

## MEN AND WOMEN DANCING IN THE REMEMBERED PAST OF PODHALE POLAND

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I am going dancing  
you musicians play on;  
and you, my friends, can bring  
out a girl for me. [1]

This song text is one of many which can be chosen by a man preparing to dance “*po góralSKU*” (in the Highlander way), and is rooted in the traditional expressive culture of the Górale from the Podhale region of southern Poland.

[2] The text makes explicit two characteristics of this dance which will guide the following discussion: the performative relationship among text, dance and music, and the social relationship among the dancer, his friend(s), and his partner.

The *góralSKI* combines music, song, dance, gesture and text into a coherent whole whose ultimate design is determined by the man spontaneously in performance.

[3] Although typically classified as a type of dance, this designation appears limiting given the range of expressive domains involved in performance. It might, instead, be considered as a “blurred genre,” to borrow a phrase from Clifford Geertz (1983) and as used by Greg Downey in relation to Afro-Brazilian *capoeira* (2002). In fact, Highlanders’ own preferred reference to dancing “*po góralSKU*” stresses the process of performing rather than the product (performance). In this article, I shall adopt this perspective in exploring the genre as it embraces gesture, movement, song and text meaningfully through performance. My discussion is based on the dance as it was found in Podhale in the past. Today, the *góralSKI* forms the backbone of most performances and festivals presented by Górale living both in Poland and elsewhere (see for example, Cooley 1999; Wrazen 1991). This staged representation is based on the practice of spontaneous dancing “*po góralSKU*,” which remains firmly rooted in the memories, if no longer always in the practices, of many Górale today. It was through the vividness of their recollections of these memories that I first became aware of the significance of this dancing in the past for the Górale with whom I spoke. [4] Most had left Poland as adults in the 1960s and 1970s and had immigrated to Toronto or Chicago. As they looked back to the days of their youth in Podhale, they spoke, sometimes with nostalgia, of the times spent singing and dancing.

This study will use these memories in the reconstruction of an ethnographic past to explore the significance of

this dancing within a larger social context. This past will be constructed in conversation with others in a manner which aims to provide some sense of “immediacy and particularity” (Kisliuk 2000) even though no single ethnographic moment, or performance event, will be recreated in its entirety. Song texts and extracts from interviews and conversations will be freely interspersed in weaving this narrative in order to explore the significance that dancing played in life in Podhale. This is consistent with an on-going concern with dance, and the performing arts, less as a product than as a process which is clearly situated within a larger social context (Blacking 1984:5). The precise nature of this relationship has been the focus of concern in recent work. Studies have shown not only that music-dance practice can reflect pre-existing social structures and cultural knowledge, but that it can challenge and contribute to redefining them (see for example, Cowan 1990; Rice 1996; Sugarman 1989), thereby supporting John Blacking’s earlier suggestion that dance, or expressive culture, can not only reflect, but also can help to make patterns of society and culture (Blacking 1984:10). As Jane E. Cowan elaborates, expressive culture is not merely “a kind of epiphenomenal icing on the cake of the ‘harder’ structural realities of kinship, economics, and political organization” (Cowan 1990:5).

This article will discuss dancing within the framework of social life and gender relations in Podhale in order to explore its central role in traditional village life in the past. As a forum for self-display and the negotiation of relationships, dancing provided access to behaviors otherwise not encouraged within the parameters of the home and village (as explored in the recent anthropological work by Frances Pine in Podhale). This essay first introduces Podhale, considering traditional gender relations and including a brief, normative description of a typical set of dancing *po góralSKU*. It then explores the dance in more detail, first as a series of choices available to the man, then through the more limited options available to women.

### Podhale and Dancing

Podhale is located in southern Poland between two mountain ranges: the Gorce (part of the Beskides mountain range) to the north and the Tatry (part of the Carpathian mountain range) to the south. Its eastern boundaries are defined by the Białka River; its western boundaries lie between the towns of Czarny Dunajec (Podhale) and Piekelnik (Orawa). It lies approximately 600 meters above sea level and stretches about 57 kilometres east-west and 26 kilometres north-south. Villages are scattered throughout the region. Nowy Targ in the north is the capital of the administrative district while Zakopane, nestled against the Tatra Mountains in the south, thrives as a tourist haven.

