



Ethnographic witnessing of a firewalking ritual as an educational method

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in the use of anthropological techniques in educational research. However, the backgrounds of many researchers contain little experience with this kind of research, also called qualitative, phenomenological or ethnographic. What can the contemporary strand of ethnographic witnessing, initiated by Dwight Conquergood, that prioritizes dialogue with the 'Other' offer, as part of an educational context? In order to answer this question, we remember the educational method of Socrates, Plato's teacher. Socratic method, used to promote critical thinking, employed dialogue and offered more questions than answers, often allowing the student himself/herself to become his/her own 'teacher'. Where can a similar interest in dialogue, questioning and a 'democratic' back-and-forth between the researcher and the subject of his/her research be found in recent ethnography? Dwight Conquergood's dialogical performance, taking upon Turner's 'communitas', wishes to view all individuals as equals and to stop promoting the superiority of the researcher – we would also add 'the teacher' – while embracing diversity, difference and pluralism. In the ethnographic narrative that follows, Conquergood's method that puts genuine conversation at its center is deployed, helping us articulate the principles of a contemporary educational method, that uses ethnographic tools in order to promote observation, listening, questioning and critical thinking in the classroom.

Keywords: ethnography, witnessing, firewalking, ritual, educational, method, dialogue, listening, dialogical performance, community, participants, Anastenaria, Anastenarides, Langadas, Northern Greece, music, dancing, classroom, energy, respect

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the use of anthropological techniques in educational research. However, the backgrounds of many researchers contain little experience with this kind of research, also called qualitative, phenomenological or ethnographic ^[1]. What can the contemporary strand of ethnographic witnessing initiated by Dwight Conquergood that prioritizes dialogue with the 'Other' offer, as part of an educational context? In order to answer this question, we probably need to remember the educational method of Socrates, Plato's teacher, first. Socratic method, used to promote critical thinking, employed dialogue and offered more questions than answers, often allowing the student himself/herself to become his/her own 'teacher'. Where can a similar interest in dialogue, questioning and a 'democratic' back-and-forth between the researcher and the subject of his/her research be found in recent ethnography? It would only be fair to mention Dwight Conquergood's dialogical performance here, that, taking upon Turner's 'communitas', wishes to view all individuals as equals and to stop promoting the superiority of the researcher – for the purposes of our quest we would also add 'the teacher' – while embracing diversity, difference and pluralism ^[2]. In the ethnographic narrative that follows, Conquergood's method that puts genuine conversation at its center is deployed, so that it can help us articulate the principles of a contemporary educational method that uses ethnographic tools in order to promote observation, listening, questioning and critical thinking in the classroom.

In 'Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance', Conquergood argues:

The strength of the center is that it pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of their opposite. For example, good performative ethnographers must continuously play the oppositions between Identity and Difference. [...] Moreover, they respect the Difference of the other enough to question and make vulnerable their own a priori assumptions. ^[3]

The method of witnessing and participating in the Anastenaria ritual performance in Northern Greece in 2011 that is described below problematized the oppositions between Identity and Difference. I was accompanied by two theatre practitioners from London and New York, two cities that became a new home to me after leaving Greece. Their home cultures are cultures I studied and at the same time they differ from my own culture, that includes the Anastenaria. However, the contemporary Anastenaria consists in a somewhat marginalized aspect of the Greek culture – particularly as this culture is being experienced in a big city such as Athens. Secondly, my two companions' presence would enable me to question and 'make vulnerable' my own a priori assumptions: in 2011 I was witnessing a ritual performance for the third time, while my two companions were looking at it for the first time. We also found ourselves sharing the same space. Sometimes this facilitated my own communication with the participants, while at other times it created challenges. Thirdly, my role evolved from that of a witness who is in dialogue with/watching the participants to a witness who is also gradually participating in the ritual performance itself. My point of view changed. Finally, the person of the witness, is now becoming a community of witnesses. Dialogical

performance in the Anastenaria includes my two companions' stories too, which become stories of mediated witnessing.

