraz*) of the dance.

Interestingly, the term “*obraz*” is actually a Russian word that has been incorporated into the Tajik language. It translates as “character,” “image,” “icon,” “shape,” “form,” or “way of manner.” This term implies that the dancer becomes something other than herself; she uses heart and *his* to transform herself into the character, image, or icon that should be portrayed in the dance. In this sense, dance becomes a transformative experience for the dancer:

After I come on the stage, all my fear disappears because I am listening to the music and I forget about everybody, everything, I only feel the music, listening, and feel what kind of music this is, and how I must show my feelings to the audience. Am I sad, or smiling, happy, or something other. And I cannot see anybody when I do the dance, I don't see anybody, only I am living in dance, its like another life. (Mariam Gaibova, personal communication, November 23, 2006)

Other dancers in Dushanbe referred to the transformative experience they have when performing and cited this as a reason for dancing, despite the low pay and low status of the profession. Thus, in both Badakhshan and Dushanbe dancers speak of transformative

experiences; in Badakhshan, it is articulated as a transformative experience for the audience, in Dushanbe, as a transformative experience for the dancer. In both cases, the sensuality of the dancing body is used to induce this mystical experience.

The aesthetic of dancing with heart and *his* to become the *obraz* is a confluence of sensual, emotional, and mystical factors. In order to feel emotions and communicate them to an audience, the dancer is dependent on the senses and the sensual depiction of these feelings. She must be able to accurately perceive the embodiment of emotions and replicate them via her dancing body; thus, *his* integrates sensual and emotional factors. In order to truly *his* the dance, not just adopt the outward manifestations of emotion, the dancer must “dance with heart,” using both body and soul to channel a presence beyond her self or her ego. Dancing with heart relies on mystical factors. The end result of dancing with heart and *his* is a transformation into the *obraz*, the image or character of the dance. While this is primarily a mystical transformation felt by the dancer, perhaps some audience members can also experience it, if they truly *his* and are able to *kaif* on the dancing.

Regional and national identity—the representation of land in costuming

Costumes play the most important role in the dance. From one side, it shows beauty and boldness and from another side, it shows the regional identity. The national clothes or costumes, they are different by color, by decoration, by shape, and they have their own distinguishing traits. (Shahodat Abdurahmanova, monologue, October 2006)

Colorful dance costumes represent specific regional and national identities and are an important visual aesthetic of dance in Dushanbe—an aesthetic that carries political and ideological impact. Just as the Ismail Somoni statue proudly and very visibly makes a statement about Tajik nationality (Figure 23), costumes make a similar visual and political statement by connecting dance to the land of Tajikistan. Costumes either literally represent the current regions of Tajikistan or abstractly represent the ancient land of Tajikistan. The influence of the land in Badakhshan is visceral and manifests in dance movements; in Dushanbe, the land is an abstract political concept and manifests in costuming, as costumes place dances within specific regional and national boundaries.

During the Independence Day concert (September 8, 2006) at Borbat Theater, dancers representing the concrete and abstract land of Tajikistan performed a large finale together, each in their respective costumes. The regions of Badakhshan, Kulob, and Khojand were represented by regional dress, while ancient Tajikistan/Central Asia was represented by *shashmaqam* costumes. Other concerts connected with political events or national holidays, such as the signing of an international road-building contract with China (Summer 2006) or the *Nowruz* (Persian New Year) celebration of 2006, featured dancers in regional and national dress to represent different areas of Tajikistan or the ancient land. Doi noted the same use of dance in Uzbekistan, as either a marker of regional identity or an abstract symbol of the ancient land of Central Asia, and always this distinction was made and commonly recognized by Uzbeks via costuming (2002). An important aspect of dance costuming involves the hair.

The six, or sometimes twelve, long braid extensions, worn by nearly every dancer in Dushanbe, seem to be the most constant and generic symbol of ancient Tajik or Central

Asian civilization.⁴⁷ Central Asia did not always have clear political, national, or cultural boundaries; it is therefore not surprising that girls with long braids are used as a visual symbol of antiquity throughout Central Asia. Girls with long braids are commonly depicted in Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen films, to signify that the action is taking place in ancient times. In Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, dancers wear six or twelve long braids, whether they are dancing to “traditional” or “pop” music. This use of hair is fascinating to me; other aspects of costuming may incorporate modern elements, such as blue jeans, cropped tops, or bowler hats, yet if the song is thought of as “Tajik” (or “Uzbek,” if in Uzbekistan)⁴⁸—whether it is sung to old Sufi poetry and accompanied by traditional instruments, or it is a modern love song accompanied by keyboard and electric guitar—the dancers will nearly always be wearing long braids.

Costumes thus represent a very important visual and emotional aesthetic that has political and ideological implications. The visual spectacle of dance constantly reminds Tajiks of their roots in Central Asian antiquity and clearly delineates different regional identities. Large political events invariably include concerts where dancers in regional dress emphasize the unity of these identities and their shared history. Just as pride for the land of “Tojikiston” is orally referenced in song lyrics, it is visually referenced and emotionally communicated via the dress of dancers.

⁴⁷ According to the Uzbek dancer Viloyat Akilova, the ideal number of braids is actually forty (personal communication, Robyn Friend, March 29, 2007).

⁴⁸ Although I saw a fair amount of Turkmen television programming while I was in Dushanbe, the only Turkmen dance I saw was “traditional;” the state television broadcasts of Turkmenistan do not appear to air much “popular” music or dance, unlike the state broadcasts of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Summary—dance aesthetics in Dushanbe

Dance aesthetics in Dushanbe stem from the same root as dance aesthetics in Badakhshan, but they manifest in different ways. The foundational elements of rhythm, symmetry, repetition, and the circle (as it manifests in curvilinear movements or positions, turns, and spins) contribute to a sensual, visual and kinesthetic aesthetic; this aesthetic is most prominent in the use of *charkh* and *plastica*, sequential lateral symmetry within the body, and simultaneous lateral symmetry in the arrangements and locomotion patterns of large ensemble pieces. The sensual aesthetic of *noz*, although not directly articulated as *noz*, is apparent in movements that purposely draw attention to the beauty of the body. The spiritual-mystical-emotional Badakhshani aesthetic “music, heart, and *mast* equal *kaif*” finds a parallel in Dushanbe with the importance placed on dancing with heart and *his* to become the *obraz*. However, this aesthetic was articulated as leading to a transformative emotional or mystical state for the dancer, and not particularly for the audience. The land also influences dance in Dushanbe, but in a completely different way than in Badakhshan; in rural Badakhshan, the land directly and viscerally affects the movements of dance, while in urban Dushanbe the land is an abstract political entity reflected in regional, national, and historical costuming. This is an important visual and emotional aesthetic of dance in Dushanbe, as costuming reflects ideas about belonging and the importance of history to the modern nation of Tajikistan.

The aesthetics of dance in Dushanbe incorporate emotional, sensual, mystical, and, minimally, spiritual factors. Despite the extent to which spirituality is cited in connection to dance in official documents, only one dancer ever spoke about God—my teacher, Sharofat. Although dance can become a mystical experience for the dancer,

dance in Dushanbe is rarely articulated by dancers in terms of spirituality. It is primarily a visual spectacle, a sensual delight of colorful costumes, moving female bodies, and beautiful gestures that represent the whole of modern and ancient Tajikistan.

For the most part, the dancing girls of Tajikistan, like those of neighboring Uzbekistan, aesthetically and ideologically represent “icons of history . . . curiously encapsulated from change” (Doi 2002, 137). Although dance is always changing, the importance of history in the national identity of independent Tajikistan is paramount. Thus, dancers, even if accompanying popular singers, maintain some element of traditional costuming to visibly connect the present with the past and show that, while Tajikistan may be a new nation, its roots are ancient.

Dance and Poetry: Specific examples

Both *shashmaqam* and Kulobi dance may or may not be performed to poetry. From Sharofat, I learned one *shashmaqam* choreography, set to a traditional poem with an unknown author, and three Kulobi choreographies, one accompanied solely by percussion, one accompanied by percussion and *labchang* (mouth harp), and one set to an anonymous (*khalqi*) poem. My fiancé learned the accompaniment on both percussion and *labchang* to the two instrumental Kulobi dances, so our lessons were often together. The Kulobi dance set to poetry is choreographed to a recording of a popular singer, Manija Davlatova, with modern instrumentation, despite the age of the poem and its role as a traditional folk song. This song is titled *Gulamoy* (My rose), and it is in the repertoire of the Padida ensemble. Thus, I was able to see other dancers rehearse a similar choreography made for a group rather than a soloist. Likewise, the *shashmaqam*

choreography is a work in progress for the Padida ensemble, and I was able to witness the similarities and differences between my solo version and the group choreography.

Kulobi dance to *Gulamoy*

All of the Kulobi dances I learned and saw contained many gestures that highlighted the mouth, eyes, face, or involved a flirtatious hide-and-seek between the dancer and the audience or percussionist; these are movements I classify as a part of the *noz* aesthetic. As mentioned, Habibullah stressed the origins of these movements in women's demonstrations of skill and beauty for other women. Today, although the audience is no longer composed only of women, the dancers usually are all women (I did hear a reference to men's Kulobi dance, but I never saw any). Kulobi dancers seem to embody this *noz* aesthetic first and foremost, as they interact with the audience in a flirtatious manner, hiding behind, and then peeking out from under, above, or between their long sleeves (Figure 28).

The long and voluminous sleeves of Kulobi dance costuming not only make coquettish hiding places, they also require a certain amount of energy and force in order to move them.⁴⁹ Many of the movements of Kulobi dance originate in the scapula and end in the wrists or hands. A basic movement starts with the raising of the shoulders (as in a shrug), then an accented drop of the shoulders on the beat, the impulse of which travels through the arms and ends with sharp backward folds at the wrists, so the hands percussively flip the sleeves of the costume outward. Although the movement feels as if

⁴⁹ Most Kulobi dance costumes have long sleeves, and this is accepted as the "traditional" costume, but there are many variations; some newer ones have very short sleeves, covering only the top half of the upper arm.



Figure 28: The author peeking out between the long sleeves of a Kulobi dance costume, November 2006

it begins in the shoulders and then travels to the wrists (according to both Sharofat and to how the movement feels in my body), it is actually a simultaneous action occurring on the beat. This movement is done with or without a characteristic waist-to-head rotation, with the arms in a variety of positions, and with differing speeds. Essentially, it is one of the most basic underlying movements of Kulobi dance (see Figure 29 for the notation of one version with the waist-to-head rotation). The waist-to-head rotation, in which the upper torso and head move as one unit, is another foundational element of Kulobi dance. Variations on this movement sequence can be found throughout the *Gulamoy* choreography, but are more easily visible in the Kulobi dance with *tavlak* (hand drum) on the accompanying DVD. (The dance with *tavlak* is accompanied with Kulobi dance

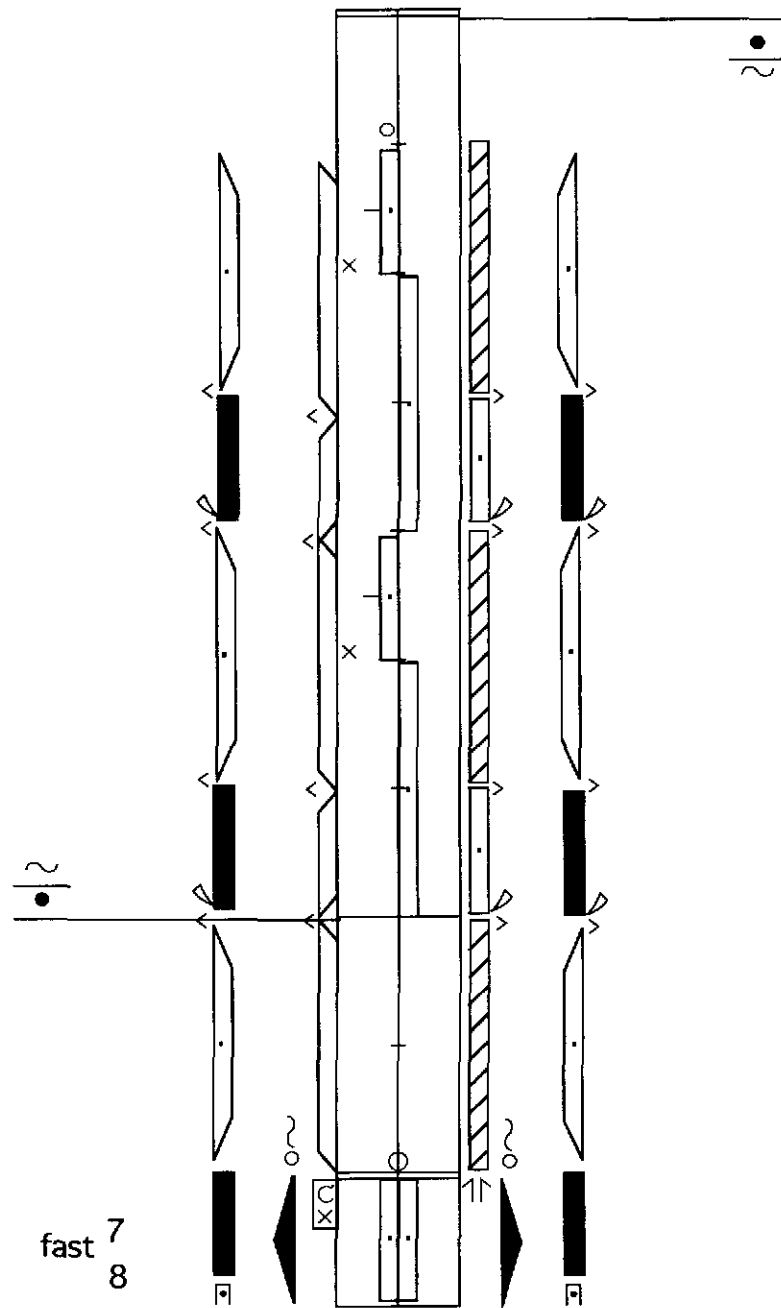


Figure 29: one variation of Kulobi shoulder shrugs and wrist movements with waist-to-head rotations (amount of rotation up to performer)

costuming, while the *Gulamoy* choreography is not; in comparing these two dances on the accompanying DVD, the role of costuming becomes quite apparent.)

