A RED VOICE IN 1922 IN AMERICA: ISADORA DUNCAN'S LAST TOUR TO HER NATIVE LAND

A Master's Thesis

by
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Ankara
September 2014

To My Beloved Family

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Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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ABSTRACT

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September 2014

This thesis focuses on Isadora Duncan, one of the most influential and controversial figures of dancing in the early 20th century both in the United States and in Europe. Although she is known as one of the pioneers of the modern dance, this thesis concentrates on her scandalous and unsuccessful visit to the United States in 1922 and why it turned out to be a disaster. By using her autobiography *My Life* and the books written by the ones closest to her, as well as the newspaper articles, my thesis will try to demonstrate that in an atmosphere that stressed conformity and conservatism following the First Red Scare of 1919-20, her Soviet affiliations and her thoughts on nudity were the reasons behind her unsuccessful tour and her decision not to come back to the United States again.

Keywords: Isadora Duncan, the First Red Scare, Bolshevism, *My Life,* 1920s, Soviet Union, United States of America, media, nudity.

ÖZET

1922'DE AMERİKA'DA KIZIL BİR SES:
ISADORA DUNCAN'IN ANAVATANINA OLAN SON TURNESİ

Acıoğlu, Begüm İrem
Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Edward P. Kohn

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Bu tez dansın 20. yüzyıl başlarında hem Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde hem de Avrupa'daki en etkili ve sansasyonel kişiliklerden biri olan Isadora Duncan'a odaklanmaktadır. Modern dansın öncülerinden biri olarak bilinmesine rağmen, bu tez Duncan'ın skandallarla ve başarısızlıkla dolu 1922 Amerika Birleşik Devletleri turnesine ve bu başarısızlığın sebeplerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Duncan'ın otobiyografisi *My Life*'ı, ona en yakın olan kişilerin kitaplarını ve de dönemin gazete makalelerini kullanarak, bu tez 1919-20 yılları arasındaki First Red Scare (Kızıl Korku)'i takip eden uyum ve muhafazakarlık atmosferi içerisinde Duncan'ın Sovyet bağlantılarının ve çıplaklıkla ilgili görüşlerinin Amerika turnesinin başarısızlığına ve Duncan'ın bir daha Amerika'ya dönmeme kararı almasına sebep olduğunu göstermeyi amaç edinmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Isadora Duncan, the First Red Scare, Bolşevizm, *My Life*, 1920ler, Sovyetler Birliği, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, medya, çıplaklık.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Isadora Duncan was an American dancer and one of the creators and pioneers of modern dance. Although her story started in California, United States, it quickly reached Europe and Russia in the early 20th century, creating sensational performances and stories as she travelled. Her dance techniques that allowed emotions to come out through natural movements were quite revolutionary for her time. Despising the teachings of classical ballet, Duncan believed that natural movements were the original source of dance and a dancer could express his emotions though these natural movements. Pioneering the modern dance of today, her philosophy of dance that defied ballet was shocking for her contemporaries.

Her revolutionary stance was not only in the field of dance though. Duncan lived a very sensational life, which many remember by her many unorthodox love stories or the drowning of her children in Seine in a car accident or her tragic death caused by her shawl entangled in the rear wheel, breaking her neck instantly. It is true that her life was full of sensations and her tour in 1922 in the United States was a part of that sensational life.

As a dancer, she dreamed of opening dance schools that would allow young students to learn, appreciate and continue the art of dance. She had been travelling all over Europe since the beginning of the twentieth century and her desire to open dance schools took her to Russia in 1921. Upon an invitation coming from the government that promised funding, Isadora would leave Paris and continue her career in Moscow. Moreover, not long after her arrival, she met Sergei Esenin, the twenty-seven year old peasant-poet of the revolution, and had to marry him because of her desire to take him with her to her United States tour in 1922. She was a candid speaker; she did not care about what others would think of her and her thoughts on the new Soviet Russia. It was partially her heroic directness that created her reputation. She was brave, direct, challenging and often provocative about her thoughts on Russia and nudity in art. However, after the World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917, America had been experiencing a nationwide fear of communism. Prevalent suspicion of revolutionary political movements, anti-labor sentiments, added with a series of bomb explosions in 1919 still had a strong impact in the succeeding years. These were the conditions when Duncan came to the United States shores. Her four-month stay in America would end with her wish not to ever come back to her homeland again. It was a tour of sensations because "Red" was the color associated with the fear of communism during those years, and she was very "red" in many ways.

As an influential and famous dancer, Isadora Duncan's career has been under examination by scholars in depth. Most of the works deal with her

dancing techniques and philosophy, and how she contributed to the field of dance under the aegis of the arts and how and to what degree her work influenced the dance in Russia, Germany and England. Her theories about the source of movement and her choice of costumes and theatrical design in her performances are analyzed by many scholars that tried to understand her style and her place in the art of dance. Likewise many scholars revisited her life and wrote her biography. As her life is rewritten over and over again, she gets the chance to be seen from different perspectives. While some believe that she is a revolutionary and a pioneer, others claim her to be aberrant and a lunatic. Duncan was a person of many interests. Her love of dance carried her to the Continental Europe, where she was introduced to the many other forms of art and the intellectual circles of the day that shaped her teachings and ideology. Both her philosophy and her daily life are a subject of interest to the authors, scholars and the readers. While some scholars are interested in her philosophy of dance, others focus on her love stories and how they shaped her career.

Although Duncan's most renowned work, her autobiography, *My Life*, is questioned in terms of fully presenting the daily truths about her life, it is still the closest source to understand her thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately she did not live long enough to pen her whole journey. Having started to write her autobiography in order to pay her debts in her late years, she was unable to write her Russian days. Since we do not have the part after 1921 until her death in 1927, her autobiography lacks information about her stay in Russia and her tour to the United States. However, it is still possible to find her

thoughts on Russia, America, communism, capitalism, and nudity in her book since she wrote it just before she died in 1927. Moreover, her earlier experiences shed a light on her forthcoming experiences in Russia and the United States. Likewise, edited by Franklin Rosemont, *Isadora Speaks: Writings & Speeches of Isadora Duncan*, brings together many unpublished or inaccessible essays, speeches, letters-to-the-editor statements and interviews written by Duncan. It also includes a good selection on her Russian experiences and her last American tour.

This thesis aims to focus on her unsuccessful tour to the United States that lasted from early October 1922 to the following mid-January, by using her autobiography and the books written by the closest to her. Irma Duncan, who was Isadora Duncan's adopted daughter, founded the Moscow dance school with Isadora and the book written by her, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days and her Last Years in France*, published two years after Isadora's death, with the first-hand material included, is a useful document to learn about her days in Russia. Moreover, Solomon Hurok, who was her manager during her United States tour, fully presented her tour in his memoir, *Impresario,* and it is very informative in terms of her days in the United States. Ilya Ilyich Schneider, who was Isadora and Irma Duncan's interpreter during their stay in Moscow, in his book, *Isadora Duncan: The Russian Years*, explored her life in Russia in depth and it is considered one of the most reliable works on her Russian days.[1] Similarly, one of the most renowned biographies, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in*

[1] Victor Ilyich Seroff, *The Real Isadora* (New York: Dial Press, 1971), 262.

Art and Love, written by her former secretary Allan Ross MacDougall, published in 1966, traces Isadora's life based on his firsthand knowledge, the memories of relatives and close friends and the study of many documents. Also, the pianist and a close friend of Duncan, Victor Seroff, in *The Real Isadora*, having got the chance to know Isadora in her last years, wrote her story as being told by her.

Most of the books about Isadora have been written by people who knew her personally, which adds intimacy to the finished work. Moreover, they focus on the periods which they knew the best and exclude the other periods of her life. Thus, other biographies written by people who did not get a chance to know her personally also offer insight to her Russian days and her tour to America in 1922. Gordon McVay, in his *Isadora & Esenin*, meticulously examines her relationship with her Russian husband from their first meeting in 1921 until their deaths. It is a book that "attempts to approach Isadora and Esenin objectively,"[2] by bringing the English and Russian sources together and presenting their life in a chronological order. Ann Daly, on the other hand, in her *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America*, focuses primarily on her connection with America and her use of body while enlarging the scope of her book and examining her dancing techniques, her views as a woman and her political stance. Unlike Duncan's accusations of the newspaper stories that focused on her personal life for the failure of her tour in the United States, Daly suggested that the reasons lay deeper than that. Her

[2] Gordon McVay, "Introduction," *Isadora & Esenin* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1980).

comments about Russia, school in Moscow, and her Russian husband were all covered in the American press and by the time she came back, she was labeled "Red" already. Additionally, Peter Kurth's *Isadora: A Sensational Life,* is also a very profound work in retelling her life with all its sensations. In the fifth part of his book, he studied her Russian years in meticulous detail by also consulting to the earlier works written about her. Duncan's life was rewritten by Walter Terry, the dance critic and the author, in his *Isadora Duncan: Her Life, Her Art, Her Legacy*, in which he pointed out that her enthusiasm for Bolshevism and her unguarded comments about Russia while she was on the stage displayed her as a suspect in the eyes of the public and the government. He stressed that Duncan never did wind up her speeches and this was one of the reasons why her tour was unsuccessful. Similarly, *Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman*, by Fredrika Blair, attempts to put Duncan and her works in a historical perspective, while making use of the new material.

This thesis aims to explore the reasons behind the failure of her United States tour in 1922 by consulting the primary and secondary sources about her and it aims to look at her American experience from a historical perspective. Thus Chapter II will focus on her experiences during her United States tour in 1922 and how she was met by the American press and the government officials. Since she had been living in the Soviet Union for almost a year, when she came to the United States shores with her new Russian husband, all eyes were directed to her, resulting in her investigation by the government and her detention on Ellis Island. As a fiery-tongued artist, her impromptu

speeches and actions after her performances added more scandals to her tour that turned into a disaster. As cancellations followed one after another, she was accused of being a Bolshevik and even a Soviet agent that came to America to spread Soviet propaganda. With her eighteen-year younger Russian husband, she managed to present an interesting couple to the newspapermen, who wrote stories about her, stories ranging from quoting her own words to the fictional stories made up by the reporters themselves. Moreover, Duncan's exposure of her body, and her statements about the nudity and the puritanical society in America, as she saw it, added more sensations to her tour. Thus, this chapter aims to present the reactions she got from her native country, which she had left completely more than twenty years ago.

In order to understand the reactions she got from the press and the government and why her United States tour was such a failure, her Russian affiliations should be studied. Thus Chapter III will explore her Russian background. She had been living in the Soviet Russia for eight months, she had opened a school in Moscow with the funding of the government, and four months before her U.S. tour she had married Sergei Esenin, the very famous Russian poet. She was "Red" in many aspects and 1922 was still a year resembling the Red Scare that America had been experiencing for the last couple of years. Although the fear of communism and Bolsheviks had peaked in the late 1919 and early 1920, still in 1922, the atmosphere had not changed radically. Being "red" still had negative connotations, and Duncan, in many of

her speeches, made it very explicit that she belonged to that color. Even the color of her robe that she put on during her plays was red and she never stepped back of saying how much she loved Russia, how much Russia was better than America and how America failed to understand arts and dance. This chapter will explore her ideology and her closeness to communism and Russia.