Ethnographic Witnessing, Anastenaria, Langadas, Northern Greece, May 2011

20th May, Evening

Ioli: I arrive in Langadas. Maria-Lisa Geyer, a young British theatre director, and Josh Hoglund, another young theatre director from the United States, will join me later today.

Maria-Lisa: Ioli and I meet. We walk at sunset to our hotel, somewhat out of town, where the baths are situated.

I: We leave our stuff. We go back to the centre of Langadas and find the tavern that I have been to every year.

M-L: Ioli decides not to tell me much about what will happen over the next few days so as not to influence my observations.

I: We go back to the hotel. It is midnight. I go to swim at the thermal spring. I am alone in it. I am thinking "Another stage is bare, and I'm standing there, with emptiness all around." The 'Anastenarisses' (female participants) are not here. I know they will be here tomorrow. They will have a bath before they go to the 'konaki' (house where the ritual takes place) to walk on fire. Josh Hoglund arrives. I am asking him not to speak much to the Anastenarides or to me tomorrow, but observe instead and keep notes. He agrees.

21st of May, morning

Ioli: I talk to both Maria-Lisa and Josh about the participant Babis Giritziotis' wish to have witnesses who are respectful "to the people, not the faith. ^[4]" Normally the 'Anastenarides' (participants) wear dark clothes. I ask my companions to wear something dark and neutral.

M-L: We take a taxi. We find the right house. An old man happily greets Ioli. He shakes her hand and she introduces us to him. He is the leader of the group. We go into the house and meet an elderly lady – his wife. We sit in the small entrance hall. A doorway to the left leads off to the main room.

I: I greet the 'grandfather' – the chief Anastenaris. The participant Mina Machairopoulou is also here. I introduce her to Maria-Lisa and Josh. We also see the participant Pantelis Bolanis, the doctor. He is very warm. The participants Maria Louisa Papadopoulou and Babis Giritziotis are not here. I ask him what time they will go to get the animal. He says that the animal is already here.

M-L: We came for the procession but Pantelis tells Ioli that this year it will not take place.

I: The animal is white. Its body has a weird shape, the back feet being much taller than the front ones. It looks as if it has not been taken care of during its brief life, something that, as far as I know, is rather against the custom, which imposes particularly good treatment of the future victims. I think of Rosinante, that ill-looking horse. At some point it approaches the wall of the konaki. It sort of sits down, the right part of its body and its face abandoned against the wall. There's something melancholy about this face. It's in the eyes. Is it wondering about something?

M-L: All of us stand and sit outside, chatting but also observing the little lamb. It dawns upon me suddenly that this is the sacrificial lamb. The sacrificial lamb that Jesus was. The imagery used in so much Christian art. The innocent lamb led to the slaughter by wolves. The lamb sacrificed for the Passover. The lamb of the Bible. We will

be taking part in something with an iconography that is ancient. We are becoming involved in something that will link us with so many people over so many generations.

I: Now the grandfather's son, Christos Gaintatzis, takes the sheep to the back garden and kills it. No one observes the sacrifice. All the participants are inside, dancing on the colourful carpet. They listen to the Mikrokonstantinos song through an old radio cassette player. They sing on top of the music. They forget some of the lyrics. I go outside with the Anastenaris Lefteris' daughter, a seven-year-old girl, and Maria-Lisa. The sheep is dead now. A few metres away I can see the raw meat of a bull. Ten years ago, the sacrificial animal was still a young bull, one of the animals linked with the cult of Dionysus in ancient times and a sacrificial victim in other places such as the island of Lesbos in contemporary Greece. The bull was brought close to the konaki and tied to a tree. Then at a certain moment the man who had the task to kill it gave it a single blow with a kind of long knife, the blow aimed behind its neck. The blow made the animal fall immediately on its four knees and remain motionless. The bull was then immediately killed and skinned. The head was cut off and placed in a separate bucket and the meat was prepared for the dinner that would take place on the same day, after the firewalking. Not only adults but also children were allowed to watch. The sacrifice of the bull was forbidden by the authorities on the grounds that it is contrary to hygiene rules. This is why today the bull is being slaughtered in the slaughterhouse of Langadas.