Most Górale at one time practised a form of transhumant pastoralism supplemented by various degrees of farming. Families would raise sheep (and possibly some cows), and grow potatoes, beetroot, oats, rye, flax and hay. The sheep were kept at home during the winter and given to a local shepherd (*baca*) and his assistants (*juhasi*) to take to the mountains to graze during the summer months. Other animals, mainly cows, were taken to other pastures by the villagers themselves, who stayed in the chalets built on these communal pastures. [5] This traditional form of livelihood resulted in a socio-economic structure that encouraged contact and cooperation between individuals in what Melcher Ekströmer described as an “economy of affection” (after Göran Hydén) which promoted “a network of support, communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, and community or other affinities (Göran Hydén as quoted in Ekströmer 1993:81).

Writing of more recent village life in Podhale, Frances Pine continues to stress this spirit of cooperation, suggesting that reciprocal bonds “between kin and houses are strong, and a collective morality underpins village social and economic organization” (Pine 1999:45). Reciprocity is practised between households in organizing farm labor, construction, and in the division of labor between men and women. [6] A complementarity of gender roles ascribed in work seems to characterize rural life in Podhale, where in general men are associated with the farm and productivity, and women are associated with the household and reproduction. Although such long-established patterns of gender divisions are typical, a certain flexibility is practiced within actual household operations (where the central authority revolves around the oldest couple, the male *gazda* and female *gospdodyni* [or *gazdzina*]) [7]:

Men and women have clearly defined tasks within the domestic domain and within farming and house-based production, but the division of labor is not rigid; if necessary, women may drive tractors and lead horse-drawn

plows, men may cook, milk cows, and plant potatoes, and nobody considers this inappropriate. (Pine 1999:56).

Efforts to survive in economically difficult times may have contributed to such flexibility, as husband or wife may have searched outside the village and farm, even traveling abroad, for more lucrative seasonal labor. Such conditions brought many to Toronto and Chicago.

The Górale with whom I spoke refer to the traditional pastoral/agrarian lifestyle of their youth when describing their life in the villages to the north of Zakopane. Typically they weave a narrative around life on their small farm in the winter months and visits to the pastures in the foothills to the south in the summer. Although they are realistic in describing the hardships that they endured, they inevitably stress the freedom once enjoyed in Podhale, together with the strong sense of community life. The word “merry” (*wesoło*) frequently is used in these narratives, and inevitably is associated with music and dance.

Dancing depended on the presence of a string ensemble of from two to five violins and a cello-like instrument (*basy*). [8] According to some, this occurred “almost every day except during Lent and Advent.” [9] The precise accuracy of this statement is here not under investigation, for as Svetlana Boym advises in her discourse on nostalgia: “One is not nostalgic for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been...” (Boym 2001:351). One Highlander is more specific in her memories of life in the village of her youth:

There was more music [i.e., instrumental] in the winter than in the summer. The most was during carnival, since in Podhale Lent was very strict; similarly, during Advent no one partied or danced. Only after Christmas was there real partying—almost every Saturday there was a dance, and feathers were pulled [*poracki*] during the week—almost every day (LH 12/4/86)

Evenings associated with pulling goose feathers for pillows and comforters, or preparing flax for linen, stand out in people’s memories, and are recalled with particular vividness. At one time in Podhale unmarried young women and men had relatively few chances to get together. Other than seeing each other at church, the market or church name-day fairs, these occasions provided an ideal opportunity for young men and women to meet. The events of the dance floor at such occasions could articulate feelings of attraction that had few opportunities for expression outside the parameters of the dance:

It didn’t happen that a girl would go out with a boy for a long time like here. I would meet my husband, then only a boyfriend, at the feather-plucking evenings—that’s all. If there was music, then we would sing and dance, and then we would go home. But heaven forbid if we should have gone out with a boy as happens here... a boy wouldn’t come to ask you to go to a dance—the girls

would go separately and the boys would go separately (LH 12/4/84).

These occasions were also a time when young people from different villages could get together, since many adventurous young men would search out these gatherings in villages other than their own. At such occasions as many as fifty to sixty people could congregate in a small wooden home during an evening. Once the musicians arrived with their instruments, dancing would inevitably follow.

To initiate the dance then, as now, one man approaches the seated musicians. [10] The dance space is clearly defined immediately in front of the string players. Everyone else sits or stands around the perimeter of the dance space, watching, talking, eating, drinking. The man begins singing a tune to a short text, such as the one quoted at the beginning of this paper. The musicians pick up the tune and begin playing it while the man waits for his partner to arrive. She is brought either by the man's friend (for the first figure), or by her friends or older women for subsequent figures. His choice of partner has inevitably been arranged by the man with a friend prior to the dance. At the right moment, the friend runs to the girl, leads her onto the floor and swings her in a manner not dissimilar to that found in square dancing (*zwyrwanie*). This may take a while, and in the meantime, the dancer must wait. He may do little, or he may dance sideways around the dance floor—in a sort of walking movement. After the friend leaves her, the woman is free to dance with her designated partner. The couple dances without any physical contact, the woman following the movements of the man. They dance to the accompaniment of the original tune for as long as the man chooses. When he has had enough, he stops and returns to face the musicians, leaving the woman to return to the side. The man then sings another tune and returns to dance with his partner. The sequence may continue (in principle) indefinitely. An entire set usually would contain from three to eight numbers or figures (this refers to distinct uninterrupted periods of dancing to one tune); most often there would be from three to five. Different tunes are chosen for their association with different dance steps and highlight different skills. When he no longer wants to dance, the man signals to the musicians and concludes by swinging his partner. At this point, another man may come up to the musicians and a new set will begin.