Besides admonishing me to hide behind or peek out from my sleeves, look towards or away from my audience, or otherwise characterizing the *noz* aesthetic, Sharofat repeatedly told me to *his* the music and become the *obraz* while she was teaching me *Gulamoy*. “*Gulamoy*” translates as “my rose,” and it is an old, anonymous poem considered part of the folklore (*khalqi*) repertoire. The poem is also sung in Afghanistan, and it may have migrated from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. I interpreted Sharofat’s instructions to *his* the music and become the *obraz* as meaning that I should become the object of the poem; the unattainable beloved who was once loved by the author, but has since left him and caused him much pain (only excerpts appear below, see Appendix A for a full translation of the poem, as well as a Tajik transcription):

Oh, my rose, my heart, new leaf, oh my rose

She is curled in my arms and her pain is in my heart

My beloved did not stay, bring back my beloved, oh my beloved

My heart does not have coquetry, it has lamentation

You have given me a wounded heart

In your love is still lament and sadness

That fire of love is still burning

And my tears are still running

Today I took a rose from the rose garden

I kept it in my hand and I took it to the nightingale’s garden

The next day I went to ask about that rose

There were no flower leaves, no sound of nightingale

In this poem, the object of affection is compared to a rose or a flower; I interpreted the *obraz* of the dance to be a beautiful girl, flirtatious, youthful, and ultimately inaccessible. Her youth is symbolized by new leaves, new blooms, and the transient nature of flowers. She is inaccessible because she disappears as soon as she is plucked from the garden, and her love is transient, appearing one moment and disappearing the next. Her carelessness and coquetry (her thorns) cause pain and sadness to the author of the poem. The words used to describe this inaccessible, beautiful beloved reflect the mysticism inherent in poetic language, yet they are manifest in the movements of this dance as pure coquetry.

In addition to embodying an aesthetic of *noz*, the choreography of *Gulamoy* relies on *charkh*, *plastica*, *zarb*, repetition, and lateral symmetry. Rapid series of spins occur several times during the dance, circular and curvilinear movements of the arms are frequent, and *plastica* is required to perform turns that utilize side and back bends in order to fix a gaze towards one particular point in space while the body turns (similar to a barrel turn or a spotted turn with the body initially inclined forward).

The use of *zarb* is nearly constant throughout the dance, but it is not steadily accented, as in *rapo*. Interestingly, the common 7/8 rhythm of Kulobi music is actually called “*zarb*.” The usual footwork pattern of Kulobi dance, which is used in most of *Gulamoy*, is similar to the common pattern found in *rapo*. The right foot usually steps on the accented beats, while the steps on the ball of the left foot are faster and fall between accented beats. However, the Kulobi rhythm is different (it is a 7/8) and usually much faster than *rapo* (see Figure 29). The step on the right foot takes two beats, while the step on the left ball only takes one (slow, quick, slow, quick), with a slight, nearly

imperceptible pause at the end of each measure. The *zarb* is accented two times in the *Gulamoy* choreography, both times coinciding with melodic or rhythmic transitions of the song and contributing to an increase in energy level. The first song transition is accompanied by audible, more forcible stomps. In the second transition, the *zarb* is accented by being performed on the knees instead of the feet (not shown on DVD⁵⁰).

Repetition occurs most frequently by the use of sequential lateral symmetry within the body and in locomotion patterns. Yet, there is significantly less symmetry in the floor plan of *Gulamoy*, where several series of movements take place only on the right half of the stage, than in the floor plan of *Raqsi Tabaqcha* (compare these floor plans in Appendix B). However, lateral symmetry may be less apparent in *Gulamoy* because it is choreographed for a solo dancer, as opposed to the six dancers utilized in *Raqsi Tabaqcha*. I never saw the entire Padida ensemble rehearse *Gulamoy*,⁵¹ but it appeared I was learning one “side” of the choreography. When I did see the group choreography rehearsed, the dancers were often roughly split into two groups; for sections of the choreography, especially during the last half of the song, the two groups mirrored each other’s movements, creating laterally symmetrical floor patterns. During the first half of the group choreography, it was more difficult to discern the floor patterns.

Gulamoy begins slowly as the dancer peeks out from between her sleeves, moving smoothly across the stage. Like a girl only coquettishly pretending to be shy, the dancer

⁵⁰ The version of the dance shown on DVD is a rehearsal, not a performance, and although I descend to my knees, I do not walk on them. (I tended to avoid performing this movement when possible, and I noticed that many of the Padida dancers did as well; the studio flooring is peppered with protruding nail heads). When this movement is performed, the knees simply take the place of the feet in stepping to the rhythm notated in Figure 29.

⁵¹ There were always absent dancers at their daily rehearsals, and I never saw this dance in a staged performance. Dancers were quitting and joining the company a lot during my time in Dushanbe, so the size fluctuated; generally, it was around twenty dancers.

actually uses a majority of the dance to display technical virtuosity and speed, as the movements increase in tempo until the final moment. The use of *noz*-like movements throughout the dance and the emphasis Sharofat put on the refinement of technique, in order to match the building speed, made me believe this dance is primarily a demonstration of skill and beauty. The poetry, nonetheless, contains hints of mysticism as it discusses an unattainable beloved and the author's separation and pain from love. The dancer may also enter a mystical world of movement, as she loses herself in the character of the dance. Thus, while *Gulamoy* contains references to mysticism via its poetical text and has the potential to transport a dancer to a mystical state, it is primarily the embodiment of entertainment, charm, and sensual feminine coquetry.

Shashmaqam and the munojot Qurbonat Manam

Shashmaqam is the most difficult dance. It's very impossible. Not everyone can do this dance and if you don't have expression or imagination, how can you do it? You must dance with soul but if you don't, the dance doesn't have meaning.

(Nadira Mazitova, personal communication, December 5, 2006)

Of all the dances I learned and saw in Tajikistan, *shashmaqam* was the style of dance most often equated with the spirituality and antiquity of Tajik culture and, therefore, required the most expression, emotion, heart, or soul, depending on to whom one talked. Interestingly, when I asked Sharofat to teach me a *shashmaqam* dance, she chose to teach me a *munojot*. A *munojot* is usually described as a particular style of poetry sung as a lament, complaint, or appeal to God (Doi 2002, 126; Levin 1999, 75). Yet, it may also be described as a melody, a rhythm, or a style of dance, in different

contexts or by different people. Today it is not unusual to see dance accompanying a *munojot* in the repertoires of the state dance companies of Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. *Munojot* are also commonplace in Tashkent, where they are dance songs at weddings (Robyn Friend, personal communication, February 13, 2006). But in Badakhshan, a *munojot* is viewed as a prayer to God, included in the *madoh* genre, and is not accompanied by dance (Uvaido Pulodov, personal communication, August 20, 2006). Doi reports that in Uzbekistan, dance to *munojot* is a relatively new phenomenon; in past days, this music was considered too serious and religious to be accompanied by dance (2002, 125-126). Levin discusses *munojot* in relation to religious chanters, and he bemoans their disappearance during the Soviet era, due to their strong associations with religion (1999, 75, 89, 115).

In the perspective of musicologists, *munojot* are not a traditional part of the *shashmaqam* genre; instead, they may be considered a part of the greater “classical music” tradition of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (email communication, Razia Sultanova, February 8, 2006; Evan Rapport, February 18, 2006). There is much fluidity with this categorization, however, and colloquially in Tajikistan, “classical music” and “classical dance” are equivalent to *shashmaqam*.⁵² Sharofat always used the terms *shashmaqam* and *munojot* interchangeably to refer to the *Qurbonat Manam* choreography, and other dancers in Dushanbe used the term *munojot* to refer to a type of *shashmaqam*. Thus, at

⁵² Confusingly, “classical dance” may occasionally refer to ballet in Tajikistan, but usually ballet is “*ballet*” (with the “t” pronounced), and *shashmaqam* is “*raqsi klasii*” (“classical dance”). In Uzbekistan, however, “classical dance” refers to ballet (Doi 2002, 86).

least in the perspective of dancers in Dushanbe, a *munojot* is a particular style within the genre of *shashmaqam*.⁵³

The poetry and character of the *munojot* I learned from Sharofat is heavy, sad, and serious, even though many other *shashmaqam* dances may be light, happy, smiley, and even accompanied by flirtatious *noz*-like movements. Paralleling the gravity of the words, the movements in this *munojot* are often slow and exaggerated and full of a somber, restrictive tension that only occasionally finds release in a rapid series of spins, quick running steps, forceful arm gestures, or other energetic movements. The hardest part of learning the dance, however, was not the movements; it was learning how to *his* (feel, perceive, sense) the poetry and reflect the separation, pain, and longing of the mystically oriented text.

Dancing to *munojot* requires a great deal of expression and emotion; as Sharofat said, “You must have heart and tears to dance *munojot*” (personal communication, October 25, 2006). She wanted to be sure I understood the nature of the poetry, and that I interpreted the song as a communication between God and myself. She continuously admonished me to express anguish, to feel tears, or to even actually cry while I was dancing; the word she always used was “*his*.” As she directed:

And when you feel [*his*] *munojot* and you begin to dance, you will only feel ‘eh, dear God’ during the dance, you will see no one, you will think of nothing else, just your dance and your God. You will see no one. When I dance, I don’t see

⁵³ When I asked for clarification, Sharofat said only one or two of the six *maqam* have *munojot*; in her opinion, *munojot* is actually included in the *shashmaqam* repertoire (personal communication, October 30, 2006).

anyone. Only God, dance, music, and my heart, that's all. (Sharofat Rashidova, personal communication, November 15, 2006)

Habibullah interpreted all of *shashmaqam*, not just *munojot*, as a conversation with God.

In his opinion, the most important element of *shashmaqam* is the meaning of the poetry:

Shashmaqam you should feel in every part of your body, your palm, your head, your eyes, your tears, because it is only you and God, you are speaking to God . . .

Hands, heart, everything that moves should express the meaning. . . .

Shashmaqam movements should be fluid and have beautiful choreography, but the most important thing is the meaning. (Habibullah Abdurazzokov, personal communication November 1, 2006)

In Habibullah and Sharofat's interpretation, this dance was imbued with spirituality and mysticism, felt and expressed by the dancer to God, and simply witnessed by an audience. What then, does this poem mean? And how could I interpret the *obraz* (character) of the song?

Sharofat and Habibullah both had many answers to my questions about the meaning of the poetry. Sharofat told me the poem was about the oppression of women and the veil; the author of the poem is singing to God and asking, "Why, God? Why?" She wants to be free, she raises her arms to the sky, and she wants to fly like a bird (personal communication, October 30, 2006). Habibullah also interpreted the poetry of the song to signify women's lack of rights in Islam, specifically, and he believed the singer is begging and pleading with God to release her or take her away:

This song says that she has a husband to whom her father sold her. "Father, mother, look!" Her husband locked her in, there is no air. There is no sky. This

is a protest! No one in this place listens to her complaints, just God, to God she speaks. “God! From this veil, from this prison, take me! From this prison, let me go.” Women don’t have rights, there is no democracy. “I am in prison!” It’s not just beautiful movements or choreography, this is a protest! Why? Wives, mothers, they are sacred, holy, but they have no rights. . . . In this one, she says, “Oh, God, if you exist, I beg of you! Let me free from this prison or I will die.”
(personal communication, November 1, 2006)

After the translation was complete (see Appendix A), I developed my own interpretation of the poetical meaning. The poem describes the woes of a person who is without their beloved; this could be interpreted as either a mystic who is separated from God or a person who is far from his or her earthly love. The words contain pain and suffering, and the poem is also sung with pain; you can hear the emotion of suffering in the voice of any one who sings it, for the importance of using heart and *his* to become the *obraz* is important to both vocal and dance aesthetics. The poem describes the plight of one who is lowly, but it does not specify if the author or subject of the poem is male or female, Muslim or Jewish, if he/she is low in social stature, or if he/she simply considers him/herself lowly because he/she is not with God. It contains one very significant mystical reference; the symbolism used in the poem, which is associated with the Arabic letters *alif* (ا) and *dol* (د), is characteristic of Sufi poetry (for more on the significance of letters in Islamic mysticism, see Schimmel 1975, 411-425). The translation, “I was straight/ And you have made me crooked” is more literally translated as “I was like *alif* (perfect, straight) and you have made me resemble *dol* (crooked/bent).” Other elements of the poem place it in the realm of mystical literature; for example, the interplay of the

words “*nolami ehsosam*” (“I cry/complain my feelings”) with “*homchu nolam*” (“like the reed I am”) makes use of two different versions of “*nolam*.” The first is derived from a verb (“to cry or complain”); the second is derived from an old noun used in reference to the reed (“*nai*”) (Guli Saeidi, personal communication, December 6, 2006). The reed is often found in mystical poetry to symbolize a variety of things—separation, complaint, or in this case, thinness and weakness. The closest English translation of this verse is:

I cry my feelings to you
You have made me sick and weak [like the reed]
Oh friend, I have taken on all your pain
I am your sacrifice

The last verse of the song is also tinged with mystical references; love is equated with pain, the lover is separated from the beloved and longs for union, and the lover is always the slave of the beloved:

The air of love is full of pain
Full of sorrow, I will fly
Until I am united with you
You have separated me from love
I am your slave

I do not think this poem was written with the plight of women in mind, as both Sharofat and Habibullah insist. Nor do I think the poem was originally addressed to an earthly love. I think it stands as a good example of mystical poetry, and it very well may not have been accompanied by dance until recent years. However, I believe Sharofat and Habibullah’s interpretation of the poetry may actually be the most meaningful for a Tajik

woman today, and the most useful interpretation for a dancer attempting to communicate an emotion of suffering. Currently in Dushanbe, most women would be more likely to sympathize with, *his*, and become the *obraz* of an oppressed woman of ancient times than sympathize with the character of a mystic, lost in love for God. In order for myself to *his* and become the *obraz*, I, too, tried to adopt the character of an oppressed woman, for the *obraz* of an oppressed woman was closer to my heart as well.

Sharofat seemed to choreograph to the words themselves, although not always literally. Rather, she used certain words as foundations and markers in space and time, while other parts of the choreography changed from lesson to lesson and did not seem as important because of their fluidity. The same combinations of words and movements are used as markers in both the soloist version and the group version of the dance. These words, accompanying movements and variations, and the way Sharofat explained or demonstrated them are each explained in more detail:

“*Qurboni dilam*” (“a sacrifice, my heart”)—One or both hands touch the left side of the chest over the heart with the elbow(s) lifted. This is often accompanied by very slight contractions of the chest with the rhythm of the music—one or both of the hands slowly contracting into a fist as the shoulders and torso expand and contract with a non-audible sigh—or a very small impulse which travels from the waist upward through the spine, resulting in a very slow and subtle movement of the ribcage. The head is slightly rotated and tilted to the left, and the gaze is either internal or downward. Sharofat always expresses pain or anguish with her facial expressions.

“*Ruzeh azal*” (“the first day”)—Both arms are thrust skyward, inwardly rotated, and close to each other, so that the palms are flat against one another; the eyes look up, and the head is thrown back. I am told to straighten and extend every part of my legs and spine to become as tall as possible.