Josh, Maria-Lisa and I sit very close to the raw meat. Two men arrive. They go towards the raw meat. They start cutting it into little pieces. Some of the Anastenarides will go to give part of the raw meat to the neighbours. We drink coffee and look at the meat.

M-L: The lamb would not feed all for the next evenings but the beef will. I watch the chopping up of the meat as I have never seen it done before and I miss such contact with the meat I eat. The meat comes away from the bones easily – I have never seen such a sharp knife before. I ask if we pay a contribution for the meal in the evening. Ioli replies: "No, the Anastenarides offer this."

21st of May, evening

I: We go to the thermal springs. Maria Louisa Papadopoulou is here. Maria Louisa asks if we will swim that late. She tells me she herself is going to the konaki now. She leaves. I decide we must go to the konaki now. The three of us take a taxi. We arrive. Pantelis welcomes us. The three of us are standing outside the konaki. Maria-Lisa and Josh ask Pantelis many questions. I exit the yard of the konaki and sit outside the house. After a while Maria-Lisa comes and sits beside me. She tells me the entire discussion she had with Pantelis:

"M-L: Where are you from?"

P: Thessaloniki.

M-L: How did you get into this?

P: I came a few times. The first time I felt something with the music, the beat. I came again and again. At some point the chief Anastenaris told me I was ready. When the old man says you are ready, then you are ready. The force I felt then made me cry for a long time. Do you know Asia Minor? They used to do the same there.

M-L: How exactly did you get into this?

P: I was born in the area. I had heard of the Anastenaria but I had not seen it. Twelve years ago, I watched it. Then I

forgot about it. In 2004 I came again. I am a believer, but back then I was getting angry towards the Saints and God. While I was watching them walk, I felt something on my cheek. At home, I discovered a beauty spot. I felt bad I had been angry. I came back and I introduced myself to them. Personal problems came back and I forgot again. One night I was with my family. I demonstrated the dance to them. It felt good. I said: "I want to do this." I came here and I asked Kostas if I can take part. Kostas said that in order to participate I would have to watch them and sing with them for ten years."

I: My discussion with Maria-Lisa gets interrupted by Kostas. He needs us to walk on the earth on which they will light the fire. We walk on it. We stomp on it. We abandon our weight to it. Now I am mimicking Kostas' movements, barely lifting my feet off the ground. Now I am walking fast, with tiny steps, on the ground that will receive the pieces of wood and the Anastenarides' feet. My boots, Maria-Lisa's sandals and Josh's trainers touch the same spot that their bare feet will touch. In a couple of hours. The Anastenarides thank us. This is something the Anastenarides do not ask everyone to do. It means something. The drum calls the Anastenarides inside – the musicians have arrived. The participants dance on the carpet. My friends enter and watch them. I watch from the other room. Five Anastenarides exit the room and the konaki, one by one. We follow them. They light the fire. They return. They take a break.

M-L: The first time I go towards the house there are so many people that I can just about peek through the door. There is live music, which I am happy about. They used a cassette earlier in the day for the hand washing and Ioli said that was the first time that had happened. An old man sings and plays a lira and a drummer keeps time – using a wooden beater with a round knob. The group is dancing. Every twenty minutes or so. They walk up and down in a steady rhythm. Always keeping to the beat with their footsteps. Often there is some sort of turning of the body from one side to the other. A sort of continuous swivel from side to side. The melody repeats; the beats of the drum, the repeated movement of the dancers, the warm light and bright colours and the lingering smell of the incense all make the atmosphere heavy and I can imagine that the participants can strongly feel this.