This sequence of events defines one individual set, or music-dance event. In her consideration of dance in Northern Greece, Jane E. Cowan identifies the "dance-event" as a "temporarily, spatially, and conceptually 'bounded' sphere of interaction" where individuals publicly present themselves in and through celebratory practices (Cowan 1990:4). Though the parameters of the present discussion are not as broad as those established by Cowan,

and do not include, for example, eating and drinking, her model provides a useful scaffold:

I regard each dance-event as a site, both physical and conceptual, where celebrants perform in gendered ways and experience themselves as gendered subjects (Cowan 1990:4).

In Podhale positive notions of masculinity revolve around physical strength, courage and endurance. Femininity is tied to notions of stability, sustenance, grace and beauty. The Gorale's own self-image and representations of femininity and masculinity are not dissimilar from a stereotype depicting the woman as "strong and beautiful, with a kind of earthy sensuality" and associating the man with more colorful behavior, which includes "heavy drinking, fighting and blood feuding" (Pine 1992:59). This is reflected in the dancing, where the man dances with flamboyant, exuberant gestures and movements. To show himself to best advantage, a good dancer must add individual invention and, as they say, "fantasies" to his dancing, just as a good first fiddler is expected to creatively elaborate a melody in his playing. In contrast, the role of the woman is primarily supportive; she is to mirror the movements of the man and provide an ornamental foil for his movements. She is judged by the way she dances in synchronization with the man's movements, by her demeanor, expression and by her ability to move lightly, as this song text suggests:

My partner  
dances so lightly;  
she has a small tummy  
potatoes don't weigh her down. [11]

The extemporization, or selection, of a text (as above) was a part of the man's role in the dance. Ultimately text, no less than dance, could serve as the foundation for acceptance or approval of the dancer. The extemporization of a song text was a test of the dancer's intelligence, and, if accepted, could become a part of the public repertoire of texts (Bachleđa-Księdzularz 1981:36). These song texts were never taken for granted, and Górale have an uncanny ability to remember texts long after they have been sung in performance. The importance of text may be attributed to the possibility that singing functioned, at least in the past, as an important form of communication which allowed the expression of something otherwise difficult, if not impossible, through speech. As one Highlander remarked: "If you don't want to tell me, then sing it to me." That songs could substitute for speech was demonstrated to me in an awkward domestic situation where a woman no longer spoke to her estranged husband. In a moment of bitterness, she sang a biting text obviously directed at him when she knew he was within easy earshot. One introspective, analytically inclined Highlander considered the significance of dance and song in the following terms:

Dancing and singing are very important...Górale dislike honesty—that is, they dislike an honest opinion or explicit revelation of true thoughts and feelings. Therefore, it was through the music and songs that true thoughts and feelings were revealed. Every song had a moral lesson—a meaning couched in the text. Similarly, much meaning was attached to the style and manner of dance (SS 1/22/85).

Positioned within this dance-event, song texts could have a powerful impact, serving to reinforce what was otherwise expressed in movement. Implicit intentions and feelings could receive explicit expression.

At one time in Podhale men and women entered the physical and conceptual space of the dance deliberately, presenting themselves to public scrutiny, positioning themselves within this community and knowing that they were being evaluated and judged. Not infrequently, their intentions were misinterpreted. The following section will examine how dancing *po góralsku* was an essential part of life in Podhale in the past. Not merely a peripheral diversion, it was primary to social processes, where, through performance, participants could present themselves as gendered individuals to the community, and to establish, maintain or contest relationships.

### Dancing in Podhale: Men's Choices

Dancing *po góralsku* provided a showcase, first and foremost, for the man, who chose the tune, text, steps and length of the dance. This allowed him to express himself and his intentions at two levels: at a structural level, it placed him unequivocally in charge of the dance-event, while at the more detailed level of aesthetic content, it provided him with an explicit public forum for the overt display of a gendered, masculine, self. An overt display of individual style was essential to the dance as a revelation of character and intent. This is clarified in the insightful writing of the Highlander Franciszek Bachleda-Księdzularz:

Through the dance, the man reveals his experiences and psychological state first to his partner, and secondly to the other participants, these often being the germs of very private/personal proposals. Each wanted to do this in the best way possible, appropriately (Bachleda-Księdzularz 1981:36).