“*Saram*” (“my head”)—One or both arms are folded over the head and the upper torso is deeply bent to one side or the other. The eyes look either downward, and the head faces downward, or upward, and the head faces upward, but never out towards an audience. I see that Sharofat always expresses pain or anguish with her facial expressions when she does this movement, just as in the movement associated with “*qurboni dilam*.”

“*Zeri poy*” (“underfoot”)—The right leg is thrust forward in a deep lunge, while the left leg is extended to the back. The torso is bent forward and horizontal to the floor, over the right thigh, and the arms are bent and close to the face, as if hiding the head in the arms. As the torso slowly returns to an upright position, ripples of the arms, combined with slow sideways tilts and expansions and contractions of the ribcage, cause the upper arms to nearly brush the sides of the face as the head also rotates both left and right. Sharofat explains the movement as wiping tears from your cheeks with your upper arms.

“*Havo*” (“air/sky”)—The arms are extended directly above the head, towards the sky, as the head and ribcage are extended up and back, resulting in a slight backbend of the shoulder area and the eyes and face looking upward. The arms are slightly rounded and the lower arms rotated so that the backs of the wrists face one another and the point of each elbow faces directly sideward. Sharofat

repeatedly tells me I must make myself tall and long, by extending my legs and spine. She says I am asking God to take me away, up to heaven, into the sky, and away from this earthly existence.

This *munojot* choreography was more focused around words than any other dance I learned in Tajikistan.

However, unlike *every* other dance I learned in Tajikistan, *Qurbonat Manam* did not appear to utilize any *noz*-like movements. I was never told to make eye contact with anyone; in fact, Sharofat admonished me to look beyond an audience when I looked outwards, for I should “see no one but God.” Also, at no point in the dance should I smile, nor did I see any of the Padida dancers smiling in their group choreography. This song is considered too serious, too solemn, and perhaps too spiritual for the lighthearted charm and flirtation associated with the *noz* aesthetic.

The *shashmaqam* costuming, which is also used in *munojot*, often (but not always) carries an interesting reference to spirituality and religion—the dancer actually wears a small purse or side bag symbolic of the Quran (Figure 30). I was unable to ascertain if this was a traditional part of costuming, like the braids, or if it was a modern adaptation. In Uzbekistan, Robyn Friend was told it was simply a “little purse” worn by the dancer when dancing *munojot* (personal communication, March 29, 2007). Yet, in Tajikistan, I saw dancers wearing this purse when performing other *shashmaqam* pieces, in addition to *munojot*, and the purse was always identified as symbolic of the Quran.

Qurbonat Manam did make use of *charkh* and *plastica*. *Plastica* was especially necessary to perform several prolonged and very deep backbends and side bends, smaller hyperextensions of the upper torso, turns which used the flexibility of the spine, and a



Figure 30: A Gulrez dancer at the Festival of *Shashmaqam*. Her jeweled purse is symbolic of the Quran. (November 2006)

charkhi miyon (waist turn), performed while on the knees (see Figure 31). In the *charkhi miyon*, the hands ideally (depending on the *plastica* of the dancer) trace a circle just above the floor around the body, while the thighs and pelvis remain more or less above the knees. In order to allow this, the body must curve sideward, forward, sideward, and backward as the arms are extended above or in front of the head. A variation of *charkhi miyon* is also performed in *Gulamoy*; the legs are completely folded so that the thighs rest on top of the lower legs as the upper torso rolls from one arm, to the upper back, to the other arm on the floor around the body (refer to accompanying DVD).

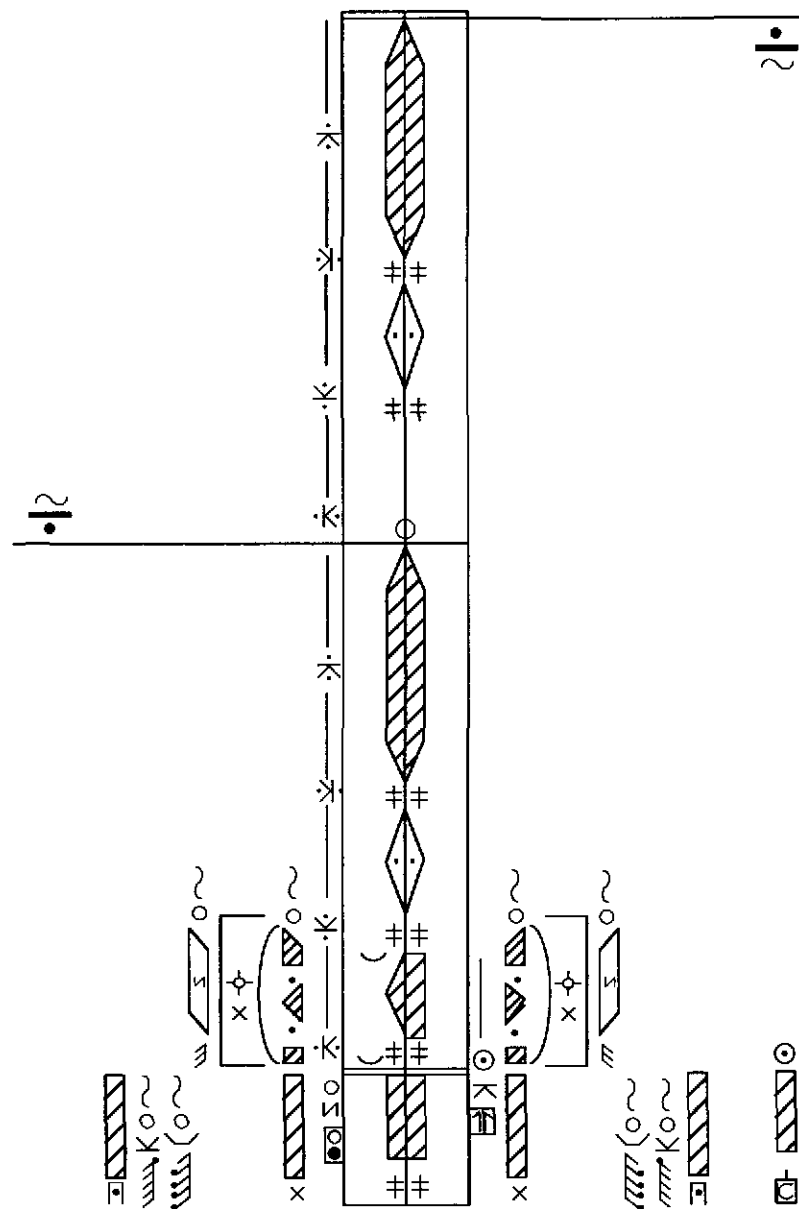


Figure 31: *Charkhi miyon* (waist turn)
Torso extension maintained throughout. Timing is approximate and flexible, depending on the dancer. Although the rhythm of the music is 4/4, movement may not coincide with the measures or beats; any number of *charkhi miyon* is permissible within a certain melodic phrasing.

Of all the dances I learned in Tajikistan, the *zarb* is the least constant in the *munojot* choreography. There was, however, one point of the dance where I was instructed to make audible stomps to complement the rhythm of the music. Habibullah, as he watched the lesson, told me, “When you show like this [stomping], ‘Land, listen! Heaven, listen! God, listen!’ Women and girls are in such a condition” (personal communication, November 1, 2006). The 4/4 rhythm of the *munojot*, however, is quieter and less emphasized in the music than the rhythms of other dances I learned, while the words and vocals were more prominent.

Repetition and lateral symmetry are also less pronounced in *Qurbonat Manam*. In fact, a great deal of the floor plan is asymmetrical (see Appendix B), many movements are performed on only one side of the body, and spins are often performed in only one direction, without being repeated on the other side. There is some repetition, but much less than in other dances I learned. There is more repetition in the group version of the dance, mostly caused by a large number of dancers performing the same movements in unison. However, the floor patterns in the group choreography are also less symmetrical than other dances in their repertoire.

The geometrical aesthetic of Islamic art, which was so pronounced in the rest of the dances I learned and saw in Tajikistan, was less emphasized in the *munojot*. Does this reflect the influence of the Soviet era, the influence of Russian ballet masters who helped create “Tajik national” dances in the state ensembles, the influence of another cultural aesthetic? Although Doi notes a large Soviet influence in the creation of distinct “Uzbek national” dances and an increased emphasis on standardization and professionalism, she does not focus on aesthetics nor on the specifics of movement

characteristics (2002). The lack of *noz* movements is also very interesting and very unusual. Perhaps the uniqueness of this *munojot* further attests to the newness of *munojot* as a dance form. Ironically, for the dance with the least reliance on the aesthetics of Islamic art, it was explained in the most spiritual terms, and the costuming visibly refers to the Quran.

This *munojot*, then, embodies mystical, sensual, and emotional aesthetics, but is less dependent on sensuality or sexuality as a way to please audiences or dancers, except of course for the sensuality inherent in a moving body. This *munojot* with its stately, somber movements and its overt spiritual references, with its *obraz* of an oppressed woman of ancient times, celebrates the spirituality of Islam while condemning its traditional system of jurisprudence, which is usually blamed for women's lack of rights.⁵⁴ This *munojot* embodies a secular spiritualism, which reflects the ideology of "secular Islamic nationalism" (Levin 1999, 111); it both embraces the spirituality of Islam and condemns its role in politics.

Summary: Secular spiritualism and feminine coquetry

In Dushanbe, the spirituality, morality, and antiquity of Tajik culture and dance are greatly emphasized in spoken and written words, especially in official documents and perspectives. However, the visual and sensual aesthetics of dance, such as costuming and coquetry, are a prime focus in Dushanbe. I believe dance in Dushanbe has been greatly affected by the professionalism and institutionalization of dance, which has placed a greater emphasis on visual and sensual—rather than emotional, spiritual, or mystical—

⁵⁴ Ahmed (1992), Mernissi (1991), and Stowasser (1994) all demonstrate that it is the way Islam has been interpreted and applied over the centuries that has reduced women's personal freedoms, not Islam itself.

attributes. Nonetheless, dance is still associated with spirituality and mysticism, but in a less visceral and more formalized way. One example of how institutionalization and professionalism has affected dance can be seen in the development of Kulobi dance.

The sleeves of Kulobi dance costumes have evolved from women's everyday dresses, which are shorter and do not cover the hands so as to not interfere with tasks. Just as the costuming has evolved for the benefit of performance, many believe the movements have also evolved, as Kulobi dance has become more of a formalized, staged "national" dance. A Dushanbe Tajik and a Badakhshani Tajik both independently told me that the movements of Kulobi dance used to be much slower and smoother, but now have become faster and faster, as Kulobi dance became more of a stage performance (personal communications, October 17, 2006 and December 15, 2006). Several Badakhshani dancers complained to me of the stress put on technique, speed, and beauty "without meaning" in Kulobi dance: one of them said, "I cannot say it is dance, it is just exercise"; the other stated, "You have to dance and use your whole body, not just parts, not just technique, and it must be with heart" (personal communication, December 15, 2006). They insinuated that the Kulobi dance practiced today has no relationship with the past; it is a new creation made for the stage.

Dance styles, however, are continuously changing and adapting to new cultural circumstances. Kulobi dance seems to be popular because of its adaptability and its speed. It represents the faster paced, modern life style of the city, without completely abandoning the past, like a successful youth that does not forget his/her elders. Nahachewsky insightfully links "national" dances to "commercial logos," symbols that visually evoke particular associations and feelings (2003, 37). *Shashmaqam* dance brings

to mind the ancient spirituality of Tajik culture and the happy medium between Islam and secularism in the country today, a secular spiritualism. Kulobi dance evokes the adaptability of Tajiki culture and the vitality of its youth, as scores of young Tajik popular musicians employ female dancers to perform with them, accompanying Kulobi-based rhythms with Kulobi-based movements and costuming. The sensual coquetry of the female body is preferred, as dancing male bodies evoke associations with deviant sexuality. The two dance forms, *shashmaqam* and Kulobi, seem to be more polarized than dance forms in Badakhshan—*shashmaqam* is a spiritual celebration of Tajik history, while Kulobi dance is a sensual display of feminine coquetry that celebrates a future well-grounded in the past. In both cases, however, these associations are evoked visually and kinesthetically and perceived emotionally, as are commercial logos; even though *shashmaqam* may represent spirituality, it is not usually intended to evoke a spiritually, mystically, or emotionally transformative state in an audience.

The emphasis in Badakhshan on creating a transformative mystical, spiritual, or emotional state, felt by the audience, is not found in Dushanbe, at least in the same strength. Unlike Badakhshan, dance is usually choreographed rather than improvised, and dance is seen mostly in the context of staged, televised, and/or pre-recorded productions rather than in informal, live venues. In my perspective, these factors inhibit the ability of a dancer to emotionally communicate with musicians and audience, and thus contribute to a transformative state in the audience. Instead, dancers themselves articulated the “other world” of dance, the world they enter to forget about their troubles. In Dushanbe, then, dance’s sensuality is used as a bridge to a mystical experience for the dancer, as opposed to the audience.

Dance in the capital, however, is subliminally emotionally communicative; nearly every time you turn on the television, there are happy, traditional-looking dancing girls celebrating Tajik nationality. Instead of allowing people to dwell on the country's economic or social problems, dance encourages people to think of the rich cultural traditions of their country, the strength and vitality of their youthfulness as a nation, and instills pride in "Tojikiston."

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In both Badakhshan and Dushanbe, dance is strongly associated with cultural and regional identity. Perhaps for this reason, dancers more often articulate its spiritual or mystical aspects than its sensual or sexual aspects, as they describe their ancient, spiritual, moralistic, and mystically oriented culture. However, dance clearly integrates both sensuality and mysticism as it communicates emotional messages about identity or aims to induce a state of mystical ecstasy in audience or dancer. In both regions, the sensuality of dance is used as a means of attaining a mystical experience, and the dancing that succeeds in bridging sensuality to mysticism is given the highest aesthetic value. In Badakhshan, this experience was explained as “*kaif*” (extreme pleasure) and was primarily articulated as benefiting an audience, although the dancer also becomes *mast* (drunk, intoxicated). In Dushanbe, this experience was articulated as benefiting the dancer, as she enters “another world,” transforms into the *obraz* (character/image), or dances “only for God.”

An aesthetic common to Islamic art is also found in both regions, even as it manifests in slightly different ways, as is the aesthetic of *noz* (flirtation, coquetry). Although these aesthetics are primarily seen as pleasing the senses, they contain elements of spirituality and mysticism (which may, nonetheless, lie beneath the surface of everyday use and knowledge). The aesthetic of Islamic art may be philosophically connected to a spiritual worldview (see Gocer 1999), and the concept of *noz* is used in mystical poetry to link the Beloved/God to a coquettish lover, always just out of reach.