I: Josh, Maria-Lisa and I speak with the Anastenarides during the break. After a while, we hear the drum calling them back inside. The dance starts again. I arrive at the door of the room. I stand still. I do not enter. I can hear the music. I can see Lefteris' head. He is standing still. Maria Louisa's hands and hair. I hear Mina whistle: 'ssssssssssssssss.' Christos, the grandfather's son, looks at me from the corner the grandfather used to stand in 2009 and 2010. With his intense, focused gaze. Now they stop dancing one by one. I go out. Josh and Maria Lisa follow me.

M-L: The next dancing, I manage to find myself a seat. As the incense is given to some participant to put away, they kiss each other's wrist in their special handshake. The music starts again. The dancers start when they are ready. Not all start at once or together. After a while, the dancers come to pick up the icons and dance with them. Those who do not receive the big heavy silver encased icons have a little red scarf with an ex-voto/s sewn on to it; these then are brought into the dancing. It seems that the musicians take their cues from the dancers and always continuing until the last dancer

decides it is enough. From when I was able to have a seat in the same room, I appreciated the designs meant to heighten the senses. The candles glowing to the left of the altar. The coloured wall hangings. The many carpets and seat coverings in warm colours, predominantly reds. The icons with their glistening silver. The smell of the incense, the repetitive music and the heavy beats of the drum which penetrate the depths of the body. Each time I observe the scene, the more I feel it enter me. It must be no coincidence that a lot of folk music makes great use of chromatics and jarring harmonies, which can be sensual, stirring, penetrating, disturbing, transporting one to a different state of consciousness.

I: Outside. Many more witnesses have arrived. They are standing by the string that surrounds the pyre. Waiting to see the firewalking. Families, mostly. I tell my two companions we can go back to the konaki. We see Maria Louisa sitting outside, holding a piece of paper. She is asking Pantelis and the musicians for the lyrics of the Mikrokonstantinos song.

M-L: Pantelis tells me it was when he cried that he was allowed to join them. The lady of the first day (Ioli's friend) and Maria Louisa also spoke about this crying that came from nowhere brought about by the music and watching. Maria Louisa is also a theatre director. She watched the first day, cried the second and was allowed to take part on the third. Maria Louisa says the Anastenia has something to do with cleansing the spirit and allowing a person to face their inner torments/sadness. This explains the need to cry certainly. I would add to this the sacrifice of the lamb and the washing of the hands before the ceremonies begin. The music, penetrating the body, also helps. Maria Luisa also says she had gone to Turkey and learnt to become a whirling dervish. She says whirling feels like the body is at one with the whole universe. I say there must be similarities between whirling, the Anastenia in Langadas and the Dionysiac rituals, if we trust the elements of the vases and reliefs depicting Maenads, there is this element of turning. The dervishes turn. The dancing in Langadas also has this element of a turn in the movement and looking at Classical depictions of Dionysiac rites, there is often a figure turning, their body twisted in spinning quickly to one side, one leg raised and holding the thyrsos.

I: Maria Louisa now turns to me, speaking in Greek: "Why don't you come inside the room? Why don't you walk on fire? You don't want to?" I tell her I might be avoiding what I want the most. We hear the drum again. The Anastenarides go back inside. This must be the last time they will dance. I stand outside. Josh and Maria-Lisa who had gone inside come outside. Josh tells me that Kostas told him it would be better if we went by the pyre and tried to find a good spot. There are many witnesses. I lift the string that surrounds the pyre. I pass underneath it. Maria-Lisa follows me. A man shouts "Where do you think you are going?" I tell him "It's ok. Relax. I just wanted to watch." I go back.

M-L: The musicians lead the procession. Lira and drum. Everyone dances around the fire first and then crosses it and dances over it, some stumbling at the embers. It is nice to see the old couple take part in this dance as the lady was mostly cooking and the old man is very old and so did not do all the dancing during the day. It is interesting to see how quickly they "get into it."

I: A few minutes have gone by. I decide to go around the block and reach the pyre from the other side. I finally find a

spot behind a few bushes and many heads. The Anastenarides arrive. I can only hear the music. Now I can only see the icons, lifted. A pair of hands. The top part of a candle. The firewalking ends. I go to the other side. Josh sees me. He walks towards me. He says nothing. Pantelis, Kostas, Maria Louisa pass in front of us. They all invite us to the dinner. We have dinner.