Her Russian love and her love of Russia were not the only reasons behind the failure of her tour. She had been a strong advocate of woman rights, a critic of marriage and believed in the power of displaying the body in arts. Dancing barefoot and with a tunic that exposed her legs and arms, she had come as a shock at the beginning of the century. While the 1920s were experiencing a shift to modernism with its jazz culture, during her America tour, she still managed to irritate public and officials with her costumes. Especially with the display of her breast in one of her performances in Boston, she created more sensation and received criticism from many different platforms and this changed the direction of her tour completely. Therefore, Chapter IV will focus on her attack on the Puritan ideals of America, especially in Boston, and how she rejected to belong to that culture by analyzing her thoughts on nudity in dance and the puritanical society in America.

For the conclusion, this thesis will explore Isadora Duncan's revolutionary spirit during her United States tour, in terms of both her connections with Russia and her attack on the puritanical society in America

in a larger context. As a free spirited artist, who searched for freedom in every sphere in her life, her philosophy and thoughts were reacted negatively in her native country. Despite all the changes in social life in the 1920s, America, still under the influence of the Red Scare, was a country that wanted a homogeneity and conformity in society. Duncan's tour was a manifestation of that resistance to change and intolerance to differences. She was opposed and criticized severely in 1922; however, after a century later she is regarded as a revolutionary and this time this word has no negative connotations. She was a visionary and farsighted figure, who lived a sensational life that contradicted the conventions of her century. Her radicalism was notorious in her own time; however, she is widely respected and appreciated today.

Finally, this study will aim to fill a gap on her United States tour in 1922; by bringing together her own words and the earlier material written about her, it will provide a new look on her visit in the context of the Red Scare and conservatism still continuing in the early 1920s America. Isadora Duncan was more than a mere dancer and this thesis will focus on how the ideas and the experiences of an artist can result with a decision not to return to her homeland ever again because of the intolerant atmosphere she witnessed.

CHAPTER II

DUNCAN'S TOUR IN THE UNITED STATES

When Isadora Duncan, the world famous dancer, returned to her homeland in 1922, she met an unfriendly atmosphere. After spending ten months in the new Soviet Russia, establishing a dance school in Moscow and marrying a Russian poet, Duncan was not welcomed as she expected. Her United States tour, which she started in order to raise funds for her school in Russia was a failure from its beginning to its end. This was not the United States she had left in 1918[3] and she had misjudged the intensity of American Russophobia as an expatriate.

The country had recently gone through a Red Scare in 1919-20 when mass arrests were made on a national scale, aliens were hastily deported, and a contagious case of hysteria infected many citizens. American anti-Bolshevism was not only or mainly a reaction to the acts of the Soviet regime. Antipathy toward socialism and communism was deeply rooted in American culture long before the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in 1917. As the World War I progressed, nativism had become an increasingly resurgent force in America.

[3] Although born in San Francisco in 1877, she left the United States in 1899 to continue her dance career in England and later France and Germany. With the outbreak of the World War I, Duncan fled France for New York in November 1914. During the war, Duncan was in the United States from November 1914 to May 1915 and from September 1916 to early 1918. Her 1922 tour to the U.S. was the first time she visited America after 1918.

Fears about imported German "Kultur" quickly spread to encourage antagonism against all non-Anglophone culture. According to Patrick Renshaw the balance between freedom and security, which was inherit in every democracy, became more fragile during the time of war due to "the danger of subversion, real or imagined."[4] Thus the World War I had created a sense of super-patriotism, which was later directed to the left-wing radicals. During the years from 1917 to 1919, anti-German and anti-radical phobias gripped the nation, and in order to repress radicalism, government jailed radical leaders like Eugene Debs and Emma Goldman, conducted raids on IWW headquarters and intervened with the left-wing newspapers. By the summer of 1918, most of the country's dissidents had either been jailed or censored.[5] Germans and radicals were the most frequent targets and with the end of the war in 1918, the focus was redirected to alien radicals, especially socialists and other left-wingers. However, the government's wartime restrictions were limited in scope and execution when they were compared with the Red Scare restraints in the postwar period. By the development of a rigid consensus that challenged freedom of inquiry and speech, an open-ended series of government actions during the height of the Red Scare threatened to permanently alter the Bill of Rights and other basic freedoms.

In order to understand the virulent atmosphere of the Red Scare that affected Isadora Duncan's tour in 1922, it is also important to understand the

[4] Patrick Renshaw, "The IWW and the Red Scare 1917-24," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1968): 63, Sage Publications, Ltd., accessed June 14, 2014.
[5] W. Anthony Gengarelly, *Distinguished Dissenters and Opposition to the 1919-1920 Red Scare* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1996), 11.

reasons behind it. How could Americans move from the existence of two weak and disorganized Communist Parties to the belief that communism will destroy the government? The immediate circumstances of 1919 are the first answers to this question. With the costs of World War I, the Federal budget jumped from $0.75 billion in 1916 to $19 billion in 1919,[6] and by December 1919, the $5 weekly wage instituted by Henry Ford in 1914 was worth only $2.40.[7] The constant need for veterans' support and pensions, and the rapid and unplanned demobilization had left the economy in disarray. Inflation was rampant and employment was shaky.

Moreover, a series of bombings and race riots during the summer of 1919 proved the instability in society. Between July and December 1919 twenty cities exploded with burning and raiding, leaving 120 dead. With the bombings of 1919 and the assassination attempts, according to Stanley Coben, millions of Americans believed that these disturbances was "part of an organized campaign of terror carried on by alien radicals intending to bring down the federal government."[8] Furthermore, the strikes of 1919, involving four million workers, which centered on bread-and-butter issues or the fight for union recognition, were another factor. The newspapers and the officials portrayed the non-violent Seattle general strike as a Bolshevik plot led by the

[6] Mark Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 153.
[7] Dorothy M. Brown, *American Women in the 1920s: Setting a Course* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 3.
[8] Stanley Coben, "A Study in Nativism: The American Red Scare of 1919-20," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Mar., 1964): 64, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2146574.

Industrial Workers of the World.[9] Even Seattle's Mayor Ole Hanson stated that "every strike is a small revolution and a dress rehearsal for the big one" and the strikers wanted "to take possession of our American government and try to duplicate the anarchy of Russia."[10] Similarly, after six months of frustration, on September 22, 356,000 launched the Steel Strike of 1919, which by January ended with twenty dead and $112 million lost in wages.[11] Although the failure of the strikes, the image that the officials and the press gave to the public was showing them as a rehearsal of a future communist revolution that might take place in America.

Besides these immediate causes of the Red Scare, there were deeper reasons. The nationalism of the war years and the anxiety about hyphenated Americans about their loyalty and conformity caused a patriotic feeling. During World War I, supporting the government, the war and the capitalist American system had become a sign of patriotism, whereas labor radicalism, opposing the war and sympathy for the Russian Revolution were all "un-American." The federal effort in behalf of 100 percent Americanism was also provided by volunteer channels. Primarily associations like The National Security League, the American Defense Association and the National Civic Federation, and newly formed groups such as the Allied Loyalty League and the American Legion organized massive campaigns to arouse the public. The business leaders had their own agenda. They wanted to label organized labor

[9] Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 219.
[10] Ole Hanson quoted in Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare,* 62-3.
[11] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s,* 5.

as “red” by linking strikes to the Bolshevik plot for a revolution in America. By mid-1919 labor’s position was quickly weakening. Unions no longer had government support and they were being blamed for the rising cost of living and postponing productivity. Furthermore, for a public encircled by an anti-Bolshevik hysteria, the distinction between the good American unions and those demanded social revolution had become increasingly blurred.[12]

Especially in the newly formed Communist parties and other radical groups, America faced a national enemy too dangerous to be allowed or absorbed into the body politic. Therefore, in order to destroy the poisons undermining its national life, it started a purge against the left-wing radicals and unions. The labor-related Red Scare began in February 1919. In Seattle, the American Protective League gathered twenty-eight IWW members and sent them on a “Red Express” to Ellis Island for deportation.[13] By the late 1919, new agencies of Red Scare were in operation. A. Mitchell Palmer, who was a prewar Progressive and a devout Quaker, now convinced that a revolution was near, marshaled the resources of the Justice Department and launched a series of raids, known as the Palmer Raids. Palmer, in December 1919, as part of his “Ship or Shoot” policy, had 249 aliens, including Emma Goldman, rounded up to sail on the “Soviet Ark” the Buford. In January 1920, federal agents raided the headquarters of the Communist and Communist Labor parties and arrested six thousand people.[14]

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[12] Ellis W. Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 39.
[13] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 4.
[14] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 5.

Similarly, New York State's Lusk Committee investigated sedition, held hearings and conducted raids to identify radicals. In the Schenck and Abrams cases of 1919, the Supreme Court held that any action constituting a "clear and present danger" to the social order was not protected by the First Amendment.[15] Thirty-two state legislatures passed restrictive laws and instituted teacher loyalty oaths. Meanwhile, the scare was fueled by bomb blasts and bomb scares. In the spring of 1919 a series of terrorist acts, including the mailing of bombs to prominent officials and the bombing of Palmer's Washington residence, had generated widespread public alarm.

However, the excess of Palmer and Lusk raids eventually resulted in public criticism. Also as the economy improved, the period of normalcy began in 1920. The last bombing came in September 1920 outside of J.P. Morgan's Wall Street offices, where twenty-nine were instantly killed and two hundred hospitalized, and the disappearance of bombings also caused the Red Scare to evaporate.

Isadora Duncan's tour in 1922 was not long after these raids and attacks on the civil liberties during the Red Scare. Although the sings of the red scare was no longer visible as it was during the days of the national hysteria, the presence of the fear was still felt. When Duncan arrived, the atmosphere in the United States was still fragile and the wounds of the red menace did not heal completely. After being interviewed on Ellis Island when she landed with the suspicion of her being a Soviet agent, Duncan started

[15] Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, 41.

giving performances one after another. First at the Carnegie Hall in New York, later in Boston and Chicago, she performed her dances. When she claimed to be “Red” and making speeches in favor of the new Russian government she was banned and many of her performances were cancelled. Her friend Victor Seroff noted that her United States tour was “a slapstick comedy,” however, it was also very sensational and dramatic, and reflecting the days of the Red Scare.

This chapter will focus on her tour in the United States, starting from her arrival to America, continuing with her sensational and troublesome performances and ending with her wish of not to come back again. In order to make the analyzing easier in the following chapters, this chapter will employ a chronological order while exploring the reactions she received in each part of her tour. In other words, by consulting the newspapers, first hand observers or the accounts of the people close to Duncan, this chapter will provide a background for the following chapters in which the reasons behind her unsuccessful tour are fully analyzed.

2.1. Her captivity on Ellis Island

According to Victor Seroff, one of Isadora’s closest friends in her late years, the prior announcements for Duncan’s performances made by her manager were not effective; however, with the government and the newspaper

articles, "three performances were sold out within the next twenty-four hours."[16] The interest for her performances was mostly due to the sensational arrival of Duncan and her husband on October 1, 1922 and the media coverage of that incident. Just after her arrival, she was associated with being a dangerous Bolshevik.