Dancing became a potentially revelatory statement of intent primarily through decisions regarding with whom to dance, and how to dance. In exploring these options with Górale, it became clear that tensions often developed between the primary dancer and those present. This could have been the result of the man's deliberate transgression of socially defined, appropriate dance behavior, or it could have been the result of a misunderstanding between intention (man dancing) and interpretation (other participants).

Not infrequently, this discrepancy between intention and interpretation led to explicit social conflict. Inevitably it generated an implicit tension among those present. The following discussion will explore the decisions allowed the man (when, with whom and how to dance) and how these contributed to a variety of social responses.

First, the man had to decide when to dance. Once an opportunity presented itself, most often after the previous dancer had finished, the man approached the musicians. Given that the very decision to dance and to claim the floor was significant, it was marked by a dramatic entrance: the man usually took large steps which could end with a leap to land directly in front of the seated musicians. (He could also come with a friend if he wanted some help with the singing.) Given the sense of exclusive ownership that surrounded this dance-event, any interruptions or transgressions of form became potential contestations and the careful balance between individual expression and social propriety could be upset in the course of an evening. This could occur if the man dancing overstayed his welcome on the dance floor (recalling that dancing *po góralsku* entitled the man leading the set to sole occupancy of the dance floor for his (self-determined) period of dancing). As an exclusive opportunity for one man (or a single couple) to assume the floor, this form of dancing forced others to watch, and wait. This could become problematic if men were forced to wait for longer than necessary, or if their much anticipated turn was somehow undermined. [12] The need to keep his dancing time restricted to a reasonable period of time was reflected in the following song text:

I only just started,  
to dance with this girl;  
the other lads are looking,  
it's time for me to stop. [13]

If he refused to stop within a reasonable period of time in defiance of others' rights to the floor, the man was clearly overstepping his bounds. The patience of those waiting might well be put to the test, and open confrontation could result.

Misunderstandings also could occur if a man was inappropriately interrupted during his set. Given the value placed on having an opportunity to dance, any interruption was potentially problematic. In certain circumstances, good-natured interruptions between friends were accepted, as suggested in the following song text:

I wanted to interrupt you,  
my dear friend;  
because it appears to me  
that your feet are sore. [14]

To some extent, this practice may even have been necessary at some occasions, when it was not uncommon for young men to outnumber young women. Since each man wanted to dance, at least for a short time, it was possible

to interrupt someone while he was dancing and take over the floor for a while (*przerenczenie*). The original partner would wait at the side until the intruder finished. This was a particularly delicate practice, however, and one which could easily lead to serious misunderstandings, even between friends, if the interloper danced for too long. A prolonged or unwanted interruption was a potential threat to the man dancing. By usurping the space from the original dancer, the interloper was contesting the man's ownership of the floor, his right to self-expression and, ultimately, his very essence as a gendered, male protagonist in the event. Not surprisingly, this would inevitably lead to a fight. Such an interruption also could provide a welcome excuse for open confrontation between men harboring unspoken animosities. Ultimately, therefore, this dance-event could provide an opportunity for the public expression of feelings which otherwise may have been left unstated, or at least minimized, within a community life largely revolving around reciprocity and cooperation.

A third possibility for confrontation appeared with the arrival of outsiders. If "strangers" from other villages arrived expecting a turn to dance in an already crowded schedule, tension inevitably would mount, especially if the outsiders presented themselves in an overly boastful or pretentious manner. Although an unwritten rule existed that the boys from the home village should allow the outsiders their chance to dance, this was often done begrudgingly. Temperaments, personalities and circumstances could all contribute to confrontations flaring between boys from the home village and the strangers. Song texts, such as the following, could exacerbate an already sensitive situation:

Even though you are as numerous here,  
as pine cones on a fir tree;  
I'm not afraid of you,  
because I came with a friend. [15]

Unhappy that "his" girl had danced with a man from the neighboring village of Czarny Dunajec, one young man used the following to begin his song:

Why did you come here,  
one from Czarny Dunajec... [16]

There being no ambiguity as to intent, I was told a confrontation quickly developed between the young men involved.

Clearly, therefore, the decision to dance was not always welcomed by others. Given the high demand for the dance floor, the situation was rife with the possibility of misunderstandings developing and tempers flaring, either through deliberate intent or (mis)interpretation. Ultimately, such variations in the dance constituted potentially serious transgressions to the understood codes of behavior dictating the unfolding of the dance-event as owned by the primary dancer, and as conceptualized by the community.