M-L: After the firewalking has finished, we all go back to the house. They dance for the last time. They then recover for a few moments before we have dinner. A bottle of tsipouro is handed around. Starting with the old man, each person says a wish to health and has a swig. Then everyone sits on the floor or on the benches around the room. After dinner the space is cleared and we all line up to have water from an ewer poured over our hands – the same as we did before the sacrifice of the lamb earlier today.

I: When the dinner is over, Maria Louisa and I wash the dishes. She tells me to be closer to them tomorrow. Today they were looking for someone to hold the candle while the firewalking takes place. She suggested that I do it, but I was not around. They gave the candle to someone else. Maria Louisa tells me that it is not good that I am not expressing my desire. Maria Louisa then tells me that each small step of their dance is a small way for them to increase their energy. The smaller and the steadier the steps one takes are, the more her/his energy gets focused, and in that way preserved. It's as if they grow bigger inside. I talk to her about forgetting the lyrics of the song as a sign of the elimination of the ritual. She agrees. However, she lets me know that the song is not normally sung by the dancers. The singers used to know it very well and the dancers used to learn it through the repetition. Earlier today, when the songs were being sung by the liraist, the lyrics were half-remembered. However, when the twenty-seven-year-old singer joined us, he sang the whole song, adding lyrics I had never heard before. She agrees with me that one should pay attention to every moment of the ritual and not focus only on the firewalking. She adds: "Another reason we sometimes do not remember the lyrics is that we do not observe the ritual since we were children, as it used to happen a few decades earlier, when all the Anastenarides in Langadas came from Langadas too. Now the text risks being forgotten if we do not choose to remember it ourselves".

I exit the small kitchen. Pantelis tells me that at some point, when he was dancing, he looked at me and he felt that I was one of them. We go back to the hotel. Josh and I have a drink:

Ioli: Maybe I am not brave enough, not doing what I want to do (walking on fire).

Josh: At least you know what you want to do. What I find hard is to understand what I want to do.

I: I am shy.

J: I often lose my stream of consciousness.

We order one more whiskey.

I: We just need to find a secret sign so that you both understand when I would like you to leave. When you see me asking you for a lighter, you will know it's time to get Maria-Lisa with you and go.

J: I might think you are asking me for real.

Sunday the 22nd of May, morning

I: While we are having breakfast again, I tell Maria-Lisa and Josh that today we can all have a bath at the thermal springs. After the bath, I tell them that when we go to the konaki, I

will use the secret sign when I want them to go. I ask them not to speak to me much when we are there. I ask them to keep notes instead that we can discuss later.

22nd of May, evening

I: Maria Lisa, Josh and I go to the konaki. Today I am determined to be inside the room in which they dance as much as possible.

M-L: I must admit Ioli is the first one to break the rule but we are more careful and I try not to disturb her too much. I am to observe and get the participants to talk to me without seeming too inquisitive. We enter the brightly coloured room. The participants, a few relatives or family members, a young American/Greek and the three of us are the only ones present and it is a lot more intimate without the tourists who had come the evening before. The tone is different and the whole thing takes on an air of seriousness.

I: I am there every time they dance, sitting on the same seat, having found "my spot." The third time they dance, a young girl is sitting next to me. Her eyes are shut. I can see her torso move while she is breathing. The Anastenarides look at her. Something else is going on too. Between me and the icon of St. Constantine. Each time I see it, each time the person who is holding it is lifting it in a way that I can see it, I feel something in my chest. As if a rural postmodern Eros was throwing an arrow towards me. It's as if something is coming towards me and grabbing me by the chest. I feel that I am being pulled by it. I stand still, I do not move. I look around me hoping that the grandfather will see me from where he is standing and invite me to the dance. He cannot see me.