When Isadora Duncan's ship *S.S. Paris* came to the shores of New York on Sunday, October 1, 1922, she was met by a crowded group of newspapers and a group of officials. Being aware of a possible investigation or interrogation, on her voyage to New York, Duncan had drafted a statement, which she distributed to the reporters when she landed on the American soil. Speaking on behalf of her husband, their secretary Vladimir Vetluguin and herself, she stated:

> Here we are on American territory. Gratitude - that is our first thought. We are the representatives of young Russia. We are not mixing in political questions. It is only the field of art that we are working. We believe the soul of Russia and the soul of America are about to understand each other. We are come to America with only one idea - to tell of the Russian conscience and to work for the rapprochement of the two great countries. No politics, no propaganda! After eight years of war and revolution, a Chinese wall is surrounding Russia. Europe, itself torn by war, hasn't enough strength to tear down that Chinese wall. Russia is in the shadows, but it is misfortunate that has helped us. It is during the Russian famine that America made a generous gesture. Hoover has destroyed the Chinese wall. The work of the American Relief Administration is unforgettable. Above everything else I wish to emphasize the fact that today there are only two countries in the world - Russia and America. In Russia there is an avid thirst to study America and her sweet people. May it not be that art will be the medium for a new Russian-American friendship?... On the journey here we have crossed all Europe. In Berlin, Rome, Paris and London we found nothing

[16] Seroff, *The Real Isadora*, 327.

> but museums, death and disenchantment. America - our last but greatest hope![17]

In her statement she mostly focused on the collaboration of the two countries in the field of art by stressing that both she and her husband were artists. By making remarks about the efforts of the American Relief Administration, she believed that she was offering an olive branch on behalf of the Soviets to her native land. She wanted to avoid any possible accusations of being a Bolshevik and was aware of that her Russian connections and the young Russian husband next to her would draw so much attention. However, she was not expecting a refusal to be let into the country.

After being told that they could not enter America, the trio had to stay in the ship overnight, and was investigated the following day on Ellis Island. In the Customs Office on the pier, all of their baggage was opened and thoroughly inspected, including the linens and pockets, which were turned inside out. All the written documents, especially the Russian materials that consisted mostly of poem books and classics, were microscopically examined.[18] Even her manager, who came to meet them at the port, had his share of that interrogation; he was stripped naked and searched for any possible secret messages that could be transferred between Duncan and him. The reception she got was a clear demonstration of the on-going uneasiness America had about her Russian affiliations.

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[17] Franklin Rosemont, ed., *Isadora Speaks: Writings & Speeches of Isadora Duncan* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1994), 94. This statement appeared, with slight alterations in many U.S. newspapers in the following days.

[18] Irma Duncan and Allan Ross Macdougall, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days and Her Last Years in France* (London: Victor Gollancz. 1929), 147.

Despite her attempt to give positive and constructive messages to the press, Duncan and her husband were taken to Ellis Island to be interviewed. She pointed out that, for the officials, a year in Moscow had made her "a bloodthirsty criminal ready to throw bombs at the slightest provocation" and they had asked questions about what kind of dance she performed, what she looked like when she danced, or what she and her husband thought of the French Revolution.[19] After a half-day of investigation, the search turned out to be fruitless, and she and her husband were found not guilty and released. According to the statement given by the Assistant Commissioner Landis, because of Duncan's long residence in Russia and the connection of her name with the Soviet government, the United States government had suspected that "she might be a 'friendly courier' from the Soviet to this country." However, after the interrogation, the board composed of three inspectors concluded that their suspicions were ungrounded and that "the only thing revolutionary about Isadora was her bizarre costume."[20] The interview with Duncan on Ellis Island seemed like a bureaucratic problem but the press was already publishing stories relating her to a Soviet agent.

In his autobiography, Duncan's manager during her tour, Sol Hurok wrote how the immigration inspectors called him aside and told him that they were sorry. It was explained to him that the law by which an American woman who married an alien automatically forfeited her citizenship had gone into

[19] Allan Ross Macdougall, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in Art and Love* (New York: T. Nelson & Sons, 1960), 215.
[20] *New York Herald*, October 3, 1922 quoted in McVay, 1.

effect short while ago. Isadora Duncan, with a *laissez-passer* issued by the French officials[21] and a Bolshevik husband, was "too hot for them to handle on the spot;"[22] therefore, they had to go to Ellis Island. The law that the officials were talking about was the Cable Act of 1922, which reversed former immigration laws regarding marriage and allowed women to keep their citizenship even though they married a foreign man. The Act had passed on September 22, 1922, some months after Duncan's marriage to Esenin; therefore, when she arrived to America, she was not an American in the eyes of the officials and that added more suspicion on their arrival.

The reaction Duncan got when she arrived was not very different than Emma Goldman's case in 1919, when the Red Scare was at its peak. Emma Goldman, who was considered "an exponent of free love and bombs"[23] in the eyes of the public, had lost her citizenship because the government had denaturalized her former husband and by law at that time a woman's citizenship followed her husband's. Goldman and her companion, Alexander Berkman were deported from New York to Russia with the order of the U.S. attorney general. Duncan was not deported; however, she received many negative reactions by the officials and the newspapers, including being called a Bolshevik. Duncan's case was not the first time that America witnessed a

[21] Duncan's American passport with which she had entered Russia, and which had been turned over to a People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs official was nowhere to be found. Therefore, Duncan had to be content with a sort of laissez-passer.
[22] Sol Hurok, *Impresario* (London: Macdonald, 1947), 98.
[23] Lois W. Banner. *Women in Modern America: A Brief History* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 115.

questioning about the citizenship of an individual on the ground of his or her relationship with someone.

After such a sensational entrance, a couple of days later, Duncan expressed her disappointment about the first day of her arrival: "I like a sympathetic atmosphere - that is why it was so terrible to be treated as if I had committed a crime when I landed here." [24] She was refused into her motherland because she was thought to be an agent. Since Esenin did not know English and never participated in the interrogations, his mere existence added mystery to the incident; he was the mysterious, good-looking suspect in the eyes of the press.

After reading the newspapers and learning about the fact that Isadora was detained and interviewed, Isadora's friend, the soprano Anna Fitziu, penned an indignant latter on October 4 to the editor of *New York Times*. She exclaimed:

> Sir: Isadora Duncan at Ellis Island! The gods may well laugh! Isadora Duncan, to whom the school of classical dancing in America owes its foundation, put in the class of dangerous immigrants!... All those who know Miss Duncan know that she is an artist little concerned in social and economic problems and her husband is an artist like her…[25]

However, the press had already published stories about them and now she was more Russian than an American in the eyes of the American public.

[24] Duncan quoted in Fredrika Blair, *Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman* (Wellingborough: Equation, 1986), 336.
[25] Anna Fitziu, "Letter to the Editor: Isadora Duncan," *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1922, 19. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

2.2. Duncan's tour in ruins

Duncan was a person of bold statements and she did not refrain to make them during her United States tour either. When she gave the first of four scheduled performances at Carnegie Hall in New York on Saturday afternoon October 7, thanks to the Ellis Island episode, a full house of three thousand people awaited her All-Tchaikovsky program at night. Moreover, Isadora received favorable press notices for her first concert in New York after five years. "Russia has been kind to Isadora Duncan, according to the view of 3,000 admirers who filled Carnegie Hall yesterday," wrote *New York Times*. After dancing to Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique Symphony, Slavic March* and *Marseillaise* for nearly three hours, she talked about the invitation that she got from Russia about establishing a dance school. Once again complaining about America not providing a school for her, she told her spectators that it was due to her school that she accepted the invitation of Moscow. She ended her speech with: "America has all that Russia has not, Russia has things that America has not: why will America not reach out a hand to Russia as I have given my hand?"[26] Her words were welcomed with ovation and cheers from the crowd. This was her first public statement from the stage and she complained about Americans not giving a dance school to her. It was very typical of her asking for a school from her wealthy American audience that watched her in a state of fascination. Unable to get what she wanted over

[26] "Miss Duncan Dances; 3,000 Cheer Speech: Dancer Would Make Symphonies..." *New York Times,* Oct. 8, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

years, she had to turn to Russia that promised to provide her with a school. Without making any political remarks, Isadora was trying to bring two countries together from her stage. She was aware of the shaky atmosphere in America, thus she was cautious about her sentences.

Along with her statements, her dance was about the new Soviet Russia as well. According to *New York Tribune*, throughout her performance, with all her postures and gestures, Duncan had depicted "the hopes, fears, disillusionments and sufferings of the Russian nation." According to the article, her interpretation of Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slav,* gave a very vivid portrayal of the misfortunes of serfdom. "Entering with hands chained and back bent beneath the weight of tyranny, she finally wrenched the fetters apart with seemingly superhuman efforts, and danced wildly in exultation as freedom triumphant…" wrote the article.[27] The political implications of her dances were pointed out in almost every newspaper that wrote about her performance.

The first performance was followed by several other performances that did not create sensations. Unfortunately, Isadora could not refrain from addressing her audience and she started making idealistic, visionary speeches in praise of Russia and advocating friendship between Americans and Russians. According to Irma Duncan, who was one of the original six pupils of Duncan and her adopted daughter, Isadora "felt that no performance was complete without at least a few words to her friends and admirers in the

[27] "Miss Duncan's Dances Carry Deeper Charm," *New York Tribune,* October 9, 1922 quoted in McVay, 115.

house… And indeed she had the gift of speech in a remarkable measure…"[28] Isadora loved speaking and addressing her audience from the stage. She was very outspoken about her thoughts and feelings, especially when she was in her motherland, where everyone could understand English.

Almost twenty years later, her impresario Sol Hurok wrote that Duncan was very reckless about the conditions of the country when she spoke about Russia. He wrote that the reaction to the war and to liberalism was still strong during that year. Suspicion of the Soviet Russia was still a very strong force in creating the national agenda. "It was a year when red was the color of all evil, and to call a man a Bolshevik was to damn his eternal soul as well as to send his earthly body to jail… In 1922 it was not suspicion but sheer, unreasoning terror; it was not mistrust but the bitterest hatred…"[29] wrote Hurok in his memoir. America was not the same one as when she left in 1918; however, in those five years she had gone through a lot and her ideology had found its shape too.

Isadora's ill-timed expressiveness, along with the puritanism and anti-Bolshevism in America, became the starting point of her failing tour. The flashpoint was reached in Boston. Duncan gave two recitals in Boston's Symphony Hall: one performance on October 20 and one on the following day. These two performances almost wrecked the entire tour. Although the details of those two nights have been distorted and exaggerated with retelling, the headlines in the national press vividly reveal the disaster that took place.

[28] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 164.
[29] Hurok, *Impresario*, 97.