In addition, the land of Tajikistan has a sensual, emotional, and mystical influence on dance in both regions. In Badakhshan, the land is viscerally, sensually connected to dance movement and is articulated as positively influencing the mystical and spiritual culture of Badakhshan. By verbally drawing parallels between the spiritual, mystical land of Badakhshan and Badakhshani dance movements, dance is further associated with mysticism. In Dushanbe, the land of Tajikistan is not viscerally, sensually connected to dance movement; rather, the political entity of Tajikistan is symbolically represented with dance costuming. Thus, even though costuming may appear to simply contribute to a sensually, visually oriented aesthetic, it actually embodies a very important ideological function and communicates an important emotional message; dance costuming visually and emotionally links dance to the abstract, political land of Tajikistan. Visually, it references the different regions or the abstract ancient land of Tajikistan. Emotionally, it connects modern Tajikistan to a spiritual past and instills pride in regional and national identities.

In both function and aesthetics, then, dance in both Dushanbe and Badakhshan integrates aspects of sensuality and mysticism, the worldly and the otherworldly. Even each individual aesthetic integrates aspects of both sensuality and mysticism.

The context of dance events, however, is usually quite different between the two regions. In Badakhshan, the esoteric and informal environment of a Pamiri home, the spiritual role of a *madoh* singer, the reverence for the land and the rural landscape, the host-guest relationship, the live music, and the improvised nature of the dancing all contribute to a more intimate, interactive environment. In this context, the emotional communication between dancers, musicians, and audience/guests is given great

importance, as dancers and musicians strive to transport everyone to a state of *kaif*. The spiritual and mystical elements of dance also appear more dominant, even though some dances may actually reference sexuality, because of the presence of a *madoh* singer and the way dance pieces are preceded and followed by devotional music. However, the professional female dancers in the administrative city of Khorog perform dances that are choreographed and accompanied by live music, often perform on stages for political and regional events, and are concerned with their low status as professional dancers. They seem to emulate the larger ensembles of Dushanbe, yet occupy a middle ground between the very informal, interactive performances of Badakhshan and the very formal, presentational performances of Dushanbe. In Dushanbe, the big stages, large state-sponsored ensembles, television crews, secular metropolitan atmosphere, recorded music, and choreographed dances all contribute to a more formal, less interactive environment. In Dushanbe, then, dancers turn their “*kaif-ing*” inwards, since they are unable to directly interact with audience and musicians.

Poetry is an important contextual aspect of dance in Tajikistan that is given equal value in both regions. Although dance does occur without poetry, poetry often acts as an inspirational basis for creating choreography or giving meaning to dances. It also surrounds dance events with mystical-sensual ambiguity, as the poetry itself synthesizes sensuality and mysticism. Mystical poetry draws on the ambiguous meanings of words and uses sensuality as a metaphor for mystical and spiritual ideas; a sensual dancing body takes the metaphor a step further, as it uses a sensual medium to induce mystical experiences or communicate emotional messages.

The context of dance events, then, may either lead to a more spiritual or a more secular interpretation of the dancing. Yet, the inclusion of poetry as a contextual element invariably introduces an element of mysticism.

In this thesis, I have presented perspectives of dance from Tajikistan to show the ability of dance to syncretize sensuality and mysticism. Dance in Tajikistan may fall on either end of this spectrum—restaurant dancers in Dushanbe may embody the sensual extreme, while *bakhshi* (shamanic healers) or mystics may embody dance-like movements at the mystical extreme—yet most dance is found closer to the middle of this spectrum. This helps to explain the ambiguity of dance and its many layers of meaning and interpretation; it depends on who is dancing, for what purpose, and in what context. The perspectives of performers and those of observers may also fall at different points along this sensual/sexual-spiritual/mystical spectrum. I believe dance’s ability to embody this wide range—its syncretism of sensual and mystical aspects—is what gives dance its emotional power, a power that is often controlled or censored by the state; this is discussed in further detail below.

Several main threads have been woven throughout this thesis: sensuality as a bridge to a mystical or spiritual experience, the relationship between dance, poetry, and mystical Islam, and the emotionally communicative power of dance. In this chapter, I discuss each of these ideas in a bit more depth and provide suggestions for future research within these areas.

Sensuality as a bridge to a mystical or spiritual experience

Using sensuality (aural, visual, kinesthetic) to attain a mystical or spiritual experience is not an unusual phenomenon, especially in Iran and Central Asia. Usually the end result of these experiences is one of spiritual or emotional healing, release, or catharsis as in the case of *madoh* in Badakhshan (Koen 2003b), classical music in Iran (During, Mirabdolbaghi, and Safvat, 1991; Varzi 1988), or musical exorcism in Iranian Baluchistan (During 1988). Many Sufi orders use ritual chant and movement to attain an ecstatic state (Schimmel 1975). In addition, the *bakhshi* shamans of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan use movement as a tool to heal their spiritually and emotionally ill patients (Levin 1999; Habibullah Abdurazzokov, personal communication, December 4, 2006). Statements are few, however, that have drawn connections between popular dance practices and spiritual or emotional release in this part of the world—I am only aware of two: Varzi (1988) mentions this cathartic function of Iranian dance in the traditional context of the *bazm* (party, gathering), and Nurjanov alludes to the spiritual function of the *sazanda* (female professional dancers) of Bukhara as they created specific atmospheres through their dancing (1995).

Based on my experiences of dancing in Tajikistan, dance is clearly articulated as functioning as a bridge to a mystical or spiritual experience. In Badakhshan, this experience was articulated as primarily benefiting the audience, as a dancer transports his or her audience via the kinesthetic display of *mast* (intoxication) to a state of *kaif* (extreme pleasure). In Dushanbe, this experience was articulated by dancers describing their own personal experience of dance; they *his* (feel, perceive, sense) and become the *obraz* (character, image) of the dance and subsequently lose themselves in a mystical

world of movement, or they may dance without knowledge of an audience, “Only God, dance, music, and my heart, that’s all” (Sharofat Rashidova, personal communication, November 15, 2006).⁵⁵ In both cases, the concept of “heart” was important, just as it is in Uzbekistan (see Doi 2002, 77-78). I believe this concept of heart is based on, but not identical to, the concept of heart found in Islamic mysticism; dancers draw on the potent mystical symbolism of the heart in order to cast dance in a spiritual light. It should be made clear that this is how dance was explained to me, as a foreigner, and it was important to dancers in both Badakhshan and Dushanbe that I understood these spiritual, mystical, and/or emotional aspects of dance.

Just as I have drawn a parallel between the spiritual aesthetic of *madoh* and these concepts of heart, *mast*, and *kaif* in *rapo*, could it be that dance in Iran and Central Asia draws a majority of its aesthetic base from an idea of spiritual rapture, an idea based in Sufism/mystical Islam? During stated that the term “*mast*” carries the connotations of “trance” in Iranian Baluchistan (1988, 32-33). This correlates with the way I heard the term used in Tajikistan; usually the word “*mast*” was accompanied by gestures such as the eyes rolling back into the head, the neck being thrown backward or tilted quickly from side to side, and/or the index finger flicking the jugular vein. These are all motions that symbolize the outward, bodily appearance of one lost in trance, spiritual rapture, or literal intoxication. While *rapo* dancing in Badakhshan does not induce trance, such as it is known in other parts of Asia (such as *thaipusam* in Malaysia, *thovil* in Sri Lanka or *l’eb guati* in Baluchistan), it does seem quite possible that it draws an important aesthetic

⁵⁵ How can this occur, however, when the dancer is admonished to dance for the camera? I have no perfect answer to this question; perhaps the ideal of how a dance could/should be performed is not how it usually is performed, but the “best” dance experiences, for the dancer, are those times when she is able to dance only “for God.”

I
from an idea of spiritual rapture, as do the poetry and music of Iran and Central Asia. In Tajikistan, the saturation of Sufi ideas may be found not only in popular Islamic practice (Arabov 2004) but also in the aesthetics of music and poetry; it does not seem odd to find them in dance.

I would like to encourage further scientific studies into the relationship between dance and altered states in Iran and Central Asia. Koen's work on the healing function of *madoh* utilized both physiological tests (primarily blood pressure and heart rate) and ethnographic data, combining ethnomusicology and health science approaches (2003b). A similar combination of approaches applied towards dance may help to scientifically explain the many statements I heard which extolled the healing, cathartic, and transformative functions of dance in Tajikistan.

Dance, poetry, and mystical Islam

Mysticism, sensuality, and dance are joined not only in actual dance practice in Tajikistan, they are also a symbolic or visceral basis of Islamic mystical poetry and practice. By drawing comparisons between dance, poetry, and mystical Islam, it becomes clearer how each relies on the synthesis of mysticism and sensuality for emotional impact. Also through this comparison, I believe I can build an even stronger argument to link a primary dance aesthetic to an idea of spiritual rapture. The idea of spiritual rapture, itself, is symbolically represented by dance in mystical poetry, and dance-like movement may be used to attain spiritual rapture in mystical practice. Linking dance to mystical practice also raises important questions about the historical role of dancers in Central Asia. Before launching into a more thorough discussion on this subject, however, I

should clarify the marginality and diversity of Islamic mysticism/ Sufism and its association with this area of the world.

Sufism/mystical Islam is a fringe practice and/or philosophy within Islam that has received criticism throughout history from the orthodox establishment (see Fakhry 2004). In addition, the Greek philosophical tradition and Shiism both have mystical offshoots in the Islamic world that may or may not be called “Sufism” (Baldick 1993, 5).⁵⁶ Some Sufi orders, such as the Naqshbandiyya, are known for their asceticism and dismiss any kind of sensual means of enlightenment, while other “wandering libertine mystics” were famed for their use of all sorts of sensual devices, such as hashish and opium smoking, sex, and alcohol, as a means of attaining enlightenment (Baldick 1993, 4-5). Yet, even within orders, many divergent opinions can be found, and a Naqshbandi Sufi may support the use of devotional music, even as his order is known to disapprove of it (see Levin 1999, 108-110). Sufism/mystical Islam, therefore, is not a homogenous entity. Thus, while visceral sensuality may be a method of enlightenment for one mystic, another may use metaphorical sensuality as a method of explaining enlightenment to the masses, through the medium of poetry. In popular practice and interpretation (from the viewpoint of “the masses”), the boundaries may blur between metaphor and reality, just as Sufism and popular Islam blur in Central Asia.

The development of Sufism is often associated with Iran (Schimmel 1975, 10), but it is prevalent throughout Northern India, Pakistan, Central Asia, and North Africa, and is more rarely found within the Arabian Peninsula. Arabov cites the inclusion of Zoroastrian elements in Central Asian Sufism (2004), and mystical poetry throughout

⁵⁶ Nonetheless, in Badakhshan, Ismaili Shia mystics were called “Sufis” (see Chapter 2).

India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Iran certainly contains Zoroastrian imagery, such as fire (Schimmel 1979). Sufism could be interpreted as an indigenized expression of Islam in this area of the world.

The imagery of dance in Sufi poetry is prolific and examples can be found in the verses of Attar, Ghalib, Rumi, Sa'adi, Hafez, and Balqi, amongst others (Schimmel 1979, 22-34). The motion of dance, especially *charkh*, symbolizes spiritual rapture—the “soul dances when they listen to the word of the friend [God or the Beloved]”—or the annihilation of the self in the divine, just as the moth dances and is burned alive in the flame of the candle (Ibid., 28). *Charkh* are also a part of religious practice for the Mevlevi and Bektashi Sufi orders, amongst others, as they utilize this symbolism in a visceral way. However, although many Sufi orders use dance-like movements as a part of religious practice, they do not necessarily define their movements as “dance.”

There are also many examples of mystical poetry that emphasize the sensuality of divine love. In some cases, the poetry even becomes erotic. For example, in Afghanistan the same mystical poets are celebrated (as those discussed throughout this thesis), and poetry is also an integral part of everyday life, religious practice, and music. There:

In spite of puritanic attitudes and restrictive conditions, neither in life nor in art has Afghan culture fully obstructed the expression of human sexuality. . . . By the hundreds the quatrains and songs allow them sanctioned hugs and kisses, breasts as large as pomegranates, cheeks as red as apples, waists as thin as hair, eyes as big as goblets, lips as red as rubies, eyebrows as curved as the new moon, and hips as round as domes. (Baghban 1976, 1: 365)

Schimmel aptly notes that eroticism and mysticism are both integral aspects of Sufi poetry; it is precisely the ambiguity between sensuality/the physical world and spirituality/the otherworld that gives the poetry its symbolic power (1975, 287-343). Sexual pleasure is the eroticism of the body, the epitome of carnal, earthly existence. Spiritual rapture is the eroticism of the soul, the epitome of mystical, otherworldly existence. They are perhaps not so far from each other, just as the proximity of sensuality and mysticism is precisely at the root of mystical poetry. Might not dance in a Central Asian/Iranian context also draw its power from this ambiguity by symbolizing spiritual rapture through the visceral sensuality of the body?

Many scholarly studies or mentions of dance in Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia have concentrated on the sexuality associated with dancers, their reputation as prostitutes, or the illegality of dance under Islamic regimes (e.g., Farmer 1929, 45, 103; Koepke, 2000a, 2000b; Sakata 1976, 122; Shay 1999, 2005a, 2005b). Is it possible, however, that dance did occupy a spiritual role in the Central Asian past? Myth or not, it is the widely held assumption amongst dancers in Dushanbe and Badakhshan, as well as in the official perspective, that the dances of Tajikistan have had a long and spiritual history. The Islamic scholar Seyyed Nasr references a (perhaps hidden) spiritual element in social dance, even as he directs his statement towards music, when he writes:

There is *no* music in the Islamic world which does not remind one of God. Even music to which people dance at weddings carries with it a reminiscence of the classical modes, which themselves are related to inner states combined with the yearning of the soul for God. (Nasr 1997, 230)

Such is the ambiguity of dance; it is always implicated but rarely directly addressed. Some additional (perhaps hidden) insights can be found by examining the subject and object of poetry, roles which may be equated with the *obraz* (character/image) of dance, as well as looking at the role of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality within Sufism and Islam as a greater whole.

Roles of the Beloved, the mystic, and gender

As Schimmel demonstrates, two patterns may emerge in Sufi poetry and imagery: in one, the suffering feminine soul is the subject, “The soul, represented as and personified by a woman, wanders along the narrow, difficult path that leads to the beloved” (1997, 24-25). In another pattern, however, a feminine element or a young masculine element becomes the object of affection as Sufi imagery uses the devouring love for an unattainable woman or “a fourteen-year-old boy of otherworldly beauty” as a metaphor for the love for God (Ibid., 18). She states that this love imagery towards boys represents “a platonic love, of course.” Schimmel also notes that “even pious dervishes sometimes dressed up as women in order to acquire the additional outward appearance of being ‘God’s handmaiden’” (Ibid., 25).