M-L: This time the two drums really start to beat inside me. My breathing changes and I have to force myself not to abandon myself to the rhythms and unite with them. I find it oppressive. The heavy beating, the bright colours, the repetitive dancing. I start to feel emotional. The music stops suddenly. I just sit there feeling very emotional. It is a relief when the drumming stops. The silence of the air makes me aware of myself again. I have to be in silence. I do not want to talk to anyone. After a while, the lady (Ioli's friend) asks me if I am alright. I say the music was really powerful, especially with the two drums. That my breathing changed. I need to be alone and in silence so I stay a bit longer in the room. I remember that Maria Louisa had mentioned that she felt the Anastenaria had a connection to spiritual cleansing.

I: I see the icon again for a few moments and I feel this thing. Then the icon disappears. Then the icon appears again and I feel the same thing, more intense this time. The icon disappears. When it appears again, I can feel a secret muscle around my lips moving. I don't know if this movement is visible to the others. It's on the right side of my mouth, between my lips and my right cheek. It is moving. It is dancing to the music. I feel grounded. Unable to move anything else but this muscle which moves without my being able or wanting to control it. The Anastenarides stop dancing. We go out. It is less crowded today. We go back inside. They dance again. Each one of them dances in her/his own way but they all follow the same rhythm. They are discussing something. Mina calls my name. I stand up. "Ioli, do you want to hold the candle?" "Yes, I do." They also call another name. "Alexis." Alexis is a young man with really long dark hair. Christos, the grandfather's son, fetches a semadi, the red scarf that all the Anastenarides wear. He puts it around my shoulders. I feel I become taller,

bigger and stronger. He puts another one around Alexis's shoulders. We go together to the Anastenaris who is holding the candles. I take a long, white, broken candle. It is lit. The Anastenaris tells us we just have to follow him and do whatever he does. We are about to exit the konaki now. They will walk on fire. Alexis says: "Let us walk side by side." Normally they walk one by one, not in pairs. We exit the konaki. We walk towards the fire. I am thinking. A young man and a young woman. Walking towards the fire together. I remember the lyrics of Leonard Cohen's *Joan of Arc*, her getting married to the fire:

[...] "And who are you?" she sternly spoke to the one beneath the smoke.

"Why, I'm fire," he replied, "And I love your solitude, I love your pride."

"Then fire, make your body cold, I'm going to give you mine to hold,"

saying this she climbed inside to be his one, to be his only bride.

And deep into his fiery heart he took the dust of Joan of Arc,

and high above the wedding guests he hung the ashes of her wedding dress. [...]

The Mikrokonstantinos song is heard instead. With my peripheral vision I can see Josh watching me walk. Next to him, I can see Maria-Lisa watching me too. I hope they can take a picture of me standing here, this time on the other side. I do not look at the witnesses. I look at the Anastenarides who walk on the coals. I am very close to them, for the first time. I am holding the candle. I do not want to draw any attention to myself. Alexis is moving next to me, he is dancing on the spot to the rhythm of the music. I am standing still, completely grounded. We both wear shoes. They are barefoot. They walk on the coals. On the same earth. On the same spot where Josh, Maria-Lisa and I had walked a few hours ago.

M-L: The music and singing fills the air and the group first of all circles the fire. They are separate to us. They are connected: after encircling the fire a few times they start walking across it. Their bare feet touching the burning woods. The old man simply, dignified, walks straight across. It looks choreographed in the best way: through instinct. The performers pay attention to the fire, but they are connected through sense to themselves and to each other. They remind me of actors, during games or exercises that are devised to bring the group together to create a company. They seem as one. I understand better the connections Ioli talked to me about, between these dancers of the ritual and actors in the theatre.

I: They press their feet hard against the coals. They want to put out the fire. They manage to do so, almost completely. For the first time I can see so clearly that their feet touch the coals for a long time. This is a form of 'pyrostatia'/standing on fire. When they stop walking there are not many lit coals left. Alexis and I are invited to join them in the circle they make around the fire in the end. We all walk next to each other, around the pyre, holding hands. We then all go back inside, followed by some of the witnesses. The Anastenarides dance for a while. Christos takes the semadi off my shoulders. I feel bereft. We eat. We then wash our hands and our faces with the holy water.