Returning to the examination of choices available to the man dancing, the next decision made by the man was with whom to dance, and also, how to dance. By his choice of partner, a man could signal much about his interest in girls and their relationship to the young woman herself, to other men present and indeed to the community at large. A number of possible intentions motivated a man to choose his partner: first, he may have felt compelled to fulfill his social obligations by paying respect to family members or certain members of the community; second, he may have wanted to acknowledge his interest in a particular young woman, possibly as a future wife; and third, he may have chosen to deliberately transgress social rules and expectations.

Repeatedly I was told through interviews that social decorum and propriety dictated who would dance, who would dance with whom, and how they should dance. One Highlander suggested that it was a son's duty to dance first with his mother, and a husband's to dance first with his wife. In fact sometimes it was necessary for a man to dance with many different partners in order to give every girl and woman the opportunity to dance. At a wedding, in particular, this included not only the young, attractive girls who were unmarried, but also all the older women and aunts who may have been attending. One Highlander explained that because of the cost involved in giving an appropriate gift to the young couple, in the past often only the wife would attend a wedding in an effort to minimize the expense. As a result, many married, older women attended alone, and were without a dancing partner. But it was important to their social position to dance. It was an honor to be asked to dance and if not provided with an opportunity they would be considered socially neglected.

It was a duty of the men present at some occasions, therefore, to make sure that each woman had her turn to dance. One Highlander jokingly complained that the man was then "like a social institution" because he had to dance with many different women, even if he had absolutely no desire to do so. Bachleđa-Księdzularz also stressed the importance placed on ensuring that certain people had the opportunity to dance (Bachleđa-Księdzularz 1981:37). Given this responsibility, derived from his sense of personal duty and honor, together with social obligation and respect, a man may well have been faced with the need to dance with many women and girls in one evening. In order to clarify expectations, he may have had to resort to a text such as the following to quell unwanted gossip:

Neither am I yours,  
nor are you mine;  
that I danced with you,  
is my good will. [17]

Such good will and respect ultimately perpetuated, and reinforced, both social positions and relationships from within the context of this dance-event.

Most often, if possible, a young man chose a partner because he liked the girl. Acknowledging attractions and promoting a desired relationship with a woman were central to dancing *po góralsku*. It provided an explicit opportunity not readily found elsewhere within village life.

The final set of choices, the decisions regarding how to dance, and what to sing, ultimately were linked with the man's choice of partner. A number of immediate decisions had to be made by the dancer as soon as he arrived before the musicians in anticipation of his first dance (these had to be repeated each time he approached the musicians for a new figure). [18] Once facing the musicians, he had to prepare to sing. First, he had to choose a song text, then decide upon one of over twenty tunes which would match this text and be appropriate for the first figure in the set; or he could choose the tune first. Then, he could incorporate some variations: he could alter the number of syllables in the text by adding "ej" or "hej" and so choose from another group of tunes, or he could vary the rhythm and accentuation of another tune to match the expanded text. [19] Finally, when ready, he started to sing to the musicians, facing them all the time. He would be slightly bent and would move in time to the song, which would soon be accompanied by chords in the instruments. He moved his arms in the air, fixed his hat, and moved from side to side. Once finished singing, he waited for his partner to join him on the dance floor and the sequence would continue to unfold.

Once his friend left the dance floor after bringing out his desired partner, the man was free to dance, ideally, with the girl of his choice. If a couple felt attracted to each other, it was "a joy to dance together," and this was evident in the couple's movements. [20] One Highlander woman suggested that it was as though the man was "cuddling up to the girl." The movements of the couple could take them around the entire dance floor in a metaphorical chase as the man approached the woman, and she coquettishly moved away. Although some distance remained between the two, they may have become quite close—even occasionally brushing against each other. Some Górale have compared the movements of the man dancing to the strutting of a cock, moving back and forth, as though ruffling his feathers to impress and engage his partner in his advances. If she liked him, the woman would mirror the movements of the man, looking straight into his eyes, smiling.

An intimacy of engagement provided a potential intensity to this moment recognized by Górale:

You would dance with a girl you like in a way you danced with no one else...with greater intimacy and contact between the two dancers than in any other dance—even in those where they hold each other (WG 6/10/86).