Is it possible that the *bacha bazi* were not simply sexualized “boy toys?” Could they have fulfilled a spiritual function in the gatherings of mystics by enticing spiritual rapture through their dancing? Persian miniature paintings show scenes of mystics and young boys, dancing together (for example, Batmanglij 1997, 398). Schuyler describes the *bacha bazi* as one of the lowest classes of citizens, yet they had many admirers who called out to them, “Your slave!” as they passed by on the street (1876, 1: 133). This is

the same type of endearment written to the Beloved in poetry (such as the lines “I am your sacrifice,” “I am your slave,” or “my heart is a sacrifice” found in the poetry of *Qurbonat Manam*, the *munojot* choreography I learned). Perhaps the *bacha bazi* fulfilled the symbolic role of the Beloved. Shay suggested that Russian cultural values saw the *bacha bazi* as “unhealthy,” and therefore their practices were banned (2002, 65).

Schuyler notes that Russian soldiers at the end of the nineteenth century seemed to prefer dance performances by females (1876, 1: 140); perhaps the affection shown towards the *bacha bazi* by men made the soldiers uncomfortable and aroused a homophobic reaction. The negative attitude I observed towards the *bacha bazi* is perhaps attributable to the melding of Russian and Central Asian cultural values in Tajikistan today, as different ideas about homosexuality and gender collided and integrated. More thorough historical research on the role of the *bacha bazi* is greatly needed. However, this research should ideally come from the oral histories and written biographies of Central Asians, rather than from a more detailed search in the travel journals of Russians and Europeans, who usually interpreted the role of the *bacha bazi* according to their own cultural paradigms.

And what of the female dancers? Did the female dancers of past eras guide the spiritual lives of their audiences, as Nurjanov attests (1995)? Or is this rhetoric from the Soviet era, as female dancers were equated with spirituality and male dancers with sexual deviancy? Again, by looking into the roles of females in Islamic mysticism, it may be possible to draw some parallels. Schimmel describes many stories in Sufi tradition about female minstrels who aroused mystical love through their songs (1997, 41). Yet, Baldick equates minstrelsy with prostitution (1993, 52), and Farmer only discusses female minstrels as occupying the roles of court slaves and concubines (1929, 45, 103).

Schimmel also reports that prostitution was sometimes practiced near the graves of Sufi saints (of course without the approval of local leaders), “a fact documented in all the sources” (1997, 51). Baldick investigated the biographies of thirteen women mystics and found they reflected “an opposition found in the ancient Near East: a woman would obtain holiness either by complete sexual abstinence or by becoming a sacred prostitute” (1993, 52). However, in the biographies of these women, they were not mystics and prostitutes at the same time, rather they were “penitent courtesans” who gave up their minstrelsy in order to follow the Sufi path. The women Baldick refers to as sexually abstinent were actually wives who had minimal sexual contact with their husbands; thus, in spite of Baldick’s opposition, there is not a clear “virgin versus prostitute” dichotomy.

Sexuality, itself, is ambiguous in most interpretations of Islam, for even as it is seen as a possible distraction from the spiritual path, sexuality within the confines of marriage is to be enjoyed, and both sexes deserve sexual fulfillment; in fact it is a man’s duty to secure his wife’s virtue by making sure she is sexually satisfied (see Mernissi 1987, 1991). If a woman is not sexually satisfied (i.e. controlled and pacified), social chaos can ensue (Ibid.). In addition, Schimmel points out that sensuality and sexuality is not seen as sinful, as the Prophet Muhammad’s relationship with his wives is often exemplified as an “expression of the joy one can find in the world of the senses, which is part of God’s creation” (1997, 32).

Thus, although uncontrolled female sexuality can create social chaos (Mernissi 1987, 1991), female minstrels may move one to spiritual rapture (Schimmel 1997, 41). Perhaps it is precisely through this tension/ambiguity of sexual-earthly/spiritual-heavenly that the female minstrels, as well as the *bacha bazi*, were able to affect their audiences,

just as this is the root of the emotional power of mystical poetry. With so little written about the female dancers of past eras, it is difficult to ascertain their role with clarity. As regards to music, Nasr states:

It [Islam] has lent music a contemplative quality which is an echo of paradise and in which are combined the sensuous and the ascetic, the otherworldly and the beauty of the here and now. (1987, 160)

Just as poetry and music both rely on the sensual and the spiritual, the worldly and the otherworldly, I believe dance also relies on this syncretism for its emotional impact.

Dance has occupied a marginal role within the Islamic arts, and Sufism has occupied a marginal role in religious practice. Why are they so intertwined in Tajikistan today, and how did dance set to mystical poetry come to represent, in part, the spiritual identity of the nation? Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan share a considerable amount of historical and cultural influences, including the development and proliferation of Sufism, devotional music, and mystical poetry. How is it that dance in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has come to be associated with national identity, while in Afghanistan under the Taliban, and in Iran today, dance practices have been outlawed? How much of these differences are tied to pre-Soviet cultural practices, how much to Soviet-era politics of atheism and artistic propaganda, and how much to fundamentalist religious movements accompanied by the suppression of mystical practices? A great deal of research, both historical and contemporary, is needed to understand the intersection between dance, politics, and religion in this area of the world.

In the following and final section, I consider the emotional impact of dance, which is based in the sensuality of the body. This integration and use of sensuality and

emotion is broadly applicable to dance in general, rather than found only in Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan.

The emotional power of dance, kinesthetic empathy, and communication

The sensuality of the body is used to communicate emotion, just as it is used to induce mystical or spiritual states. This communication is based in the body itself and experienced through kinesthetic empathy. Although we tend to think of communication primarily along the lines of speech or text, how much of communication is kinesthetic? Lomax, Bartenieff, and Paulay discuss the way our bodies adopt the expressions and postures of others when we are watching and listening to them, which facilitates our understanding (1974, 199). As early as 1939, the dance critic John Martin recognized this bodily feature of communication and called it “inner mimicry”; he also recognized its manifestation in dance, as he wrote, “Facts he [the dancer] could tell us, but feelings he cannot convey in any other way than by arousing them in us through sympathetic action” (1989, 23).

Recent research in neuroscience has discovered groups of brain cells that respond to sensual and kinesthetic stimuli; they are called “mirror neurons” because they are activated in response to witnessing a behavior, action, or expression in another individual (see Berrol 2006). The groups of brain cells that are activated in the brain of the performer are identical to those activated in the brain of the observer, and they are connected to emotions and empathy. As Berrol notes, this may explain the “dream-like” memories of dance performances, where one does not necessarily remember exact

movement sequences, but is left with a vague feeling and a visual, aural, and kinesthetic sensation (2006, 312).

Thus, kinesthetic empathy results in emotional communication through the faculty of the senses—this could easily be dismissed or summarized as “mystical” simply because it is not easily explainable, it is an “experience-based” reaction that goes beyond the faculty of the senses, and it is not one of the “intellect or reasoning” (Berrol 2006, 303). Similarly, this is a good reason to call the kinesthetic sense a sixth sense. Even as the kinesthetic sense is based in the body and movement, it is not considered one of our five senses. Because we are only just beginning to find ways to rationalize and discuss this “sixth sense,” emotional communication through dance and movement happens on a nearly subconscious level.

I believe it is kinesthetic empathy that gives dance its emotive power. While based in the body, and actually of the senses, kinesthetic empathy is felt emotionally; it joins the sensuality of the body to the realm of emotions. This emotional power is often put to use for political purposes or considered a threat to people in power if they are unable to control it, as is the current case in Iran. Perhaps the current Islamic regime in Iran, which has outlawed most dance performances, views dance as a threat because of its embodiment of individual mystical experience, which contradicts the current authoritarian religious order. Many communist regimes have harnessed the emotional power of dance and used it as a vehicle for political messages.⁵⁷ In the United States, political statements often come from independent dance companies, rather than from the

⁵⁷ For examples concerning dance in Romania, see Giurchescu 1987 and 2001; in China, see Christopher 1979; in the Soviet Union, see Shay 2002 or Swift 1968.

central government. In Tajikistan, state-sponsored dance ensembles and private companies both convey political messages about the historical morality and spirituality, and the future prosperity and adaptability of Tajik culture. As Buckland points out, dance often has associations with cultural memory and “embodied practice . . . underlines the power of the performative and the continuing relevance of a mythic past in contemporary life” (2001, 13). For this reason, *shashmaqam* dance has come to represent the “ancientness, purity and legitimacy” of a unique Tajik identity (as Buckland uses these terms, 2001, 1)—whether or not this past is mythical, and whether or not *shashmaqam* served a similar role in the past, it has great import to the current identity of Tajikistan.

Sklar believes that embodied experience, or corporeal knowledge, is one of the most fundamental ways of knowing about and conceptualizing the world (1994), and the researcher’s own body and body memory is one of the most useful tools for understanding the “felt dimensions of movement experience” (2000, 75). I agree, but I am also aware that my interpretations as an “outsider” may be different than those of an insider” since ideas about the body and movement are culturally prescribed (see Grau 2005). By experiencing dancing in Tajikistan, both as a performer and as an audience member, I embodied feelings and emotions that are difficult to rationalize. By the end of my six months in the country, I began to feel pride and love for Tajikistan when I saw dance performances on television and in concerts; seeing dancers opening their arms wide, lifting their chins, standing tall, my own back would straighten, and I would feel a surge of love and affection for “Tojikiston.” I saw young female Kulobi dancers, and I felt youthful, energetic, and hopeful, certain that Tajikistan was finding its own way of “development” and “modernization” without losing its unique identity/identities and

culture(s) by maintaining a link with the past. The rare times I saw Badakhshani dancing on television, I felt transported back to the mountains. I felt hospitality and warmth, the soothing rhythm of the music, the mountains, and the rivers. Oddly, I felt “homesick” for Badakhshan. I wondered why there was so little Badakhshani dancing on television, and I felt it as an injustice. Through practicing the *munojot* choreography, I began to sense the oppression of the *obraz*, and I began to recognize suffering in some women’s faces and wondered about their lives. These are all the impressions of an outsider; no doubt, the feelings and associations that Tajik dance arouses in an insider’s perspective would vary and differ from my own. What does not differ is the potential impact of dance as it communicates embodied emotions.

Dance is often overlooked as simply an entertainment or diversion, yet it has the potential to communicate political and emotional messages as it associates sensual elements (such as visual national costuming) with particular emotions (such as patriotism and pride) through the medium of the body. Precisely how emotions are embodied and expressed, how this varies from culture to culture, and how we can rationalize and verbalize this aspect of movement and its use in dance is, I believe, still one of the least explored areas of dance scholarship. It is also an area that can have a great impact beyond the field of dance ethnology.

As Buckland has pointed out, all research is but one interpretation of the “truth,” an entity that is infinitely multifaceted (1999). I was influenced by the people I met and the dances I studied; as Van Zile has noted, complete objectivity is impossible and emotional attachment inevitable on the part of the researcher (2001, 238). I hope that, even as this thesis represents my own perspective of dance from Tajikistan, the

perspectives of others have been presented in such a way as to expose my subjectivity or offer some alternate readings and interpretations. Although based in the body, dance stirs emotions, and this can make it elusive to explain. While creating the introduction to a documentary student film, Nasiba Imomnazarova struggled to find a way to articulate the emotional impact of dance. To end this final chapter, I leave the reader with her words:

The world of dance is varied and very rich. It is very difficult to understand this world of dance but if you can, you feel elation feelings. You can forget about everything—just you, music, and dance. It is one of the easiest ways to speak with God. You become an Angel and you don't care even if the world crashes.
(2006, Introduction)

AFTERWORD

A conversation with Uvaido keeps coming back to me as I synthesize and try to make sense of the observations, images, sounds, reflections, and memories from my time in Tajikistan. Early into our research project in Badakhshan, he took Aliah and I (as the “team leaders”) aside and asked us why we were asking certain questions during interviews, such as, “Who was your teacher?” “How old are you?” or “What is your last name?” These questions, he stated, were not important, and it was difficult for him to translate them because they were too direct. He had to turn these short and concise questions into long and circuitous conversations in order to be respectful by not asking a “stupid” question, yet please us by getting an answer. We had been wondering why, after we asked one of these “simple” questions, he would talk for a long time with a musician or dancer, then turn to us and say, for example “He is forty-one.” His explanation was, “Nothing in Badakhshan is specific; everything is wide,” (personal communication, August 4, 2006). I feel this statement has broad-ranging applications to the whole of Tajikistan and even, possibly, a wider cultural area. Although some things may seem like they should have a simple and straightforward answer or solution—nothing is specific; everything is wide.

For example, driving anywhere with Davlatnazar (one of our drivers, and a musician) in Badakhshan was always an adventure. Every time we thought we were finally on our way, he would take a detour. Frustrated, we would wait in the car while he attended to business. Then, again, we would be on the road, heading out of town, but yet another stop, then another, then another. However, in the end, many of the stops were

necessary; perhaps he was securing us a place to stay for the next night, finding out which musicians were in town, getting the local gossip on where to buy the cheapest gas, or picking up a letter to deliver to the next village. No trip with Davlatnazar was direct; every road was circuitous.

When I tried to categorize and concisely describe *rapo*, *madoh*, and *munojot*, I invariably ran into problems. In Shugnan, *madoh* always consisted of three parts named after three rhythms (*arzil*, *hidara*, *setoyesh*), but in Ishkashim, it may consist of only two of those rhythms or it may incorporate others; for this reason, people from Shugnan think they do not play “real” *madoh* in Ishkashim. In Uzbekistan, *munojot* poetry is usually attributed to Alisher Navoi and can be accompanied by dance; in Badakhshan, *madoh* singers may write their own *munojot*, which is not accompanied by dance; in Dushanbe, I was taught a *munojot* that both is and is not a part of the *shashmaqam* repertoire. *Rapo* may mean a rhythm to one person, a melody to another, and a dance style to yet another. Categories are rarely specific; boundaries are fluid and opinions wide.

While studying Persian language and after much confusion, I discovered that different words have different meanings when they are placed in different contexts. Poets, especially, make clever use of the multiple meanings and connotations of words. Words are rarely specific; their definitions are wide.