M-L: We join the group for dinner again. The "table" on the floor is set more quickly and we all take our places. The dinner and we are blessed and then the tsipouro bottle is

passed around again starting with the old man. He says 'to next year', takes a swig and the bottle is passed around the room. After the table is cleared, we stand in a queue to be ritually washed with the pitcher over our hands.

I: Maria Louisa, Maria-Lisa and I, wash the dishes again. Josh comes to help but Kostas does not allow him to do so saying: "This is not for you." Then Josh and I go outside. Christos is here. The chief Anastenaris' son. He asks me: "How did you feel?" I reply: "Thank you." He says: "It is different to participate." Maria Louisa tells me she had suggested me to Mina yesterday. Mina remembered today and she called my name. We sit outside. The grandfather asks Josh what he thought. Josh tells him and Pantelis translates. What follows below is a synopsis of Josh's response combined with my own comments in square brackets:

J: I think the music and dancing is designed to create space for a common cathartic experience by allowing quick shifts from the ceremonious, deeply personal experience that demands a look into one's personal beliefs to a common social space that is more casual. [I'm thinking: Just beliefs or also desires, fears, temperament? I mean you don't face death or extreme danger with beliefs.] In the case of the Anastenaria this social space that might be seen as beside the point, is a necessary piece of the structure. [I am thinking: Of course, it is not beside the point. Ritual is anyway a collective activity.] I believe the episodic nature of the event helps enrich it. Togetherness is formed over the mundane cup of coffee after a portion of trance-like dancing and familiar transportive music [I'm thinking: Familiar to whom? The Anastenarides, the witnesses? Josh? Because at least none of us usually hears that kind of music.] During this cup of coffee, one of these many short breaks between the music and dancing in the konaki, friends easily transition to talking about things outside of the ceremony. The unsaid, unspoken power of what has just concluded in the konaki is present, in limbo, like a cloud that hangs over the break. What interests me: The cycle of ceremony. The rhythm of being in the dance and outside of it is something I find unique and surprising. It would be easy to think of these breaks in the forward motion of the "official" aspects of the Anastenaria as an obstacle to reaching catharsis. Instead, it bespeaks the trust the Anastenarides have in each other and the ceremony itself. The breaks give the Anastenarides space to let the mystical resonate with them as individuals. [I am thinking: The very element of the passage from an active state, like dancing in the ritual or performing a part on stage to a comparatively trivial and neutral one, like the Anastenarides' pausing for some chatter and coffee or the actors disappearing backstage and "becoming themselves" for a while, constitutes an interesting analogy between the Anastenaria ritual and performing for the stage. Although such passages, such transitions are quite common, an investigation – neurological, psychological, social – would be worth it.] The actual firewalking is when this heightened sense peaks... it is a public display of faith and trust. But for me, as an "audience member", I certainly felt more like a houseguest and finally perhaps a friend. I received the most concrete display of power and belief after the firewalking in the final dance back in the konaki. Finally, the mystical and the mundane seem to merge with great joy and celebration. It was still reverent but charged – the room was electric. But there was more eye contact, laughter. Bodies seemed to

work together without effort. The final dance was an acknowledgement of a shared experience that is both common and deeply personal. This is to me the motor that drives the Anastenaria forward.

I: The grandfather looks pleased.

M-L: Some of the dancers go home but some of the men go to sit outside on the veranda later joined by the women who wash up. It is very relaxed. We all chat for a bit and then it is time for goodbyes. The women in particular are sad to see us go. Maria-Louisa and the other lady (Ioli's friend) say we must keep in touch. I thank the old lady and shake the old man's hand.

I: Kostas, on his way to leave, tells me: "See you in July." Nobody had invited me to the Anastearia in July before. I want to go. After we have exchanged e-mails again, I say goodbye to everyone. Pantelis drives us back to the hotel.