According to Irma Duncan, that night, Isadora was provoked by the insensitivity of the audience and the cold greyness of the hall, and she cried out after her performance, while waving her red silk scarf above her head:

> This is red! So am I! It is the color of life and vigor. You were once wild here. Don't let them tame you! Thank God the Boston critics don't like me. If they did, I should feel I was hopeless. They like my copies. I give you something from my heart. I bring you something real… You must read Maxim Gorky. He has said that there are three kinds of people: the black, the grey, the red. The black people are like the former Kaiser or the ex-Czar – people who bring terror, who want to command. The red are those who rejoice in Freedom, in the untrammelled progress of the soul. The grey people are like those walls, like that hall. Look at these statues overhead. They are not real. Knock them down. They are not the statues of real Greek Gods. I could hardly dance here. Life is not real here… We are red people![30]

Delivering one of her most quoted speeches, she wanted to provoke her audience, which was partially cheering and partially leaving the hall. When she was saying she was red, she was pointing at the creative side of an artist, but as she waved her red scarf she was looking very pro-Russian from the other side of the stage. Especially after that incident in Boston, Duncan was despised by the American public, who believed that she preached communism from the stage at a time when America was still obsessed with the danger of the Red menace.

She was not bitter only in her words; she had also touched the nerves of the "puritanical" society because of her clothes and "immoral" action on the stage. According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune* article on October 23, titled "Isadora Doffs So Much Staid Boston Gasps," Duncan danced in a "scanty

[30] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 164-65.

attire," which the audience gazed at "in disgust."[31] Moreover, there were those who claimed that Isadora displayed her nudity in the face of the puritanical Bostonians. Some claimed that she tore off her flimsy red tunic, "which she waved above her head as she delivered her speech in the nude."[32] Even her manager, Sol Hurok, mentioned in his memoir that she tore her tunic down to expose one of her breasts and shouted "This - this is beauty!"[33] Although Isadora later on denied all the claims about displaying nudity on the stage by claiming that her dress was fastened over the shoulders and around her hips and waist by elastic bands, the accounts of the watchers differ from displaying one of her breasts to stripping her dress off to show her full body; therefore, Duncan's denial is doubtful.

Seeing her stage as a platform to raise questions and make remarks about the American way of life and her life in Russia, she did not hesitate to reveal her color to the American audience: she "looked pink, talked red and acted scarlet."[34] Everything she said or did was seemingly by impulse and her outrageous claims were a result of that impulsive character. Realizing that there might be more cancellations on the tour, Sol Hurok, insisted on her not to make any more speeches; however, she could not resist the temptation of addressing her audience from the stage. "As the first slap was dealt her, a lesser soul would have quailed and fled; a wise one would have sealed her lips

[31] "Isadora Doffs So Much Staid Boston Gasps," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Oct 23, 1922, accessed June 12, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/28759360.
[32] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days,* 166.
[33] Hurok, *Impresario,* 103.
[34] Sewell Stokes, *Isadora Duncan. An Intimate Portrait* (London: Brentano's, 1928), 70.

and danced. But Isadora was neither weak nor wise,"[35] wrote Hurok reminding Isadora's after performance speeches that shocked her audience. However, Isadora was mostly concerned about the fearfulness of the Boston ideal of life and culture rather than the reaction that she got from the audience. She once again insisted on going back to Moscow, where there was "vodka, music, poetry, and dancing… Oh, yes, and Freedom!" [36] With her sarcastic remarks accusing America for not being free enough, she was annoying the officials and her spectators. Placing Russia over America, she was attacking the old-stock Americanism that the society valued, and in a society where nativism was cherished, this was a serious challenge to the long held ideals.

Of course after such statements there were swift and strict repercussions. Because of her scanty costumes and radical addresses, including claiming to be red, she was banned to perform in Boston by the issue of the Mayor James Michael Curley himself as long as he held the office of Mayor.[37] Isadora was obtaining great publicity, but resentment at her "Bolshevistic" speeches indeed threatened to bring the tour to a sudden halt. The popular evangelist Billy Sunday raged in Washington, calling Duncan a "Bolshevik hussy who doesn't wear enough clothes to pad a crutch," and added that he would have liked to be the Secretary of Labor for fifteen minutes just to send Duncan back to Russia.[38] Moreover, the Departments of Labor,

[35] Hurok, *Impresario*, 98.
[36] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 107-71.
[37] "Bars Isadora Duncan from Boston Stage: Mayor Curley Moved by Protests…" *New York Times*, Oct 24, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.
[38] "Billy Sunday Demands that 'Red Hussy,' Isadora Duncan to be Deported; Officials Busy," *The Sioux County Index* (Hull, Iowa), Oct 27, 1922, accessed June 12, 2014,

Justice and State had initiated inquiries to search whether she was spreading Bolshevik propaganda. Likewise, when she arrived to Indianapolis to perform at the Murat Theater, she realized that the Mayor of Indianapolis, Lew Shanks, had ordered to place four policemen on the wings of the stage to make sure that Duncan would not display nudity. In a statement given to the press, Mayor Shanks classified her with nude dancers and warned her that she might end up in a paddy wagon. Indicating that ninety per cent of the men who went to see her performance said that it was artistic just to fool their wives;[39] in the eyes of Shanks, Isadora's art was not different than the Burlesque girls'. Shanks' words were demonstrating that in the 1920s dance was seen only as a form of entertainment, rather than a form of art, and Duncan's desire to place dance among higher arts was despised by the authorities.

Ruined by her actions and speeches, by November 3 the press had already begun to carry advertisements for her last two performances at Carnegie Hall on November 14 and 15. Duncan could not stop making statements about her new country and its politics; however, the new ones were milder compared to the ones she made in Boston. On the stage, she stated that her idea of communism was "everybody singing and dancing together" and she talked about her faith in the "new idea of living," which was "not home life… family life… or patriotism, but the International."[40] Apparently she was

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http://www.newspapers.com/image/52272457.

[39] "Says it About Right," *Logansport Pharos-Tribune* (Logansport, Indiana), Nov 22, 1922, accessed May 13, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/28085147.

[40] "Miss Duncan Dances Again: Tells Audience Communism is Everybody Singing and Dancing," *New York Times*, Nov 16, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

very affected by her ten-month stay in Russia and the new social system, which actually did not fulfill her dream of school as she had expected. Despite the disappointment caused by the withdrawal of the funds by the Soviet government for her school, Duncan was still hopeful about the future of the country under the new Soviet regime.

One after another her planned and awaited performances were cancelled. The last stroke came when her speech on "the Moralizing Effect of Dancing on the Human Soul" on the Christmas Eve, in the church of St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie was cancelled on the order of Episcopal archbishop William T. Manning.[41] It was told that this cancellation originated from the letters of protest from many parts of the country because of Duncan's exhibitions that aroused great criticism. While her audience and dance critiques enjoyed and praised her performances very much, the government officials and the press were drawing attention to her speeches and actions, thus presenting her as a dangerous Russian sympathizer and creating a different public image.

2.3 "Goodbye America. I shall never see you again!"

On January 13, 1923, Isadora Duncan danced for the last time in her native land at New York's Carnegie Hall, and far from having made any

[41] "Dr. Manning Barred Isadora Duncan's Talk: Dancer's Address at St." *New York Times*, Dec 23, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

money from her U.S. tour, she departed for Europe with the liner *George Washington* on Saturday, February 3, 1923. Feeling unwanted and alienated, she was ready to go back to her school in Moscow. However, Duncan, with a character of directness, was somehow enjoying her reputation as a Soviet sympathizer and using it to attack her country. As a witness of the event, Joseph Arnold Kaye, wrote that before getting on the ship, Duncan waved a red flag from the boat and when she was asked the reason of her action, she said she did it simply to make people mad.[42] During the Red Scare of 1919-20, the red flag laws that provided penalties for red flag demonstration had resulted in the imprisonment of 300 people in various states.[43] She was continuing her impulsive actions just as she was getting ready to leave the country and this flag incident was one of them. As the press focused more on her "red" identity, she did not hesitate to hide it and backed her words with such actions implying that she belonged to that color.

Although typically her initial reaction was disappointment and sadness, when she was confronted with severe criticism, Duncan would display an offensive approach to her attackers. Similarly on her way back to Europe, after all that she had gone through, she accused America for not having freedom, for not knowing and appreciating love and art, for having Prohibition in the country, and most importantly for being materialistic. According to her, Americans would even sell "their souls, their mothers or their fathers" for money. Despite her desire to open a dance school in America, both the

[42] Joseph Kayle quoted in Fredrika Blair, *Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman*, 335.
[43] Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, 223.

wealthy and the government of her country had refused to provide it. However, they were enjoying her dance when she was performing. To quote her own words, it was this greedy, capitalist and hypocrite America that she had escaped before, and now she was leaving it one more time. Her alienation by the accusations led her to claim that America was no longer her country.[44] All of her comments included resentment and disappointment about America, which she was born into and was not a citizen of anymore.

In the atmosphere of 1922, in order to refute the accusations and to make her political stance clear, she always felt the necessity to say that she was not an anarchist or a Bolshevik. According to her, being a revolutionary in spirit never made her or her husband Bolsheviks. Just before she left she told the reporters that she and her husband were revolutionaries that were capable of creating changes, and she added: "all geniuses worthy of the name are…Goodbye America. I shall never see you again!"[45] Duncan was very offended by the approach of the government officials and the press, and even the praises and ovations she got during and after her performances were not enough to make her stay in America any longer. She had been living in Europe for more than twenty years, coming to the United States couple of times for short stays, but this tour would be her last visit to her native land. Feeling a certain estrangement to her country, she preferred to live in Russia for couple of years, and then moved to France, and lived there until she died in 1927. Furthermore, a few months after her departure, her citizenship was officially

[44] *Isadora Speaks*, 140.
[45] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 166-67.

ended by the Secretary Davis of the Labor Department, and she would not be allowed to be a U.S. citizen again unless she "proved herself to be a person of good moral character attached to the principles of the Constitution."[46] Her last remarks about the United States, which were an accumulation of the negative responses and treatment she got during her stay caused her to lose her citizenship and after her disastrous tour, she did not even consider coming back. The government literally and figuratively silenced Duncan by taking away her citizenship and repositioning her as an "alien" until she proved her loyalty to the United States. This was one of the ways that the government was eliminating the dissenters from America and Duncan had become a subject to this implementation.

2.4. Media's approach

For the ruining of her tour Duncan accused the press and how it depicted the couple. After the sensations she created in Boston and upon returning to New York, she told the reporters that she had been suffering persecution caused by the American press, and that whenever she came to America, they treated her like a criminal. Once again denying being a Bolshevik propagandist, she maintained that she had been performing the same dances even before the Revolution took place.

[46] "Holds Isadora Duncan Lost Her Citizenship," *New York Times*, Mar 10, 1923, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

As the "Red Menace" was ruling the pages of the papers, it was not surprising that what was most stressed about Duncan was her opinions about Russia and her Russian husband. Even after she left, headlines like "Isadora Sails for Her Dear Moscow, Bolshevik Freedom and Good Liquor: She Came Here for Money, and Got the 'Raspberry,' So She is Peeved"[47] continued to be printed massively. She was on the cover pages of the newspapers almost every day with such headlines.