While I could think of many other situations where this concept—nothing is specific, everything is wide—applies, the best example is the focus of this thesis; in Dushanbe and Badakhshan, is dance mystical or sensual, spiritual or sexual? It is all of these, and there is no contradiction. Dance, too, does not have a concise definition. Not only does it depend on whom one asks and where dance takes place, nearly every type of

dance integrates aspects of the physical and the non-physical world. Dance in Dushanbe and Badakhshan is a synthesis of mystical, sensual, emotional, spiritual, and sexual attributes—this is exactly what makes it so difficult to define, for the nature of dance (or music) bridges the world of sensation to the world of reflection; a dancer can be compared to a mirror that reflects an image of another time or space, a mystical space uncluttered with life's daily problems and worries. Although it was performed in the most spiritual and mystical atmosphere, *raqsi asp* (horse dance) had an undercurrent of sexuality. In Dushanbe, what appears to be a secular modern love song is accompanied by beautiful, flirtatious, and young female dancers in sensually pleasing costumes; yet the song text is actually an old poem with mystical undertones. All the same, one of these dancing girls may actually make most of her income by working as the Tajik equivalent of a strip tease artist at a local nightclub. It is impossible to separate dance, mysticism, and sensuality in Dushanbe and Badakhshan, Tajikistan.

APPENDIX A

POETRY TRANSCRIPTIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

The poems accompanying the dances discussed in detail are given in the following order: *Raqsi Tabaqcha*, *Raqsi Asp*, *Gulamoy*, and *Qurbonat Manam*. On the left is the Tajik transcription and on the right the English translation. I have made an exception for the poetry leading up to and accompanying *Raqsi Asp*, and I have only given an English translation. There are three songs which come before the dance itself and two songs during the dance; therefore, the sheer bulk of the Tajik and Shugni transcription I feel is unnecessary to most English readers. The translations are not word for word, since this would render no adequate meaning in English. Nasiba Imomnazarova, Maruf Noyoft, and Guli Saiedi have helped me a great deal in the effort to make the translations meaningful in the English language. Still, due to the ambiguous wording of much of this poetry, I have tried to leave it as close to the original as possible, to allow readers their own room for interpretation.

Raqsi Tabaqcha (Little wooden dish dance):

Poetry by Shofitur, sung in the Tajik language

<i>Badakhshon, sarzamine kuhsori</i>	Oh, Badakhshan, mountainous land
<i>Che khushbodu havoï obshori</i>	So pleasant your climate, your waterfalls
<i>Kalonu khurdi farzandoni khudro</i>	We are all like children,
<i>Saodathakhshu jonu jonon diyori</i>	Happy, because of our dear, dear land
<i>Jono ba justujuyat, raftam ba</i>	Dear, to search for you, I went to the
<i>kuhi Pomir</i>	Pamir Mountains
<i>Payvasta kuhsoro,</i>	The mountains, connected,
<i>budand misli zanjir</i>	were like a chain
<i>Dar ruyi qullahoyat,</i>	On their summits,
<i>dar bomi khushhavoyat</i>	the weather was good
<i>Bo mo shuda hamoghush, bo osmon gulugi</i>	The blue sky embraced us
<i>Qadi khushnamo dori,</i>	Height picturesque you have,
<i>khusham omadi dilbar</i>	hey charmer, you brought me happiness
<i>Abruye siyoh dori,</i>	Eyebrows black you have,
<i>khusham omadi dilbar</i>	hey charmer, you brought me happiness
<i>Ey dilbari beparvo,</i>	Hey, charmer, careless,
<i>yak ruz shudi paydo</i>	one day you appeared
<i>Andar nazaram chun moh,</i>	In my eyes, you are like the moon,

<i>khusham omadi dilbar</i>	hey charmer, you brought me happiness
<i>Az khona fitodam dur,</i>	I found myself far from home,
<i>mehri tu ba dil shud mur</i>	your love became medicine for my heart
<i>In gazal guft Shofitur,</i>	With this poem, said Shofitur,
<i>"khusham omadi dilbar"</i>	"charmer, you brought me happiness."

Raqsi Asp (Horse dance):

First Song (Rez), poetry of Sultonazar Saidnazarov, sung in Tajik:

Hey friend, come, welcome to my country
 My door is always open to you
 When you want to leave, take me with you
 You want to always stay by my side
 Today in this party, all together
 From talking with each other, some moments we are resting
 We hold each other precious
 Tomorrow, who knows where we meet

Friend, may you find perfection and prosperity, may your good health be prolonged
 May you have happiness, wealth, and moral distinction
 Healthy congratulations, days and nights with goodness
 I wish you happiness and destiny to travel all over the world
 You are respected, child, among God and people
 You are good, your name will be respected after you are gone

Second Song, poetry of Rumi (Shamsi Tabriz), sung in Tajik:

In our two worlds, we have no one but God
Except God, we do not worry about what another does
We do not have a faithful friend
We have no friend besides the Prophet Jabbor
We are like a poor parrot that tastes sugar from the reed
We are not like the black crow, we don't desire bad things
We are drunk from food, drink, and music
We do not care how much we drink
We are like a poor parrot that tastes sugar from the reed
We are not like the black crow, we don't desire bad things
We are religious people
If everyone throws stones, we do not care
Look at Shamsi Tabriz's tired heart
We have no friend besides the Prophet Jabbor

Third Song, anonymous folklore repertoire (*khalqi*), sung in Tajik:

The friend has been unfaithful to us
He/she wants to separate from us
Barley seller, from your look, your heart is stone
We grew wheat together

I am with my friend unfamiliar
That sweetheart/girl separated from us
Hey, Muslim, hear my yell
That sweetheart/girl separated from us
The girl is a dam in the path of love
He begs a kiss from her lips

Fourth Song, poetry of Husayni Balkhi, sung in Tajik:

Her face is like the moon of 14 days [the most beautiful phase of the moon]
The expressive nightingale is always speaking
Lips like a flower, teeth like pearls, nose straight
Sweet talker, silver mouth

(Raqsī Asp dancers enter and begin to dance)

I love you so much in both worlds
From the flower branch, decorations for the cypress garden
Call her face a light or a fairy
Or a star or a beacon
Story short, do I abbreviate
Better from garnet agate, from Yemen
Hey charmer, beautiful, as if you don't know
I am madly in love, as if you don't know
Until I die, I will love you
Other charms you have, as if you don't know

Sometimes Layli and Majnun, sometimes Shirin and Farhad
Sometimes Yusuf and Zulaykho, as if you don't know
They don't look to the world of separating love, they got together
I will be killed by love, as if you don't know

Ay, beautiful face, your jealous word
Your elegant figure like a cypress garden
Pistachio teeth, your tears sweet
Perfumed hair, you are a net of disaster
Nargis [flower], liberator, you are one without a homeland
You are kind with others not with me

Hey, stone-hearted idol, hey silver body	(When I will be separate from you)
In a tulip field I am crying	(When I will be separate from you)
From sorrow, I am connected to you	(When I will be separate from you)
In a tulip field I am crying	(When I will be separate from you)
Sometimes voice nightingale	(When I will be separate from you)
Sometimes melody hyacinth	(When I will be separate from you)
Sometimes in desert steppe	(When I will be separate from you)
To the summit/climax, she is carried	(When I will be separate from you)
Inside the net, she is taken	(When I will be separate from you)
Ay, oh, from this separation	(When I will be separate from you)
Above the net I cry	(When I will be separate from you)

Yusuf fell inside well	(When I will be separate from you)
And Zulaykho's legs became tied	(When I will be separate from you)
Ay Yusuf, joker ours	(When I will be separate from you)
Again I cry	(When I will be separate from you)
Poor/Beggar Husayni Balkhi	(When I will be separate from you)
Read this ghazal [stanza]	
Beside the goblet at the gathering place	
of mankind on the Day of Judgment	(When I will be separate from you)
Miserably, he cried	(When I will be separate from you)

Fifth Song, anonymous folk poetry (*khalqi*) sung in the Shugni language:

My heart, my heart, my heart	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Sweet, my dear, my heart	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Ay, of your height I am proud	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Friendship/Brotherhood is so good	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Hey sweet, my dear, my heart	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Your floor [of Pamiri house] is so long/wide	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Some people do flirt	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
With you, my heart feels good	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Sweet, my dear, my heart	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
Above your house the moon is still	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
In your lap, I am going to sleep	(My heart, my heart, my heart)
To you, I lean against	(My heart, my heart, my heart)

Sweet my dear, my heart (My heart, my heart, my heart)

Sweet my dear, my heart (My heart, my heart, my heart)

Sweet my dear, my heart (My heart, my heart, my heart)

[The last line and its response is repeated until the end of the song.]

Gulamoy (My rose)

Anonymous folk poetry (*khalqi*) sung by Manija Davlatova

Gulam oy Oh, my rose

Dilam oy Oh, my heart

Gulam oy, gulam oy Oh my rose, oh my rose

Toza barg ay gulam oy New leaf, oh my rose

Kaj oghosh dar baram oy She is curled in my arms

Alamosh dar dilam oy Her pain is in my heart

Oy ey dilbaram o, nabosham be dilbaram My beloved, I will not be without my
beloved

Oy yak dilbaram o, beh zi dusad dilbaram My one beloved is better than two hundred

Oy ne dilbaram o mondame, ne dilbaram My beloved did not stay, no, my beloved

Oy yo dilbaram o rasone, yo dilbaram Bring my beloved, oh my beloved

*Oy ruze ki ravam, hamrahi jonon ba
chaman* Oh, that day I went, together with my love
to the flower garden

<i>Oy ne lola va gul namud u, ne sarv u suman</i>	No tulip nor rose remained, no cypress tree nor jasmine
<i>Oy ruze ki miyoni man u u gufta shaved</i>	Oh that day, between her and I, a conversation came
<i>Oy man donam u u donad u u donad u man</i>	Oh only I know and she knows and she knows and I
<i>Sosan guli man, bargi sosan guli man</i>	My lily flower, leaf of my lily flower
<i>Noz nadorad dili man, nola dorad</i>	My heart does not have coquetry, it has lamentation
<i>Az mobayni dilbaro, hame khushrui man</i>	Of all the beloveds, mine is the most beautiful
<i>Noz nadorad dili man, nola dorad</i>	My heart does not have coquetry, it has lamentation
<i>On dil ki tu dodai figor hast u hanuz</i>	That heart that you have given is still wounded
<i>Dar ishq i tu bo nola u zor hast u hanuz</i>	In your love is still lament and sadness
<i>On otashi dilbar sari kor hast u hanuz</i>	That fire of the beloved is still burning
<i>Ham obi du dida bar qaror hast u hanuz</i>	Also water of two eyes is still running
<i>Imruz giriftam az guliston yakta gul</i>	Today I took from the rose garden one flower

<i>Mondam, raftam chaman ba dasti bulbul</i>	It remained in my hand, I went to the
	nightingale's garden
<i>Yak ruzi digar khabar giriftam az gul</i>	The next day I went to ask about that rose
<i>Ne bargi gul ast ne sadoi bulbul</i>	No flower petals, no sound of nightingale.

Qurbonat Manam (I am your sacrifice)

Anonymous poetry (*khalqi*) sung by Ozoda

<i>Qurbonat manam</i>	I am your sacrifice.
<i>Ey falak dod az jafoyat</i>	Oh heavens, keep me from torment.
<i>Dar chi holam kardai</i>	What a condition you have made,
<i>Rost budam chun alif</i>	I was straight.
<i>Monandi dolam kardai</i>	And you have made me crooked
<i>Qurboni dilam</i>	My heart is a sacrifice.
 <i>Oqibat kori tu kard</i>	 The conclusion of your work
<i>In budi garduni dun</i>	Was this existence of lowliness.
<i>Az chi dar ruzi azal</i>	From the first day,
<i>Qismat kamolam kardai</i>	My fate was sealed.
 <i>Okhire gardun zadi</i>	 At last, you, oh sky, have struck
<i>Sangi malomat bar saram</i>	My head with the stone of blame.
<i>Qurbonat manam</i>	I am your sacrifice.

Zeri poyi beshu rang

Poymolam kardai

Asirat manam

Ey sipehri bemuruvat

In kadomin shiva ast

Yor ay, yor ay, jon, jonam oy

Nolami ehsosam zi dastat

Homchu nolam kardai

Yor ay, dardat ba jonam

Qurbonat manam

Dar havoï mushetoqi

Pur alam par mezanam

To tui gardun maro

Dur az vasolam kardai

Ghulomat manam

Underfoot, without value,

You made me to be trampled.

I am your slave.

Oh, unfair heavens,

What kind of life is this?

Oh friend, my life.

I cry my feelings to you,

You have made me sick and weak.

Oh friend, I have taken on all your pain,

I am your sacrifice.

The air of love is full of pain.

Full of sorrow, I will fly

Until I am united with you.

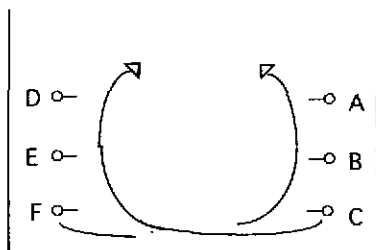
You have separated me from love.

I am your slave.

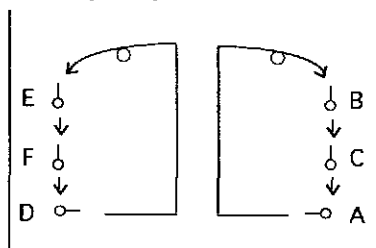
APPENDIX B

FLOOR PLANS OF SELECTED DANCES

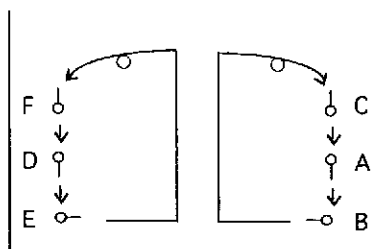
These floor plans represent idyllic arrangements and pathways, as stated by the choreographers, Mahingol Nazarshoeva for *Raqsi Tabaqcha* and Sharofat Rashidova for *Gulamoy* and *Qurbonat Manam*. In actual performance, some deviations may occur. My objective is to give an overall view of the spatial movements and configurations of each of the dances. I have not included measure numbers beneath each floor plan because the plans do not need to be aligned with a notated score. Because turns and spins (*charkh*) so often embellish the spatial design, I have chosen to indicate some *charkh* by adding a small circle to the path sign at the point where they occur along the path. Although these *charkh* do not affect the path of the center of weight, they embellish the visual pattern by adding a curvilinear element to the apparent shape of each path, thus I feel it is important to include them here. If drawn on the right side of the path sign, the *charkh* is to the right, or clockwise; if drawn on the left side of the path sign, the *charkh* is to the left, or counterclockwise. Each floor plan is drawn from the perspective of a dancer; the open end of each box faces the audience. The floor plans are read from the bottom of the page to the top of the page, from the left to the right side, and are numbered accordingly.