Conclusions

This narrative can help us articulate the principles of a contemporary educational method that uses ethnographic tools in order to promote observation, listening, questioning and critical thinking in the classroom.

First of all, the experience that is narrated above prioritizes community. The dialogical performance with the Anastenarides would not be able to take place outside the framework community provides. Community, as described by Esposito:

Here we find the final and most characteristic of the oppositions associated with the alternative between public and private, those in other words that contrast *communitas* to *immunitas*. If *communis* is the one who is required to carry out the functions of an office – or the donation [*elargizione*] of a grace – on the contrary, the term *immunis* defines the person who has to perform no office [*immunis dicitur qui nullo fungitur officio*], and for that reason he remains ungrateful [*ingratus*].^[5]

Maria-Lia Geyer and Josh Høglund, my two companions, and me, were given some assignments by the Anastenarides. These included asking us to stomp on the earth they would later use in order to walk on fire, to help them wash the dishes of the communal dinner, or, in my case, the fact that I was asked to wear a 'semadi', hold a candle and take part with them in their final procession that leads to their firewalking. They also included us, inviting us to all their dinners, talking to us during every break they had between their dances. Every hour that went by and every small interaction we had with them made us feel more and more that we belonged with them. That we were an integral part of their community.

Now, how can this prioritization of community take place inside a classroom? The teacher can always make sure to include the students, not only by his welcoming attitude, but also by assigning them with specific tasks. These tasks, destined not only to honor his/her 'favorites' but to every student, from handling the projector and distributing the photocopies to proposing or making relevant the next subject of research or discussion and gathering material from everyone towards a communal goal, such as an educational excursion or a philanthropic activity, may enter the everyday routine of the classroom and provide students with the invaluable sense of both being useful and belonging.

Secondly, this research was based upon a certain structure. As Turner says, performance – whether cultural

performance, social performance, or social drama – takes place under the rubric of structure or antistructure. Structure is all that which constitutes order, system, preservation, law hierarchy, and authority. Antistructure is all that which constitutes human action beyond systems, hierarchies, and constraints.^[6]

The structure consisted of specific rules. For example, my two companions were advised to avoid initiating conversation with the participants – something that resulted in allowing them to reach for us – and, instead of talking, prioritize observation. However strict these rules sound to anyone who was not there with us then – in Langadas, Greece, in 2011 – there were necessary for dialogue and liberty to flourish. There was a specific framework, including the wish to respect 'the people, not the faith', as well as some specific goals that each visit had, spoken, or unspoken. Even if we were a community of witnesses, as I mentioned in my Introduction, this small community had a leader who was guiding it. This leader was I believe more democratic than other leaders we may encounter in our everyday lives, and at the same time – and because of that – offered a specific framework.

How can this use of structure work inside a classroom? The rules need to be offered to the students, not accompanied by a warning or threat of punishment, but rather as an invitation to join. I am inviting you to join me in this journey and this invitation I am offering to you includes abiding to certain rules. Rules that we discuss together as we go. There are values behind those rules, which are not mere attempts towards discipline. These values include but are not limited to respect – respect of the other, respect of the subject of our research/study – as well as increase of energy and concentration of the individual and of the whole classroom. Let us remember here Maria Louisa Papadopoulou's words that are part of the narrative in this article: "Each small step of their dance is a small way for them to increase their energy. The smaller and the steadier the steps one takes are, the more her/his energy gets focused, and in that way preserved. It's as if they grow bigger inside."

Finally, the dialogical performance, initiated and defined by Dwight Conquergood, takes the form of a literal dialogue in the field and definitely on the page. Three different points of view, intertwined, including even more points of view – the ones entrusted to us by the participants. This can serve as an invitation to dialogue inside the classroom, that can be part of a moderated discussion as well as a written assignment, in which students learn to respect and listen to one another. The narrative included in this article can serve as an 'open' document, free to interpretation and dialogue with the reader. It offers itself as an entry point to new conclusions and new links between ethnography and education.

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