The American press was definitely enjoying the news of the dancer's arrival with a Russian husband, and their detention by the immigrant authorities. The *Toledo Blade* was able to report that Duncan was conducting a school in Moscow under the direction of the Soviet government, secretly married to a "much younger" Russian poet, who spoke no English. In the rest of the article, the point shifted to her statements about how they fell in love and how their marriage united Russia and the United States.[48] Her "white hat trimmed with scarlet flowers, her red, green and yellow costume" and her "red morocco boots inset with white and yellow slashes" was as much interesting as the detention itself for the reporters. With the "curly haired, boyish husband" [49] next to her, Duncan replied reporters' questions about being a communist. In many of the newspapers, the physical appearances of the

[47] "Isadora Sails for Her Dear Moscow, Bolshevik Freedom and Good Liquor: She came here for money, and got the 'Raspberry,' so she is Peeved," *The Springfield Leader* (Springfield, Missouri), Feb. 4, 1923, accessed May 13, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/40824658.
[48] "Soul Wedding, Trip Delayed at U.S. Docks: Flight of Dancer's Spirit in Russia Costs Citizenship and Right to Land," *Toledo Blade*, October 2, 1922 quoted in McVay 109.
[49] "Admits Miss Duncan After 2-Hour Quiz," *New York Times*, Oct. 3, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

couple were written in detail. While the *New York Times* focused on Esenin's "powdered hair" and how Isadora "dusted the powder from the poet's hair"[50] before they were photographed, *New York World* noted that Esenin would make "an excellent half-back for any football team - about 5 feet 10, with a blond, clean-cut head set upon a pair of broad shoulders, with narrow hips and feet that might do a hundred yards in about ten seconds."[51]

Many of them were romanticizing the couple and adding fictional stories to make their articles more interesting. For instance, it was written that Esenin had bowed to the Statue of Liberty to thank and declared that he was going to write a poem about it.[52] While depicting them as an interesting, exotic couple coming from the Soviet Russia, the newspapers brought the Russian connection of Isadora to its titles. Accusing the press for creating false and fictional stories about her speeches and misrepresenting her, Duncan indicated that the articles were mentioning what she ate, drank or with whom she met, focusing on the trivial things as well as the possibility of Duncan being a Russian sympathizer, but they were ignoring her art.[53] Indeed Duncan was correct about the newspaper articles; there were not many newspaper articles that tried to look at the couple in a different context. The words "Russian," "Soviet," "detention," or "agent" were often attached to Duncan's name. Not

[50] "Isadora Duncan and Poet Husband Detained on Liner," *New York Times*, Oct 2, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.
[51] *New York World*, Oct. 2, 1922 quoted in McVay, 108.
[52] "Isadora Duncan Admitted: Dancer, Back from Russia…" *The Indianapolis News* (Indianapolis, Indiana), Oct. 3, 1922, accessed June 15, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/39565456.
[53] "Isadora Duncan Off Will Never Return," *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1923, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014.

many articles tried to put their reception in a different perspective. *New York Tribune* of October 3 wrote:

> America has long had the habit of putting her worst foot forward at that particular moment when an alien or a citizen reaches her shores… Washington knew not why she and her robust Slavic husband were detained at Ellis Island. Neither did the immigration authorities, apparently… Painful as the experience was to Miss Duncan, or rather Mrs. Essenine, personally, it can hardly have brought tears to the eyes of her press agent… The point is that… but for these untoward events which put these latest samovarians on the middle of the front page, goodness knows whether the importance of their appearance would have been noticed at all.[54]

It was true that Duncan's tour both gained attention and was ruined due to the newspaper articles that flowed all over the country since the day she arrived. She was on the front pages almost any day she performed and her remarks were written in full detail. The Red Scare was not a spontaneous expression of public fear; individuals and institutions had promoted it. Moreover, eager to sell papers, the news media had sensationalized events and this tradition was continuing during Duncan's visit in 1922 as well. The impact of the newspapers to manipulate Duncan's image is undeniable; however, the two basic reasons behind the failure of her tour were her Russian connection and her unorthodox view on nudity in dance.

[54] *New York Tribune*, Oct. 3, 1922 quoted in McVay, 112.

CHAPTER III

DUNCAN'S RUSSIAN AFFILIATIONS

Isadora Duncan was a revolutionary in every sense, and revolt was the hallmark of all that she did. Her interpretation and techniques in the field of dance were not the only revolutionary things about her. When the newspapers accused her of being a Bolshevik, they were referring to her past year in the Soviet Union, her dance school in Moscow and her Russian husband, Sergei Esenin. Although the Red Scare peaked in late 1919 and early 1920, by the late 1922, America still was in a postwar nativist mode that threatened immigrants, unions, radicals, and Bolsheviks. For years, the politicians, veterans, patriotic groups and the media had been manufacturing propagandas, and for an average American, being a Bolshevik meant anarchy and massacre. According to Robert Murray, as it was argued in *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*, after the war, Russia, the substitute for the bloody Kaiser, was not a military threat to the United States. However, Bolsheviks had become a "symbol of the foreign revolutionary and thus a perfect target for the country's pernicious xenophobia and anti-radicalism."[55]

The President Woodrow Wilson, in April 2, 1917 had addressed Russia

[55] Gengarelly, *Distinguished Dissenters and Opposition to the 1919-1920 Red Scare*, 18.

as a "fit partner for a League of Honor."[56] Nonetheless, with the revolution this tide changed. Shortly after the October Revolution, the U.S. government broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet government. Wilson repeatedly authorized U.S. support for anti-Bolshevik forces in the Russian Civil War. Moreover, he warned that Bolshevism - "the poison of disorder, the poison of revolt, the poison of chaos" - had spread and that some "of that poison has got in the veins of this free people." To him, that sort of revolution meant "government by terror, government by force, not government by vote" and it was "the negation of everything that is American."[57] With the Russian Revolution, the attitude towards Russia had changed. In March 1919 the Bolshevik regime, which had seized power in Russia sixteen months earlier, launched the Communist International in the name of proletarian and peasant revolution everywhere, and according to Albert Fried's views in *Communism in America: A History in Documents*, the creation of Comitern was "the mover that America's left Socialists had been waiting for."[58] In an international environment of Bolshevik success in Russia, uprisings in Hungary, unrest in Germany, and the formation of the Communist and Communist Labor parties in 1919, strikes in America were quickly translated in to a full-blown Red Scare. Thousands of captures, detainments and deportations from the country, as well as the establishment of federal, state and local level authorities employed with investigations, identification, and punishments continued in

[56] Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 42 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966-1993), 524.
[57] Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 63, 77.
[58] Albert Fried, *Communism in America: A History in Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 1.

massive forms throughout the Red menace of 1919-20. As the Bolsheviks proclaimed their intention to spread Marxist ideology, millions of Americans at home were disturbed not by a Russian invasion but by the possibility of spreading the communist ideas at home in America.

The communist Russia was created to bring a new order to the corrupt and brutal imperial capitalist system that dominated the masses all around the world; however, the communist regime had to spend its first ten years to deal with its own problems. The civil war, the famine that killed approximately 6 million and the brutal power struggle following Lenin's death in 1924 prevented the communist regime to achieve its goals rapidly. In the meantime, imperial capitalism in the west, especially in America, stabilized and the fear of communism diminished respectively. After the war, America also returned to its policy of isolationism and the widespread affluence most of the Americans enjoyed caused communism to be seen as a remote threat. However, the fear and intolerance that started the decade never completely disappeared and remained in the following years. In 1922, writer Katherine Fullerton Gerould noted in *Harper's*: "America is no longer a free country in the old sense, and liberty is increasingly a mere rhetorical figure… No thinking citizen can express in freedom more than a part of his honest convictions… free speech is choked off in one direction or another."[59] The Sacco and Vanzetti case which was carried up until 1927 was also an indicator of the Red Scare dragged into the following years.

[59] Gerould quoted in Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 6.

Duncan's United States tour coincided with such conditions and it resulted with a complete disaster. The term "Bolshevik" was then synonymous with "communists," and it should have been applied to a person belonging to the Communist Party; however, the atmosphere of the Red Scare made it very difficult to distinguish between the supporters of the ideology and anarchy. As of the initiators of the Red Scare, Mitchell A. Palmer wrote in February 1920 that "upon these two basic certainties, first that the "Reds" were criminal aliens, and secondly that the American Government must prevent crime… there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws."[60] Any theory that excused a crime would not be tolerated in America and since communism was a crime, it should not have been tolerated. During the war years, American left-wing groups and aliens were especially exposed to persecution for views considered to be "pro-German." Now these same groups and their sympathizers were to come under attack for their supposed association with international communism.

In no part of her life, Isadora was a Bolshevik; she did not participate to any of the Communist Party related meetings or associations. When a reporter suggested that she might be a "in hot water as an emissary of Lenin,"[61] she had to explain that she had not seen Lenin or Trotsky during her sojourn in Russia and by pointing at her husband who was right next to her,

[60] Mitchell A. Palmer, "The Case Against the Reds," *The Culture of the Twenties*, ed. Loren Baritz (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 77.
[61] Peter Kurth, *Isadora: A Sensational Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 457.

she added that Esenin was not a politician either, but a genius.[62] She had to make sure that their reputation remained artistic, not political because of the intolerant atmosphere of the early twenties.

This chapter will analyze why Duncan was perceived as a Bolshevik in the eyes of the press and it will argue that Isadora was a revolutionist and not a Bolshevik, as the United States officials believed when she arrived. It will prove that her admiration and love of Russia was mostly emotional and not very much political. Being a dancer, her ideology was never clear but the sentimental and aggressive statements she made from the stage added more depth to her Bolshevik image. Duncan was naïve enough to believe in revolution without ideology. To her, communism was the renewal of democracy without the "greed, villainy, and the class injustice" of capitalism.[63] She saw no contradiction between her American ideals and those of Russians and she could never understand why America, itself born out of a revolution, did not support all revolutions, including the Russians'. While her belief in the Communist system was more like a hope in the possibility of a utopia, she was very much affected by the enthusiasm of people that she saw in the new Russia. Her vague and sometimes contradictory views of Bolshevism played a significant part on her disastrous tour.

No matter how naïve or utopian, her thoughts about communism had also started to come into existence in her choreographies. Her dances,

[62] "The Trials of Genius," *The Indianapolis News* (Indianapolis, Indiana), Oct. 3, 1922, accessed June 12, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/39565240.
[63] Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance*, ed. Sheldon Cheney (New York: Theater Arts, 1928), 109.

especially the ones created in the middle of her career were very allegorical and usually depicted the revolution and freedom. Clad in a red tunic and waving a red scarf in most of her performances, she was "red" in appearance as well. More importantly, her main reason to go to the Soviet Union, her school in Moscow, was a reason to look at her as a Russian sympathizer. Even after the failure of the project because of the inefficiency of the Soviet Government, Duncan was not disappointed by the system; she wanted to continue her school in Russia under difficult circumstances. Lastly, her marriage to Sergei Esenin in May 1922 made her a Russian in the eyes of the Americans. As a longtime critic of marriage, her decision to marry the young poet shocked many and this marriage resulted in her losing American citizenship. Bringing Esenin to America, she was suspected of having pro-Soviet leanings and being a Bolshevik propagandist. When all of these were brought together, Duncan, who had been living abroad for almost twenty years, were suspected as a Russian sympathizer by the government officials, and with the help of the American press that focused on the incidents, her United States tour was smashed.