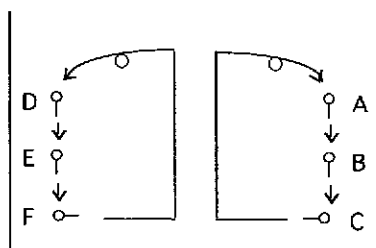
4: dancers A, B, and C move clockwise; dancers D, E, and F move counterclockwise; all take sideways steps



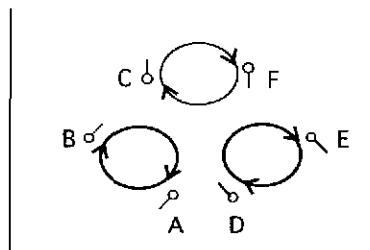
3: dancers A and D move downstage, take an introductory bow, and spin off to each side



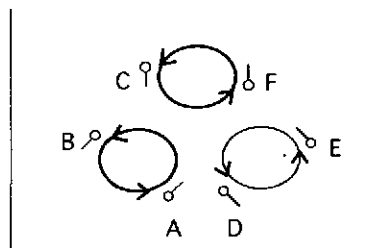
2: dancers B and E move downstage, take an introductory bow, and spin off to each side



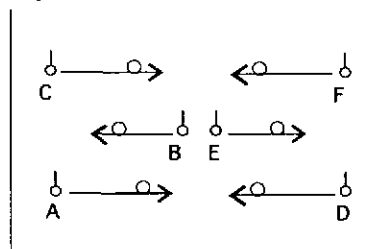
1: dancers C and F move downstage, take an introductory bow, and spin off to each side



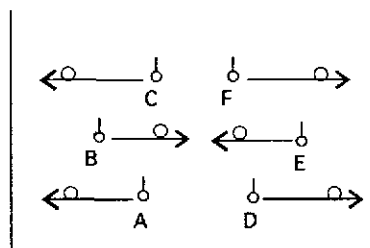
8: circular paths in pairs; each dancer completes one full circle clockwise; all take forward steps



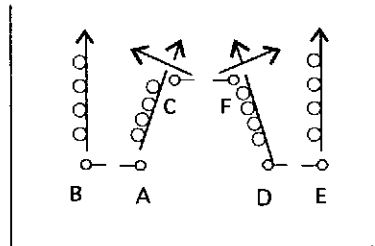
7: circular paths in pairs; each dancer completes one full circle counterclockwise; all take forward steps



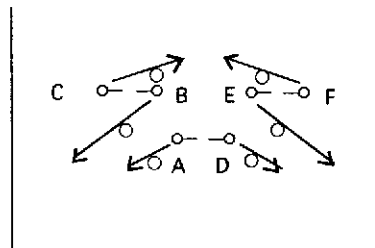
6: sideways steps culminate in a turn



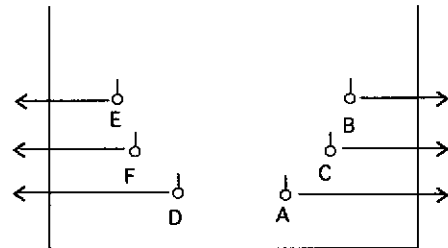
5: sideways steps culminate in a turn



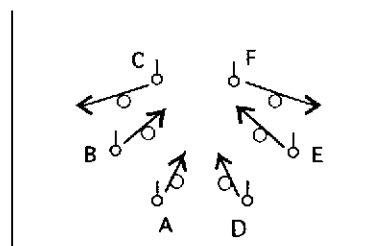
11: many turns on a straight path, dancers C and F also make four complete counter clockwise turns (not shown)



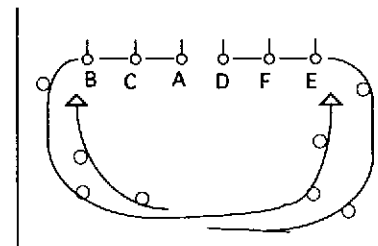
10: turning on a straight path



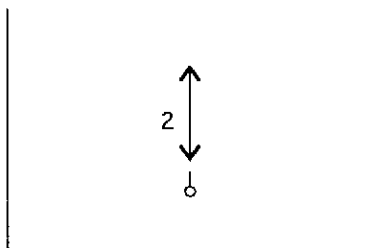
13: dancers B, C, and A exit stage right; dancers E, F, and D exit stage left



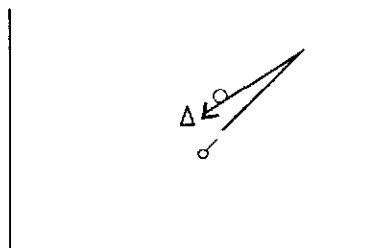
9: turning on a straight path



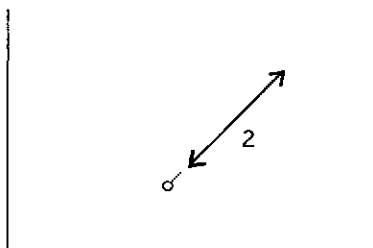
12: dancers B, C, and A move counterclockwise; dancers E, F, and D move clockwise; each completes 4 turns at equidistant spots on the pathway



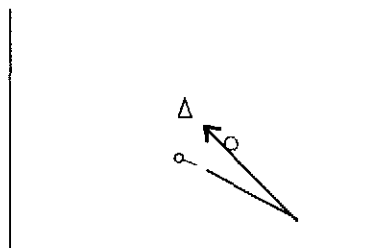
4: a forward pathway traveled twice ends centerstage, dancer faces downstage throughout



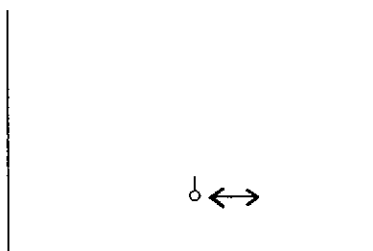
8: a diagonal pathway ends with a turn centerstage, dancer ends facing downstage



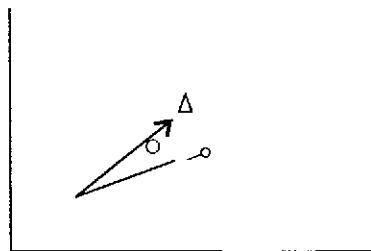
3: a diagonal pathway traveled twice ends centerstage, dancer faces downstage right throughout



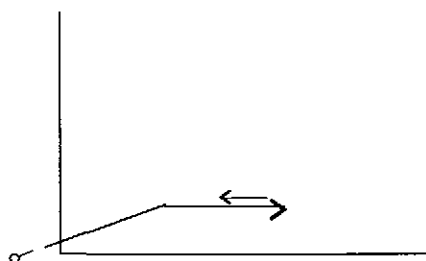
7: a diagonal pathway ends with a turn centerstage, dancer ends facing downstage



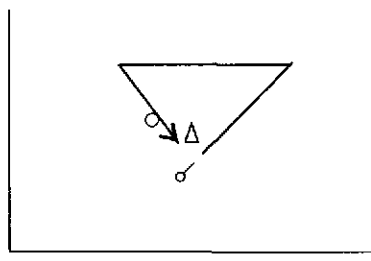
2: a pathway towards stage right and back to centerstage; all sideways steps; dancer faces downstage throughout



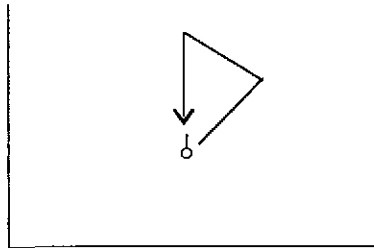
6: a diagonal pathway ends with a turn centerstage, dancer ends facing downstage



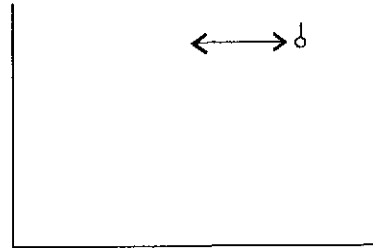
1: entrance, followed by sideways steps moving towards stage right and returning to centerstage; dancer faces downstage throughout



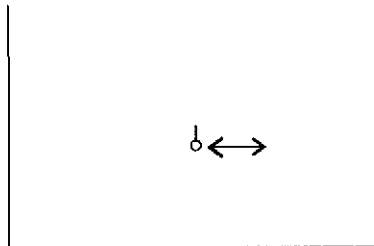
5: a triangular pathway ends with a turn centerstage, dancer ends facing downstage



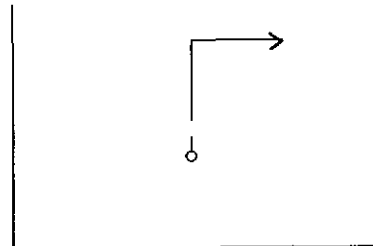
12: a triangular pathway, dancer stays facing downstage throughout



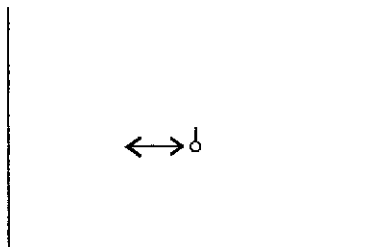
16: repeated travel to and from downstage right, ending downstage right



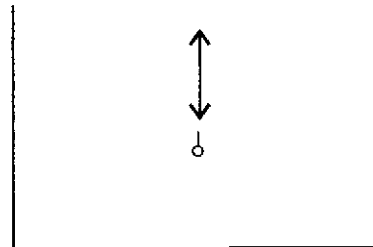
11: a pathway to stage right and back to centerstage; all sideways steps; dancer faces downstage throughout



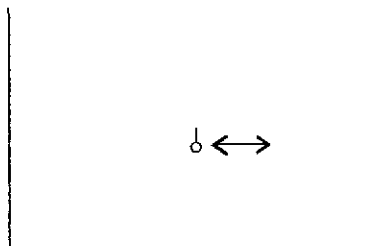
15: travel to downstage and then downstage right; downstage facing throughout



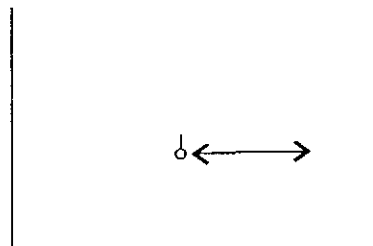
10: a pathway to stage left and back to centerstage; all sideways steps; dancer faces downstage throughout



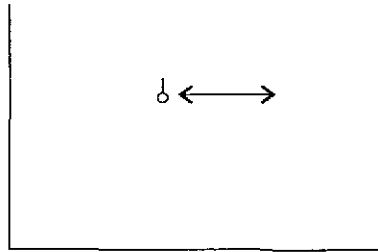
14: repeated travel downstage and back to centerstage, dancer facing downstage, ends centerstage



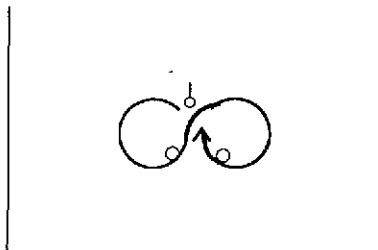
9: a pathway to stage right and back to centerstage; all sideways steps; dancer faces downstage throughout



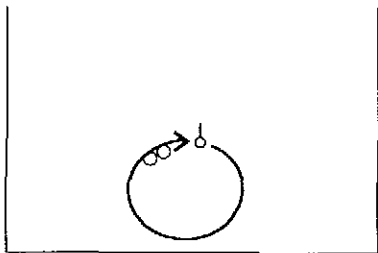
13: repeated travel to stage right and back to centerstage with sideways steps, ends centerstage



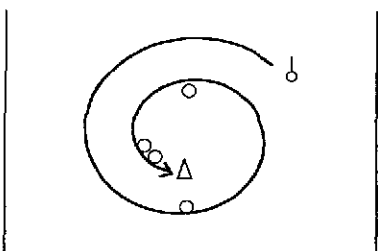
20: a pathway to stage right and back to centerstage; all sideways steps; dancer faces downstage throughout



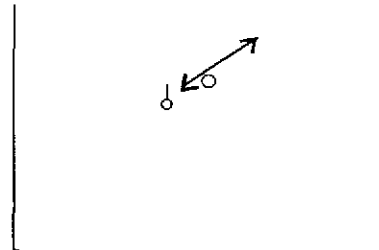
19: a pathway resembling a "figure eight," traced behind the dancer; all sideways steps, ends facing downstage



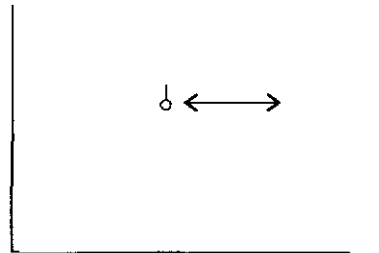
18: a circular pathway clockwise with sideways steps, ends upstage center facing downstage



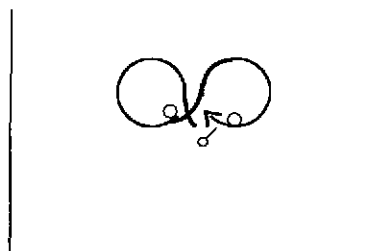
17: a spiral pathway with sideways steps, dancer ends upstage center facing downstage



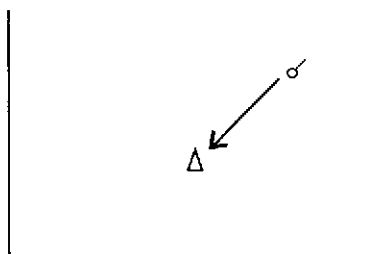
23: diagonal pathway with downstage facing, dancer finishes with a turn centerstage



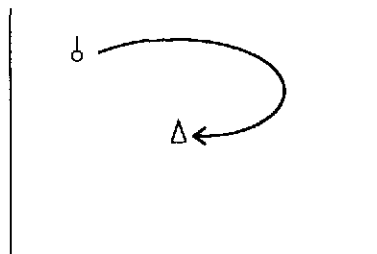
22: a pathway to stage right and back to centerstage; all sideways steps; dancer faces downstage throughout



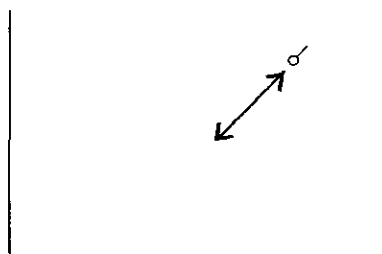
21: a pathway resembling a "figure eight," traced in front of the dancer; all sideways steps, ends facing downstage