Bachleda-Księdzularz also has described the intensity of this interaction as it occurred, he suggested, usually in the second figure of the set:

This is the point of culmination of the dance...Here, now, in this most important place in the dance of the Highlanders, the dancer [male] must "reveal himself," display the complete depth of his feelings through dance. He must forget that anyone else is watching the two of them, as though, to substitute with dance for the words: we are here for each other. Look, how proficient, renowned and lucky I am. In this dance with you I have all the riches of this world and am thirsting to deliver them to you. He must establish with his partner a psychological contact so intense as to lead her to the dance, so as to penetrate her through and through (Bachleda-Księdzularz 1981:39).

Given the potential significance of dancing, it was not surprising that misunderstandings developed. Bachleda-Księdzularz has explained that there was a certain amount of responsibility involved in dancing—not only a responsibility for the artistic value of the dance itself, but also for the delivery of one's essence in the public forum (Bachleda-Księdzularz 1981:36). Who was dancing with whom and how they were dancing were always noted; much could depend on the manner dancing. Overly provocative gestures while dancing with someone else's girl, or wife, were not ignored. As one woman explained, a man might interpret the actions of another man dancing with his girl as offensive, or likewise, might consider the dancing of his girl as being too provocative, forward or encouraging and as a result would start a fight with the man dancing. When acceptable boundaries of appropriate behavior in dancing were deliberately crossed, reactions could be immediate.

One of the choices open to the man, therefore, was that of deliberately transgressing social rules and expectations in how to dance with his partner. Intentionally provocative dancing might well have been reinforced by a self-congratulatory text such as the following:

My little sweetheart,  
I'll tell you the truth;  
because I know what you're all about  
in the light of the full moon. [21]

One Highlander suggested that the significance of dancing imposed restrictions on who could dance with whom: a married man, for example, could dance only with his wife, or if in a family circle, he could dance with a close friend—but never with a young girl. That such restrictions could still be considered, if not necessarily followed, was revealed to me when an older woman described an occasion where her (married) son danced with an attractive woman other than his wife. Upon seeing this, his mother-in-law immediately started making loud and angry inquiries about the woman with whom he was dancing. But, as many Highlanders also explained, dancing with someone else's girl (or wife) need not necessarily result in hard feelings or misunderstandings if done honorably and respect-

fully. An effort ultimately had to be made to prevent the dance from being misinterpreted. The potentially sexual connotations of the dancing had to be well managed for misinterpretations not to occur. This could be aided by the inclusion of a text making intentions explicit:

I'll have to finish now,  
this will be enough of this;  
it is necessary to respect,  
someone else's girl. [22]

One Highlander explained the range of possibilities available to the dancer by returning to the metaphor of the embrace:

Just as there are different manners of embracing, there are different manners of dancing. You embrace your sweetheart, a member of your family, or a stranger in different ways. Each embodies a different feeling. Dancing has the same function—different feelings are shown and felt depending on the manner of dancing (SM 5/14/86).

Ultimately it was up to the man dancing to manage the range of choices open to him in a way that would express his intentions. If these were in any way ambiguous, they could in turn lead to misunderstandings, and subsequent confrontation.

As shown above, the man was able to make many choices when he danced *po góralsku*, including when to dance, with whom to dance and how. By exploring the full range of these options, he was able to articulate his intentions to best advantage in the community forum. It now remains to be seen what choices were open to women in this genre.

### Dancing in Podhale: Women's Options

Women had a clearly defined role in this dance with few opportunities to exercise any significant influence. A woman entered the dance by request and was limited in her silent (non-singing) role of providing a partner for the man. Whereas a man had many choices before him, a woman had a limited number of options. Three occasions within the dance provided her with an opportunity to exert some control.

First, and most obviously, the opportunity to dance allowed her to decide how she should dance in relation to her partner. Specifically, the woman could choose to dance in a manner which was in contrast to the clearly implied amorous intentions of her partner, thus showing her ambivalence or disinterest in his advances. Propriety, however, still governed that she appropriately mirror his steps and directions. Should she overstep her prescribed boundaries and dance in too disinterested a manner, she might be in danger of insulting him, and/or of being ignored as a partner by other young men. This was not a desirable alternative.