3.1. Her approach to Bolshevism and revolution

Isadora Duncan never considered herself a Bolshevik and did not join or participate in any revolutionary organizations during her lifetime; however,

this did not make her less of an activist. She agitated for Russian famine and for the independence of Ireland; she strictly criticized child labor and governments' moral impositions on the society. Just before she died in 1927, her house in Paris was used as a meeting place for the committee to sign a petition protesting the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. She was not a Russian Bolshevik; she did not even have clear-cut ideological opinions. It was true that her ends were democratic; however, her means were exclusionary. On the one hand, she was working with wealthy patrons that fostered her art and helped her open schools in Grünewald Germany and Paris. Moreover, her ticket prices were quite high and she was appealing to the upper or upper-middle classes. On the other hand, she was dreaming of enlarging the scope of her art and dancing for the masses. Although she regularly complained about the state's inefficiency of creating a free life as she wanted, she turned to the state for the support of her students. More of a pragmatist or opportunist than being a communist, in many times of her life she tried to make use of what she had in order to achieve her goals. The lack of a clear ideology from the beginning also helped her to look inconsistent in terms of her actions.

She was not a Bolshevik but she was definitely sharing the pain and oppression in Russia, which would be a significant host to her through the second half of her life. In her autobiography, she wrote a sincere story about her first impressions on her first Russian tour. The day she arrived to Russia

coincided with the "Bloody Sunday" of 1905,[64] when several unarmed demonstrators that wanted to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II, were killed by soldiers of the Imperial Guard. She wrote that after her arrival at night and seeing people carrying coffins one after another, she vowed herself "to the service of the people and the down-trodden," adding that if she had never seen it, all of her life would have been different.[65] She was deeply affected by what she saw in the aftermath of "Bloody Sunday" in 1905 and this incident gave a powerful impetus to her early radicalism. With the overthrow of Czarism in 1917, she started to consider herself a true communist, although she never used the word herself.

Even before living in Russia, she had made it clear in her speeches that she was in favor of equality. During her tour to the United States in 1915, after giving a free performance in New York, she wrote about building a great Amphitheater with no boxes or balconies, which would provide equal view for everyone. According to Duncan, arts should not have been kept for the few refined people, on the contrary it should have been carried to the masses.[66] To her, music and dance could not be appreciated in the balconies, separated from the rest of the audience; there should not have been any separation and discrimination when it came to art.

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[64] Although Isadora Duncan stated in her autobiography that she arrived the day after the Bloody Sunday of January 5, 1905, she meant January 22, 1905. According to Francis Steegmuller, this misdating of the event and her arrival was perpetuated by her biographers, and the evidence of her St. Petersburg debut in December 1904 can be found in many Russian sources and her letters to Gordon Craig. Francis Steegmuller, *"Your Isadora:" The Love Story of Isadora Duncan & Gordon Craig* (New York: New York Public Library, 1974), 37.
[65] Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Liveright, 1927), 161-62.
[66] Duncan, *My Life*, 253.

Her romantic and naïve view of communism can be seen in almost any account of her days in Russia. For instance, when she first landed to Moscow in 1921, she was met by Florinsky at the station, who talked about the future of communism, and by morning she was "ready to die for Lenin and the cause."[67] Duncan was even surprised and impressed with the physical strength and endurance of the Russians she met and said to Irma that "a real communist is indifferent to heat or cold or hunger or any material sufferings."[68] Her admiration for the people's will to endure the hardships in the country was a very important factor in the shaping of her ideology. The feeling of a community, the sense of unity against the poverties was what pulled Duncan to the Russian ideology. Coming from a poor family, it was also possible that she saw her own struggle in the struggle of the Russian people.

Feeling that her search for an ideology had ended when she moved to Russia, she became very enthusiastic about living in a communist country. Her utopian, optimistic, and maybe even unrealistic belief in the new regime can be seen in one of the incidents she had, not long after her coming to Russia. Having been invited to a party, where the Communist Party leaders would also participate, Duncan, for that special event, "donned a red dress, draped her scarlet Marseillaise shawl about her, and bound around her head a turban made with a red tulle scarf."[69] However, seeing that the comrades were listening to a young soprano in a lavishly decorated grand salon, which was in

[67] "Our First Night in Moscow," *Isadora Speaks*, 68.
[68] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 28-29.
[69] Macdougall, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in Art and Love*, 189.

the style of Louis XIV, she shouted: "What do you mean by throwing out the bourgeoisie only to take their places?... *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*…You are not revolutionists. You are bourgeois in disguise. Usurpers!" [70] She reproached that group of Soviet leaders on their hypocritically bourgeois behavior and that was an evidence of how she imagined the Communist Russia would be. Even her choice of attire for the evening was a proof of the possible disappointment she would have when she saw the revolutionists. After that incident, Anatoly Lunacharsky, who was a Russian Marxist writer, a leader of the Bolshevik Party, a prominent figure in the October Revolution, and the Commissar of Education between 1917 and 1929, indicated that Duncan was "going through a phase of rather militant communism" that sometimes made them even laugh.[71] Duncan's expectation of a sudden radical change in the system was mostly due to her utopian faith in the revolution. To her, everybody should have worn red dresses and participated in the communal suffering of the famine years.

Her naïve approach could be seen in her first performance in the Soviet Russia as well. She was asked to perform for the fourth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution at the Bolshoi Theater on November 7, 1921 and Duncan accepted this invitation more than readily. She was assured that all the seats would be free and the tickets were distributed to the workers' organizations and the Red Army. However, when she got on the stage, she realized that while ten times of the audience waited in the snow to see her, all

[70] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 46-47.
[71] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 48-51.

the chairs were occupied by "the leaders of the Party, the commissars, government officials, the heads and officials of the trade unions, the leading officers of the Red Army and all the foreign correspondents."[72] She could not hide her disappointment with the unfulfilled promise. Her desire to perform for the masses was not achieved.

According to Duncan, despite all of these drawbacks, Russia had a spirit. In an interview in *Soviet Russia* with Karl Pretshold in November 1922 in New York during her U.S. tour, she stated that the only sane thing in Europe was the spirit of Russia, which meant equal suffering that led to a common understanding. The famine or the poverty that struck Russia after the Revolution was creating a unifying sense and this suffering was shared equally, according to Duncan. She believed that the only two countries that looked to the future were the Soviet Russia and the United States, and not seeing any contradiction between the ideals of the two countries, she believed that America should understand Russia.[73] Apparently, Duncan's dream of the ideal communist state was not shattered with the withdrawal of government funding for her school or her experiences in Russia. She made it very clear during her American tour that America should try to understand Soviets and she was not making any Russian propaganda. However, with the fear of communism in America, it was impossible to differentiate her purposes.

[72] Macdougall, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in Art and Love,* 199.
[73] "The Spirit of Russia," *Isadora Speaks*, 69-70. Interview with with Karl Pretshold in *Soviet Russia*, the official organ of the Friends of Soviet Russia, New York, November 15, 1922.

Despite being enthusiastic about the new communist life she was experiencing, as a person of great wealth in her earlier years, she found it slightly unappealing. Isadora's meeting with the "God-like man,"[74] Comrade Podvowsky, who had led the attack on the Winter Palace in November 1917 and who was the People's Commissar for Physical Education, resulted in a communist life experiment for Isadora. Podvowsky was engaged with a small army of athletes in the construction of a sports stadium, and in order to show Duncan the real comrade life, he offered Isadora and Irma Duncan to live out in the woods of Sparrow Hills, "in a two-room long cabin furnished in the most primitive fashion," with no bed or sanitary supplies. Although she felt just as "one of his soldiers" and she could "follow him to death,"[75] according to Allan Ross Macdougall, "after a week of this pioneering existence the dancer was ready to move back"[76] to her apartment at the famous Prechistenka Street in Moscow. The equally shared suffering was not so much appealing to her. No matter how much she respected and was impressed by what the Revolution brought, she was not ready to suffer as they did.

Isadora Duncan held a philosophy of liberation that depended upon the inner strength of the individual to overcome oppression. Nonetheless, she remained loyal to an attitude of entitlement that was especially created during her relationship with Paris Singer, heir to the sewing machine fortune. She placed herself in the world of the elite even when she was performing in San

[74] "A Commissar," *Isadora Speaks,* 72.
[75] "A Meeting with Comrade Podvoisky," *Isadora Speaks*, 74-75.
[76] Macdougall, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in Art and Love,* 194.

Francisco before she left America. She preferred to appear only in the concert halls and opera houses and demanded high tickets prices, which caused her audience to be upper or at least upper-middle class. She may have pitied the working class, who could hardly afford tickets to see her while performing, but she also enjoyed the luxury of the royal elite. Duncan admitted to be "a poor pagan sybarite, used to soft beds, good food."[77] She denounced the life style of the upper elite; however, at the same time, she was content with the money and their lifestyle. "When in doubt, always go to the best hotel," she said to Irma Duncan.[78] Her relationship with Paris Singer, the heir to the sewing machine fortune, had started with her idea of finding a millionaire, which she "repeated a hundred times a day, first in a joke and then, finally in earnest."[79] She certainly enjoyed the life of a millionaire for eight years until he proposed to marry her. According to Walter Terry, the key word about her ideology was "enthusiasm."[80] He claimed that if she was enthusiastic about something in communism, she was also equally enthusiastic about the life of the wealthy.

Having remained naïve and idealistic about her ideology, to Duncan, communism or Russian regime would lead to a better world. It was the "dream that had been conceived in the head of Buddha; the dream that had resounded through the words of Christ… the dream that Lenin had by a great magic

[77] "A Meeting with Comrade Podvoisky," *Isadora Speaks,* 75.
[78] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 171.
[79] Duncan, *My Life*, 229.
[80] Walter Terry, *Isadora Duncan: Her Life, Her Art, Her Legacy* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1984), 138.

turned to reality."[81] Despite the poverty, hunger, lack of basic necessities, the Russian revolutionists were happy to be free, as they sang the *Internationale* and waved the red flag. As a believer in revolutions, she even predicted that the downtrodden, exploited workers in America would start a revolution on the Fifth Avenue, singing the *Internationale* with the red flags in their hands to cure the dreary and routinized America.[82] Moreover, she could not understand why America was so scared of revolutions. During her United States tour in 1922, she indicated her disappointment by saying that, although she had been taught that America was started by a revolution, in which her great-grandfather, General William Duncan, played an honorable part, the American government had no sympathy with revolutions.[83] Accusing her native country of mental and spiritual "slavishness," she believed that most people in the United States were already dead because nothing new and progressive like the Russian Revolution would come out of America. The provocative statements she made during her tour had disturbed the government officials and the press, but she believed that revolution was a necessity and nothing to be scared of. The capitalist, greedy America was commercializing beauty and letting only the rich enjoy art while the Russians were providing art, education and music free for all. Her experiences in Russia led her to conclude that art should not be confiscated to the upper elite and if her wish to perform for the masses

[81] Duncan, *My Life*, 359.
[82] "America Makes Me Sick!" *Isadora Speaks*, 135-36.
[83] "Isadora Duncan and Hubby Forbidden Entry to Country," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Oct. 2, 1922, accessed May 12, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/28996170. Also Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 145.

made her a Bolshevik, she said: "perhaps I am becoming a Bolshevik," because everything that America wanted was money.[84] The change in her thoughts about performing for masses instead of the elite illustrated how her stay in Russia helped her shape her ideology.