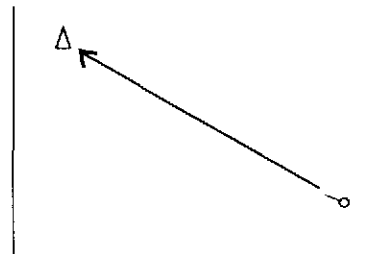
4: traveling backwards on a diagonal pathway to end centerstage, facing downstage



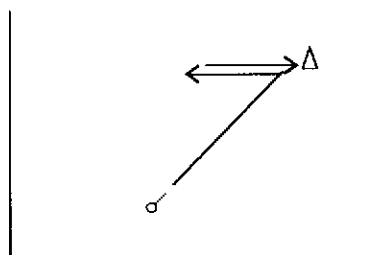
8: a circular path with sideways steps, ends centerstage with a half turn so that dancer faces downstage



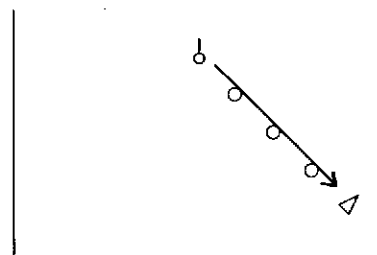
3: traveling backwards on a diagonal pathway, followed by a return to downstage right



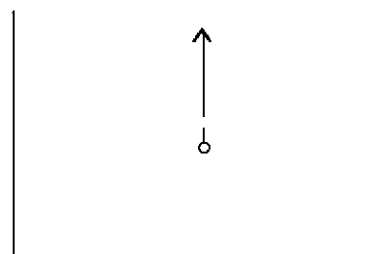
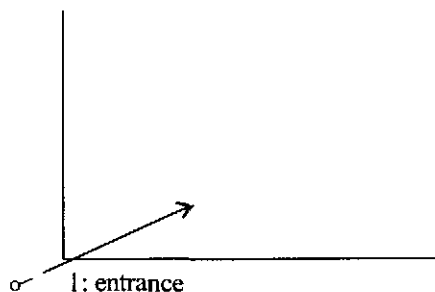
7: a diagonal pathway ends with dancer downstage left, facing downstage



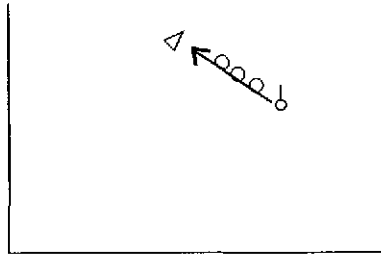
2: a diagonal path followed by sideways steps to left and back to downstage right, dancer ends facing downstage



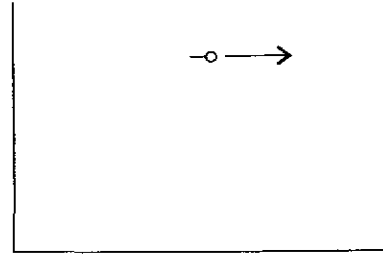
6: turns on a diagonal path, dancer ends upstage right, facing downstage right



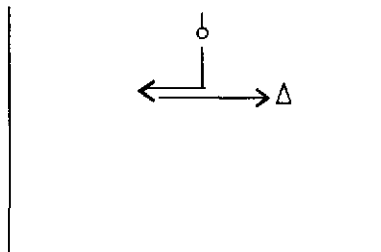
5: a forward path ends downstage



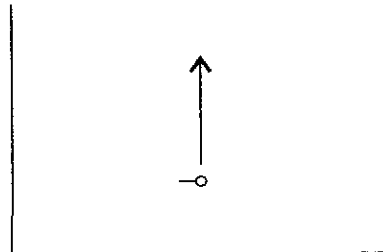
12: clockwise spins on a diagonal path, dancer ends facing downstage right



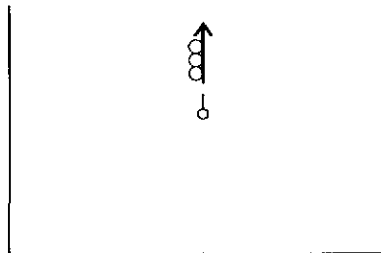
16: a pathway to stage right with backwards steps



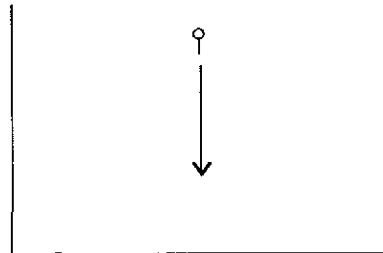
11: a backward pathway followed by sideways steps, downstage facing throughout



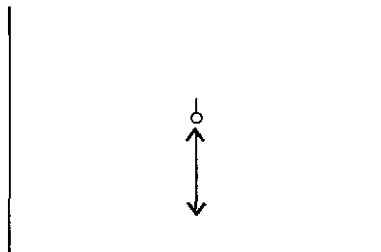
15: a pathway downstage, facing stage left



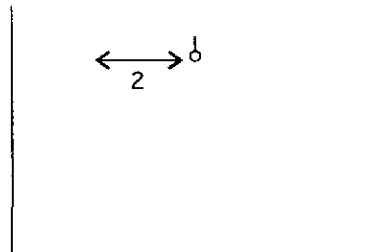
10: counterclockwise turns moving forward



14: a pathway towards upstage, facing upstage

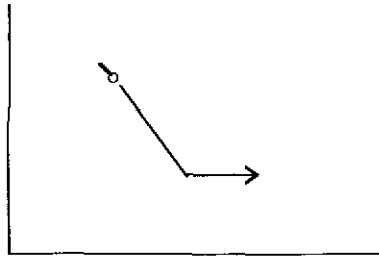


9: a backward path, followed by a forward path, downstage facing throughout

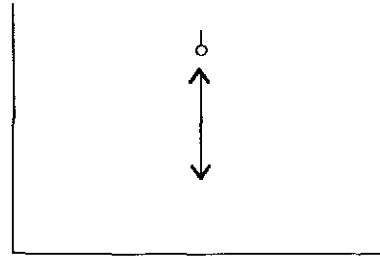


13: a pathway to stage left and back to center, traveled twice

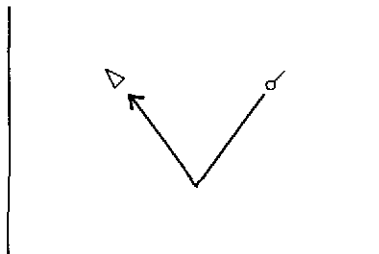
Qurbonat Manam floor plan, part 2 of 3



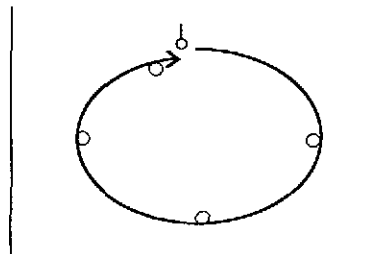
20: a diagonal path with backward steps, followed by sideways steps with downstage facing



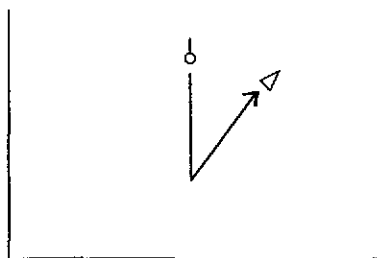
24: a backward path followed by a forward path, both with downstage facing, ends with dancer downstage center



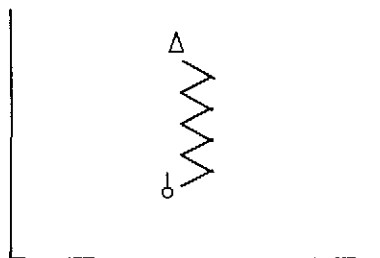
19: a diagonal path with backward steps, followed by a diagonal path with forward steps, dancer ends facing downstage left



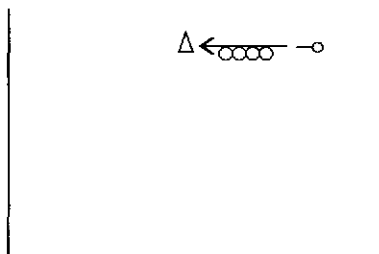
23: a circular pathway with sideways steps and clockwise turns, dancer ends facing downstage



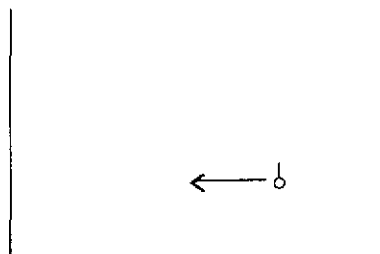
18: a path moving upstage with backward steps, followed by a diagonal path with forward steps, dancer ends facing downstage right



22: a zig-zag pathway with downstage facing



17: counterclockwise turns moving to downstage center, dancer ends facing downstage



21: sideways steps moving to centerstage

Qurbonat Manam floor plan, part 3 of 3

APPENDIX C

PEOPLE REFERRED TO IN THESIS

Many dancers and musicians in Badakhshan and Dushanbe contributed greatly to this research; this list only represents those named in the thesis, and it is alphabetically arranged by first name, since this is how the names often appear in the text. “TDI” stands for “Tajik Dance Initiative,” and place of residence is included in parentheses.

Ali Akbar Odinamamadov – *madoh* singer and musician (Roshtkala, Badakhshan)

Aliah Najmabadi – member of TDI, assistant director of Ballet Afsahneh, student
(London)

Andy Rick – my fiancé, member of TDI, musician, sound engineer (Honolulu)

Atrigol Akramjonova – dancer with Mahingol’s Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan (Khorog)

Dilrabo Shodmonbekova – member of TDI, student (Khorog and Dushanbe)

Gulzar Dalatshoeva – dancer with Mahingol’s Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan (Khorog)

Habibullah Abdurazzokov – actor, Sharofat’s husband, co-director of Ensemble Padida
(Dushanbe)

Jahongir Munzim – administrative director of TDI (Dushanbe)

Mahingol Nazarshoeva – my teacher, actress, dancer, director of Ensemble Navoi
Badakhshan (Khorog)

Maruf Noyoft – member of TDI, musician (Dushanbe)

Mariam Gaibova – dancer with Ensemble Padida, student (Dushanbe)

Nadira Mazitova – dancer with Ensemble Padida, student (Dushanbe)

Nasiba Imomnazarova – member of TDI, translator, student (Khorog and Dushanbe)

Odinamo Mubashirova – dancer (Vrang village, Ishkashim, Badakhshan)

Robyn Friend – associate director of TDI, dancer, singer, scholar (Los Angeles)

Safina Abdurazzokova – member of TDI, Habibullah’s granddaughter, student
(Dushanbe)

Samandar Pulodov – musician, Uvaido’s brother, director of Amesh Aspenta (Dushanbe)

Sarkori Davlatnamadov – dancer and musician (Siponj village, Roshan, Badakhshan)

Shahodat Abdurahmanova – former dancer, employee of the Institute of Culture &
Information (Dushanbe)

Shamsriddin Rahmazonov – musician (Siponj village, Roshan, Badakhshan)

Sharlyn Sawyer – director of TDI, dancer, director of Ballet Afsahneh (San Francisco)

Sharofat Rashidova – my teacher, co-director of Padida Ensemble (Dushanbe)

Sholi Ghumolaliev – musician (Siponj village, Roshan, Badakhshan)

Sultonazar Saidnazarov – *madoh* singer, musician (Ghund Valley, Shugnan, Badakhshan)

Tahmina Fayzakova – dancer with Mahingol’s Ensemble Navoi Badakhshan (Khorog)

Tara Pandeya – American member of TDI, member of Ballet Afsahneh (San Francisco)

Tohirkhon Odinabekov – musician (Vrang village, Ishkashim, Badakhshan)

Uvaido Pulodov – TDI’s logistics and performance organizer (Khorog)

Zaragol Iskandarova – my teacher, former dancer and actress (Khorog)

GLOSSARY

Unless otherwise noted, terms are of Tajik (Persian) origin. Many terms originate in the Arabic language, but they have been fully incorporated into Tajik. Therefore, transcription follows the Romanization system most commonly used in Tajikistan, as outlined on pages xi-xiii.

asp – horse

bacha bazi – professional boy dancer, pre-twentieth century

badan – (Arabic) body, flesh

bakhshi – shamanic healer

baraka – (Arabic) abundance, blessing

basmach – those who fought the Bolsheviks in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan

bazm – gathering or party with music and dance

charkh – turn, spin, wheel, whirl

dastgah – a mode of Persian classical music

davat – funeral

dil – heart

dilbar – one who has taken the heart, charmer, beloved, sweetheart

doira – (Arabic) frame drum with metal rings along the inside edge of the frame

estrada – (Russian) literally “variety,” but used in reference to popular music

his – (Arabic) (used as a compound verb with *kardan*) to feel, perceive, sense

kardan – to do, to make, often used as the second part of a compound verb

kaif – (Arabic) a state of extreme pleasure, ecstasy

khalifa – (Arabic) spiritual advisor or leader

khalqi – (Arabic) folklore, anonymous

labchang – mouth harp, especially used in Kulobi music

madoh – (Arabic) devotional music of Badakhshan

maqam – (Arabic) a mode of classical music

mast – intoxication, drunkenness

mazar – (Arabic) shrine

munojot – poetry or song written as a prayer, complaint, or lament to God

obraz – (Russian) character, image

plastica – (Russian) plasticity, flexibility

qalb – (Arabic) heart

Nowruz – Persian New Year, on the spring equinox, celebrated throughout Central Asia,
Iran, and Afghanistan

noz – coquetry, amorous teasing, whim, caprice, flirting, influencing, captivating, pamper

raga – (Sanskrit) mode of Indian classical music

rapo – 2/4 musical rhythm of Badakhshan, accompanied by a particular dance style

raqs – (Arabic) dance

rez – sung musical introduction

rostow – (Shugni) 2/4 rhythm of Badakhshan; in Tajik language, “*rapo*”

rubob – 5-string lute of Badakhshan, central to *madoh*

ruh – (Arabic) soul, spirit

ruhani – (Arabic) religious, spiritual

sazanda – professional female dancers and entertainers, pre-twentieth century

setar – 3-stringed lute

sama' – (Arabic) whirling ceremony or “dancing” of the Mevlevi Sufi order

semo – (Arabic) sky, heaven

shashmaqam – “six *maqam*,” classical music (and dance) of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and

Bukharan Jews

tabaqcha – small wooden dish

tavlak – (also known as “*tablak*”) hand drum

zarb – blow, strike, bump, drum, meter, multiplication, rhythm, Kulobi 7/8 rhythm, used

in dance to mean “hit the rhythm” by stepping on the beat

zikr – (Arabic) “remembrance,” ceremony associated with Sufism involving the recitation

of the name of God, silently or aloud, with movement or without

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