Second, the woman, together with other women, could occupy the dance floor for longer than expected at the beginning of a figure. As already described, a woman's participation in the dance was circumscribed to the extent that she could not enter the dance floor by herself. At the beginning of the dance she was brought by her partner's male friend; for subsequent figures she usually was escorted by one or more of her girlfriends or by several older women. The women first turned in one direction and then the other, using the same steps the male friend had used to bring the woman to the floor. This could continue, in principle, for as long as the women chose, and represented the one opportunity for women to exert complete control over the event. The man had to wait for the women to leave before he could dance with his partner. This could have been a potentially embarrassing, or at least annoying, wait for an impatient dancer who had presented himself onto the public arena in anticipation of promoting himself, only to find this opportunity thwarted (temporarily) by some imposing women. [23]

Finally, most exceptionally, and most seriously, a woman could refuse to go to the dance floor when approached by the man's friend at the beginning of a set. Unless the woman had a legitimate excuse, however (for example perhaps the man was too drunk to dance), this was considered a serious insult. The man fully expected events to unfold in the manner of his choosing. By taking the dance floor, he assumed a responsibility for his public actions, and with this some degree of vulnerability. Such a refusal, therefore, would threaten his presentation as a gendered protagonist in the dance-event. It would serve as a serious humiliation which would strike to the very core of his pride and honor as a man. It was stressed that such a refusal was very dishonorable and very rare. If it occurred, however, it would not go unnoticed. The offended man would inevitably seek retaliation, possibly by addressing an insulting song text to the woman when he next approached the musicians:

\_\_\_\_\_,  
since you didn't want to dance with me;  
I have had a good dance,  
and you just sat. [24]

In addition, no one else would dance with the woman. Even if an insulting text was not sung, this blatant neglect alone would disgrace her. Such a damaging response by the man would cause most women to hesitate before refusing to dance, no matter how undesirable the partner.

Women, therefore, were limited in the options that they had when dancing *po góralsku*. Furthermore, if they chose to exercise an option which could threaten the man's intentions, they could suffer the consequences of their actions. The dance belonged to the man; the woman was largely supportive. This appears to be in contrast with traditional social and economic

patterns in Podhale, as outlined earlier, where men and women played complementary roles. Women's subservient role in the dance is in contrast with gender relationships which have been characterized as fluid, negotiable and apparently flexible (Pine 1999). Yet the significance of this flexibility, or complementarity, in work may ultimately be undermined by the suggestion that the merits of some (women's work) are discredited in favor of others (men's work). Frances Pine has found that the work and activities of women and men are not equally acknowledged. She suggests that whereas men's work is given a high value, women's contributions are largely unacknowledged. She notes that

women are expected to be strong, hard-working and independent, and have a significant power base in their ownership of land and property. None the less, their work is both economically and culturally undervalued in relation to that of men, and they are subject to a series of gender-linked constraints (Pine 1992:58).

One of these constraints is manifest in the performance of dancing *po góralsku* where women assume a secondary, supportive role in a dance-event which ultimately underlines patriarchal authority. [25]

### Conclusions

The memories of Górale living in the North American diaspora are easily stirred to recount anecdotes and incidents of dancing during their earlier years in Podhale. These sometimes are recalled in a voice tinged with regret, suggesting a possible mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility which returns with the vivid recollection of the past (Boym 2001:xvi). That nostalgia may cloud their recollections, however, should in no way undermine our consideration of the narrative which they unfold. The temporal multi-dimensionality of past and present places the teller reflexively in the telling and in the told, creating an ethnographic narrative that we can then consider in a number of ways.

In this article, I have focused on the events told rather than on the tellers in order to consider these stories as they reveal the central role of dancing *po góralsku* in social and cultural process in the Podhale of the past. The clearly defined physical space of the dance was reinforced by a conceptual space which positioned the dancers as gendered performers negotiating within a dance-event determined as much by social expectation as by aesthetic/stylistic criteria. Located within a traditional socio-economic framework based on cooperation and reciprocity, dancing provided a strategy for articulating animosities and rivalries "outside" the closely-knit framework of village life between and within genders.

The consideration of a dichotomy between inside and outside spheres has been explored by Frances Pine.

Analyzing Górale society in terms of binary opposites, she suggests that for the Górale the major contrast is not based on gender (male/female), but on marital status (married/unmarried) and self-definition relative to the rest of the world (inside/outside). Pine contrasts the house and village community, where there is little place for the pursuit of individual desire or skills, with the outside space, where the performance of individualism, self interest, and "presentism" is appropriate. She notes also that the period before marriage similarly offers opportunities for individualism, in contrast to marriage, which emphasizes conformity and mutuality (Pine 1999). The *inside* was associated with married life, the house/village community, conformity, mutuality and house/family interest; the *outside* was associated with being single, beyond the village community, autonomy, individuality, self-interest.