Though sometimes contradictory, this newly shaped ideology was reflecting communist trends. The sensational remarks during her Boston performance in 1922 caused her to be labeled as a "red" Bolshevik. After being almost persecuted by the officials and the press, Duncan later on felt that it was necessary to make herself clear about her statements about being "red." She stated:

> There are, in the world, persons of three colors. There are the whites. Their color typifies a purity which is useless; a starved quality of the body and mind and emotions from which no young may spring; a sterility which is praised only by its own barrenness. That's your ultra-pure, all over our country. The next color is gray. They paint the walls of their Symphony Hall gray in Boston because that is the color of polite funerals and hearses where too much sadness is not desired. Gray is the color of Boston-people who are dead and buried already… That's Boston. Dead, politely, positively dead, so far as any thought or any feeling, or any quickened intelligence are concerned. The last color of all is red. That's the color of the people who do the real work of the world… That's the color of the artists and the creators, the great soldiers and fighters and poets. And that's my color, praise the Lord! For you see, the color of my blood - I am glad, glad to say-is still red, even after my American tour.[85]

Although this time using white instead of black to describe the third category, she was still considering herself red and the people in America as gray. Accusing Bostonians of being dead and not appreciating art because of the puritan doctrine it followed, she had wanted to free them from their chains.

[84] "I will Go to Russia," *Isadora Speaks*, 63.
[85] "America Makes Me Sick!" *Isadora Speaks*, 133-34.

Although she claimed that she was red in an artistic sense, not in a political sense, the press had already labeled her as a Bolshevik. It is clear that her political beliefs and opinions were quite ambiguous and sometimes contradictory, but the fact that she dared to display interest and admiration in communism injured her career severely at a time when communism was extensively scared of. The postwar nativist mode had blurred the lines between ideology and crime. Even Duncan's mostly naïve views about communism were regarded as a threat to the American way of life.

Although Duncan often stated that she was not a Bolshevik, but a revolutionary in an artistic sense, the red menace of 1919-20 was not leaving any space to Duncan to make herself clear in the eyes of the officials and the public. For Americans, private property, family, religion, self-reliance, small-scale government, and low taxes were sacred. The fear that communists would overthrow these standards and replace them with a terrifying tyranny automatically made the dissenters "un-American." Duncan's words were understood as a close threat to those ideals and she became "un-American," at least for the governing authorities that aimed to remove unfit and radical pieces from the rest of the society.

3.2. Her revolutionary dances

Her greatest services to the revolution found shape in her dance and teachings. Despising classical ballet and its teachings, she pioneered the

modern dance and as a revolutionary spirit, she reflected revolution in her dances, as well. These were her revolutionary ways to change the world by overthrowing the old society while building a new one. Although Duncan's early dances were lyrical and in the form of free movement along with the music, her later dances were more allegorical and depicted the repressed bodies, which tried to free themselves and finally triumphed and let go of the oppression. Despite the fact that in the beginning of her career, she danced to the pieces like Mendelssohn's *Welcome to Spring*, Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*, or to those dances inspired by ancient Greece like *Orpheus* or *Oedipus Rex*, she added more political music and anthems to her program in her mature period.

Arts and politics were not separate entities for Duncan. Her concern with political freedom always found its way into the content of her work. During World War I, her dances focused on revolution and the oppressed but in a more nationalistic sense. *Marseillaise,* France's national anthem and one of her most awaited and admired dances, received a standing ovation by the audience. During her dance, she portrayed the departure of the troops to battle against the invaders, and as the dance continued she got down on her knees and rose on her feet at the finale scene to depict the triumph of France in the image of *Arc de Triomphe*. According to Duncan, her dance was more than just a call to arms; it was about the "determination never to yield, never to

surrender."[86] In her red tunic, she was the real embodiment of France, in a deadly fight with the suffering.

On March 6 1917, after dancing the *Marseillaise*, Duncan made what was perhaps the most distinguished gesture of her American career. She peeled away her crimson robe and revealed the silken folds of the Stars and Stripes underneath it. While she was still dressed in the American flag, she told her audience that artists would rather be fighting in the war or at least they should be helping the wounded. She also asserted that she would found a school in America "to dance the songs of freedom."[87] After that short speech, she got an ovation by the audience and was applauded for a long time. The *Marseillaise, Pathétique,* and *Rédemption* were some of her most praised and popular dances, partly because they advocated nationalism. However, when she came back to America in 1922, after ten months in the Soviet Russia, this time she was labeled as a traitor to that nationalist creed.

The Russian Revolution had its impact on her choreography as well. As a believer in the power of the masses, Duncan honored the Russian Revolution with a celebratory performance at the Metropolitan Opera House on March 28, 1917. Moreover, the Revolution strengthened her antipathy toward the rich, and for her, it became a symbolic event for ending human suffering and oppression. In her autobiography, she noted that when the tsar

[86] Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 186.
[87] "Miss Duncan in Two Roles: Dances at Metropolitan Opera House and Makes a Speech," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), March 7, 1917, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/53892195.

was overthrown by the revolutionists in 1917, she performed the *Marseillaise* "in the real original Revolutionary spirit in which it was composed," and it was followed by Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slav*, in which she "pictured the down-trodden serf under the lash of the whip." Recalling her feelings on the night of the Revolution, she noted that her heart was bursting "at the release of all those who had suffered, been tortured, died in the cause of Humanity."[88] To her, communism would abolish the old abuses and pave way to a better society.

Later on in her life, she admitted that it was the movements of despair and revolt that attracted her. She was dancing to the revolution and her dance was a call to arms of the oppressed.[89] In April 1918, she officially added to her repertoire the allegorical, patriotic dance of *Marche Slav*. Overall, the choreography was similar to *Marseillaise*; however, this one was depicting the rise of people from slavery to freedom with the music of the Russian composer and this became Duncan's first explicitly political choreography.[90] Depicting a slave under the Tsardom, she did not spread her arms fast in a wide gesture; instead she brought them forward very slowly as if to show that she had forgotten how to move at all. Deeply impressed by this dance, critic Van Vechten indicated that "they are crushed, these hands, crushed and bleeding after their long serfdom; they are not hands at all but claws, broken,

[88] Duncan, *My Life*, 334.
[89] Duncan, *My Life*, 334.
[90] Duncan, Dorée, Carol Pratl, Cynthia Splatt, eds., *Life into Art: Isadora Duncan and Her World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 152.

twisted piteous claws!"[91] Her ability to portray politics vividly in her dances aroused, inspired and shocked her audience. She was not the same dancer in 1900 that only tried to narrate her emotions to the audience; now she was trying to give a message from the stage. In her red tunic, she was an embodiment of the silent portrayal of the masses; without any spoken words during her performance she could express the fears, pains and the eventual triumphs of the downtrodden.

Before the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, Duncan could bring together the Russian Revolution with Allied patriotism by pointing at the conditions of the oppressed and the power of the right. However, when she returned to America in October 1922, her thoughts did not appeal to the American public. She had been living in the Soviet Russia for almost a year, had founded a school in Moscow, got married to a "Red" husband; thus, the sympathies of the public had shifted dramatically. The sort of innocent "revolution" that Duncan represented was no longer possible. Being a revolutionary had no longer a romantic meaning associated with the fight for democratic changes and becoming free; the word had changed its meaning and it now meant a dangerous communist sympathizer, who sought to find a way to destroy the American way of life. Thus, her dances were more "dangerous" than ever. In the aftermath of the Red Menace, being an idealistic "revolutionary" was not defensible. While the Americans once saw liberty in Duncan's dances and her body, now they saw sedition and provocation. That

[91] Carl Van Vechten, *The Dance Writings of Carl Van Vechten* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1974), 25-6.

"Bolshevik hussy" was encouraging pro-Soviet sympathies and threatening the American values that the society had long cherished. As cities cancelled her performances one after another, her tour had to end earlier than it was expected.

3.3. Her Dancing School in Moscow

In order to understand why she went to Russia, it is important to look at the motives behind her decision. Throughout her life, she dreamt of founding a school for her pupils, where she could teach them her dance and create new "Isadoras" for the future generations. The dance school seemed as the most efficient way to transmit her message of freedom to the following generations and it became "an idée fixe"[92] for her. As she got older and her body became heavier, the idea of establishing a school became more urgent: there had to be young dancers to continue her tradition and techniques. Desperate for money to start up her dream of an American school, she asked for funds directly from the stage. However, she could not get the respond she had been waiting for. As the time passed, she became louder and bitter in her denunciations of the rich, pleasure-seeking Americans. Accusing the Americans for not appreciating the real art, she expressed her anger and disappointment in her performances. During her tour in 1915, after her

[92] Duncan, *My Life*, 188.

performance at the Century Opera House in New York, she gave a bitter speech about the rich in America:

> What is there left in America [for creative people] but the ships to take them to lands where their efforts are appreciated? There are people here tonight that have paid as much as $100,000 for a painting by some Old Master of Europe. The cost of one of those paintings would support my school for a long time… I want to build up my school in America… I could build up a school for about one quarter of what this hideous theater cost. Only the rich people here can make it possible for me. But the rich people of America are so criminally unintelligent that it seems there is nothing left for me but to take the ship and emigrate.[93]

She believed that it was the responsibility of the rich to give her a school and provide the funding. When her request was turned down, Duncan stepped back and started criticizing them while praising the peasants and workers. The materialistic approach was causing Americans to purchase expensive pieces of art, while she was not provided a school no matter how much the society enjoyed watching Duncan on the stage. In May 1915, after many fruitless attempts, she claimed that she was renouncing America forever since it does not want her anymore. The government and the rich were in her target for not having art in the United States. She did not forget to add: "it is not the fault of the masses."[94] She believed that if her admirers had wished her to remain, they should have built her a theater on the Lower East Side, where people wanted and enjoyed her art.

As she constantly asked for funding from the stage or by going from door to door asking for money to found a school in America, she had to return empty-handed. When she realized that her dream of a school in America was

[93] "April 1915 Speech at the Century Opera House, New York," *Isadora Speaks*, 39-40.
[94] Duncan quoted in Ann Daly, *Done into Dance*, 185.

not a possibility under these conditions, she turned to governments: American, French, British, Greek and lastly the Soviet. Until the Russian Revolution, she had been looking for a wealthy patronage that would support her schools. However, with the creation of the new regime in Russia, she realized that she could bring alive her dream, which envisioned a dance school, where students lived, learned and played together and none had to pay for it. This was the dream she always had and with the success of the Russian Revolution she was hopeful that it could work. According to Ann Daly, the moment that Duncan had accepted Lunarcharky's invitation to found a school for the communist country, she was already categorized as a "Soviet dancer" who had "joined the reddest ranks of Bolshevism."[95] Thus, she was a "red" even before her arrival on the Unites States shores.