Within the framework of this analysis, dancing *po góralsku* created an "outside" opportunity "inside." It provided an explicit opportunity for exhibitionism, individualism and potentially provocative behavior inside the community. But it also provided this opportunity to both the unmarried and married, and so to some extent bridged both worlds. It offered any man able to take possession of the dance floor an equal opportunity for self-display and the expression of intent. It was then up to the individual man dancing either to conform to the social conventions and expectations or to contest them. Whereas dancing re-opened opportunities associated with being single and with the "outside" to men, it confined women to a supportive role which they were more able to transgress outside the conceptual space of this expressive form, thus here keeping them "inside." Far from being a peripheral diversion, or irrelevant epiphenomenon, dancing in Podhale was therefore a socially indispensable site of meaningful action and contestation (see also Rice 1996:176). As the opening song text suggests, by "going dancing" a man, together with a woman and his friends, initiated a complex process of actions and interactions, thereby accessing domains associated with both inside and outside the traditional community structures through performance.

### ENDNOTES

1 Kotonski 1955:38:

Jo se idem tańczyć,  
wy, muzycy, grajcie,  
a wy mi, koledzy,  
dziwcyne zwyrtajcie!

All translations are my own unless otherwise specified. While attempting to be as literal in the translations as possible, I have taken certain liberties in an effort to maintain some of the poetic eloquence of these short song texts.



2 "Górale" (after góra=hill) refers to anyone living in hilly/mountainous areas. I adopt the plural "Górale" as both noun and adjective, singular and plural.

3 *Górale* tend to use the adverb form and say "to dance *po góralsku*" (in the Highlander way) rather than "to dance the *góral ski*," as I do here.

4 My contact with the *Górale* from Podhale in Toronto began in 1979. More intense fieldwork was undertaken between 1982 and 1986 in Toronto; I visited Chicago in 1983, 1985 and 1986, Podhale in 1985, 1989 and 2002. I am grateful to Tim Rice for his comments and suggestions.

5 This pastoral life began to change in the mid-1950s when a large part of the Tatra Mountains was turned into a national park and grazing was forbidden (see Ekströmer 1993).

6 The fine work by Frances Pine informs much of this discussion. See, for example, Pine 1992, 1996 and 1999. Though working predominantly in the ethnographic present of the 1980s and 1990s, Pine's observations are relevant here.

7 Ties to home and family are traditionally strong; a history of partible inheritance guarantees both men and women a right to property, though one son or daughter usually is the main heir to the core farm (see Pine 1996).

8 For more discussion of the music, see Cooley 1999a; Wrazen 1991. For a collection of instrumental transcriptions of tunes, see Mierczyński 1973/1930.

9 Lent is the period of forty days immediately preceding Easter, and Advent includes the four Sundays before Christmas.

10 The following synopsis of a typical dance sequence is based on my participation and observation of both folkloric and spontaneous events in Toronto, Chicago and Podhale.

11 Sadownik 1971:  
no 676:Moja tuncnica  
lekućko táńcuje,  
malućki brzusek mo,  
nie ciężom ji grule.

12 This contributed to the inclusion of an increasing number of general couple dances such as polkas and waltzes at such occasions.

13 Sadownik 1971:  
no 433:Dopiyrok se zacon  
z tom dzzywcinom tońcyć,  
chłopczy spoziyrajom,  
trzeba bedzie skóńcyć.

14 SJ 6/16/86:  
Chciałem cie przerencyć,  
mój kolego drogi,  
bo mi sie tak widzi,  
ze cie bolom nogi.

15 SJ 5/16/86 interview:  
Choć by was tu było,

jak na jedli szyszek  
jo sie was nie bojem,  
bom z kolegę przysed.

16 M.F:  
Poco ześ tu przysed,  
Corno Dunajecki...

17 SJ 6/16/86:  
Ani jo se nie twój,  
aniś ty nie moja,  
zem z tobom tańcował  
dobra wola moja.

18 See Kotoński (1953:43–45) for a full consideration of this moment.

19 See Mierczyński 1935, Kotoński 1955, Sadownik 1971/1957, Szurmiak-Bogucka 1959, for collections of vocal tunes.

20 For a full discussion of dance steps and movements, see Kotoński (1956). An English language summary is found in Wrazen 1988:137–159.

21 MF:  
Moja kuochanecka  
jo ci powiem w łocy;  
bok cie wymiarkował  
przy misiącku w nocy.

22 Sadownik 1971:no. 431:  
Trzeba bedzie skóńcyć,  
bedzie juz doś tego,  
trzeba przysanować  
dzywęcica cyjéguo.

23 Folkloric representations of this dancing often include some of the features discussed above: a man interrupting another dancing and leading to a fight (*bujka*); a (humorous) prolongation of women swinging the girl before her dance. They typically are included for dramatic effect, to add to the narrative potential of the presentation.

24 LH 2/27/85:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
kies tańcyć nie chciała;  
jo se juz wytońcył  
tyś sie wysiedziała.

25 Pine notes that rituals involving men underline patriarchal authority rather than fertility (Pine 1992:68).

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