For her, Russia stood as a mysterious and even a scary country. In the last pages of her autobiography, she wrote about the invitation that she got from the Soviet Union in the spring of 1921. She wrote that the telegram was coming from the nearest place to Hell. "What stood for Hell in Europe - from the Soviet Government of Moscow," she wrote.[96] It was Anatoly Lunacharsky that offered her to establish a school in Russia. In a letter to him, Duncan stated her wish that she only wanted a workshop, a house for her and her students, simple food, and dresses. Moreover, she complained about the bourgeois, commercial art and wrote that she was very upset for not being able to perform for the masses, who needed her art but never had the money to see

[95] Daly, *Done into Dance*, 203.
[96] Duncan, *My Life*, 357.

her. So instead of selling high priced tickets to the bourgeois, this time she wanted give free performances for the masses. To her, "the modern theater" was now like a "house of prostitution more than a temple of art."[97] Her belief of taking art to the masses was about to be fulfilled and these were her only conditions to go to the Soviet Russia. Without waiting any longer, she arrived to Moscow on July 24, 1921 to achieve her dreams.

According to Duncan, as she traveled to Russia, she "left all the forms of European life" behind her. She believed that the ideal State "had now by some miracle been created on earth," and she was "ready to enter the ideal domain of Communism." She wrote that she did not even bring dresses with her, thinking that she would wear her famous red blouse all the time among other "comrades equally simply dressed and filled with brotherly love." Her utopian approach to communism was reflected on her thought on the way to the Soviet Union, as well; she was entering into a new world. Even years later, in her autobiography, she wrote that she was ready to leave the "old institutions and habits of bourgeois Europe," and "inequality, injustice and the brutality of the Old World" that made her school impossible.[98] Though it was scary for Duncan, Russia seemed like an exit to a better world, where equality and solidarity made its citizens happy and hopeful.

With the assignment of a staff to the school by the Commissariat of Education, her school was opened in the middle of October, almost three months after her arrival to Russia. In order to fulfill her dreams, she chose fifty

[97] "I Shall Never Hear of Money," *Isadora Speaks*, 64.
[98] Duncan, *My Life*, 358.

of the most elected pupils, a number far from the one thousand students that were promised by the government initially.[99] However, about a month after the opening, the funding for her school was stopped because of the New Economic Policy, which allowed private enterprise and eased foreign trade to foster the economy of the country that was almost in ruins. Thus her school in Russia, which was aided by the government, fell far short of her hopes. She was informed by Lunacharsky himself that the government could no longer support the school. According to Irma Duncan, "Isadora's idealism was blown sky high;"[100] her school was more a dream than reality. The reason why she accepted the offer from the Soviet government was no longer valid and she had two choices in front of her. Either she would abandon her school, go back to the capitalistic Europe to continue her career or she would stay in Russia and continue her school by whatever she could earn. Having run away from the bourgeoisie, she picked the second option and decided to continue her school in Moscow. "I have left Europe and art that was too tightly bound with commercialism and it will be against all my convictions and desires if I shall have to give again paid performances for the bourgeois public," she complained in *Izvestia* on November 23, 1921.[101] However, with the withdrawal of the state funding, her ideal was no longer possible. She had to perform on tours with paid tickets. Thus, her U.S. tour in 1922 was a result of that change in the economic policy in Russia.

[99] "Lunacharsky's Telegram to Isadora Duncan," *Isadora Speaks*, 64.
[100] Irma Duncan, *Duncan Dancer* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), 230.
[101] Duncan quoted in Kurth, *Isadora: A Sensational Life*, 424.

Despite the failure of the Russian government to assist Duncan to fulfill her dreams, Duncan's romantic view of Russia is clear in her statements; she was naïve enough to believe that everything would be better in Russia. Her devotion to the revolutionary cause was largely romantic and even utopian. Her zeal for Bolshevik Russia, for Lenin and for the International was unquestionable; she was very explicit about her thoughts and feelings. Her admiration to the basic aims and the achievements of the Revolution never diminished even after the Russian Government failed to provide enough food, wood or sanitary items for her school. Despite the negations she witnessed about her school, it was the reason why she had come to the Soviet Union and it was also the reason why she returned to Russia after her United States tour. Although America viewed her dance school with suspicion and used it as an excuse to accuse Duncan of being a Bolshevik, it was also the same America, which rejected to establish a dance school in New York despite Duncan's ceaseless requests.

3.4 Her marriage to Sergei Esenin

Maybe the most obvious reason why she was not allowed to the United States when she arrived in 1922 was her Russian husband, Sergei Esenin. Isadora was a strict critic of marriage and had turned down many proposals throughout her life. She did not want to marry even when she learned that she

was pregnant. However, in 1921 she had to forego her detestation of the legal ceremony and marry her Russian lover, Sergei Alexandrovich Esenin.

Although well before the United States knew him through Isadora, Sergei Esenin was a prominent poet in Russia. The son of a peasant, educated by his grandparents, and a famous poet allied with the Imagist movement in Russia, Esenin believed in revolution. Having loathed the army life, he had deserted the army and was caught and placed in the battles at the front. Deserting the army once more, he joined the revolutionaries in 1917.

Although he was a revolutionary, he was not a Communist. In his autobiographical sketches, he wrote that he "never joined the Russian Communist Party," because he felt "further left."[102] According the biographer Fredrika Blair, he was "too individualistic to be a member of any party."[103] Moreover, Esenin was afraid that the industrial developments planned in the newly created Soviet Russia would destroy the rural life that he was born into. In his poems, he usually penned the village life of Russia, the simplicity and his fear of disappearance of it. Although his fame had not reached to America yet, his Russian passport was enough to be skeptical for the government authorities.

Having experienced the bad marriage of her parents when she was young, Isadora had decided to live a life without marriage. To her, women had to be emancipated and given the option to have children as she pleased.[104]

[102] Esenin quoted in Blair, *Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman*, 307-8.
[103] Blair, *Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman*, 307-8.
[104] Duncan, *My Life*, 17.

Thus, she turned down many proposals by the actor Oszkár Beregi, English modernist theater practitioner Gordon Craig, and the wealthy heir to the Singer sewing machines Paris Eugene Singer. She stressed her opposition to marriage on every possible occasion, considering it to be "an absurd and enslaving institution, leading - especially with artists - inevitably to the divorce courts, and preposterous and vulgar lawsuits."[105]

Her free spirit that escaped any kind of commitment in marriage was a revolt in itself; however, she had to marry her Russian lover in 1921 because of necessities. With the withdrawal of the Russian government from her school and the obligation to raise funds, Isadora Duncan planned a tour to foreign countries, including her United States tour in 1922. She took Esenin with her "first, because he was a very sick man, in need of the examination and care of a specialist; second, because he was a poet who required, so she thought, new horizons."[106] However, behind these motives, there was a more crucial reason. According to Victor Seroff, Lunacharsky had advised Isadora that they should marry before leaving Russia. Being aware of "how they feel in the West, and especially in America about… the Bolsheviks," he told Isadora that Esenin would be safer abroad because the new Russia was not recognized by many countries, had no embassies, and her name "would be his protection" if they got married.[107] Shortly after the Bolsheviks seized power, on December 6, 1917, the United States had ended its diplomatic relations

[105] Duncan, *My Life*, 193.
[106] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 124.
[107] Seroff, *The Real Isadora*, 307.

with Russia and the Soviet Union would not be recognized until Roosevelt's decision in 1933. Having no embassies in the stops of her tour, in Germany, France, England and the United States, Duncan's fame seemed like a guarantee of Esenin's safety.

In the fall of 1921 when they met, Esenin was twenty-seven and Duncan was forty-three. Scared of possible accusations, especially in America, Isadora asked her interpreter, Ilya Ilyich Schneider, to do a "little correcting" on the official documents when they got married on May 2, 1922. "We don't feel this difference of fifteen years in our ages, but it is written down here and tomorrow we have to hand our passports into the hands of strangers. It may be unpleasant for him,"[108] said she to her friend Victor Seroff in her late years. Thus the official marriage certificate indicated that Esenin was twenty-seven, whereas Duncan was thirty-seven. Isadora's decision to marry her lover was not because of a change in her state of mind about matrimony; she believed that marrying him would cause fewer problems during her tour.

Moreover, during that time no legal contract bound a married couple in the new Soviet Union and either part could end the marriage without a penalty or loss. This was what impressed Duncan who believed that the abolishment of marriage in Russia was "one of the fine things" that the Soviet Government has done. "Such a marriage is the only convention to which any free-minded woman could consent, and is the only form of marriage I have ever

[108] Duncan quoted in Seroff, 308.

subscribed,"[109] wrote she in her autobiography. During her American tour, when she was asked about her marriage to Esenin, she indicated that she was forced into marriage because of the laws of the countries she had been visiting. Otherwise, she stated "two burly policemen" would have the right to break-in her hotel and take them into court because they were "natural enough, and sane enough, loving enough to live together without this throttling wedding ceremony."[110] She had not changed her mind about marriage; she was still a critic. However, she had wanted to escape any possible legal problems that might occur during her travels with a Russian lover.

According to Irma Duncan, one of the reasons why she married Esenin was Maxim Gorki's harassment by the press and the police during his stay in the United States with his common-law wife. "So for the sake of a peaceful and fruitful tour in the Land of Liberty… Isadora Duncan went through the formality of a Soviet marriage,"[111] wrote Irma Duncan in her book on Isadora. It was true that Isadora had not forgotten "poor Gorky and his mistress of seventeen years… hounded from pillar to post, and their lives made a torment to them."[112] Many years ago, she had toured America with her millionaire lover, Paris Singer; however, "when one is so very rich these little disagreeablenesses are all smoothed away," because "travelling with a millionaire does simplify things," and they could stay in the best plazas "with

[109] Duncan, *My Life*, 17-18.
[110] "America Makes Me Sick," *Isadora Speaks*, 129-130.
[111] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 125.
[112] Duncan, *My Life*, 241.

every one bowing down right and left."[113] Living with a millionaire for eight years, she had travelled many parts of the world as she pleased but she met no legal complications; Singer's name had opened many doors. This time, in 1922, Isadora was aware that both she and her husband were not doing great financially and Esenin had a Russian passport, unlike Paris Singer, who was known and respected throughout Europe. Furthermore, she was returning to her native land with a Soviet husband, who did not know any English, was silent throughout the interviews and interrogations. On their arrival to New York harbor, on October 1, 1922, the Esenins were not allowed into the country by the United States Immigration Service. Apparently, Duncan's marriage to Sergei Esenin, which had made her respectable in the eyes of the authorities as a woman, had also made her a Soviet citizen and she was suspected to be a spy. Her marriage was under close examination by the government and the press. When she was asked about the motives behind her marriage, she told the reporters that when someone traveled to that country with someone he loved, they either locked them up in jail or drove them out.[114] It was the government that drove her into marriage; the government, which suspected her marriage to be a possible Soviet spying. The Red Scare had left a deep scar on nation's trust to the newcomers and Duncan and her Russian husband were suffering from this scar. Although repeatedly, Duncan maintained that both she and Esenin were not Bolsheviks and their marriage

[113] Duncan, *My Life*, 241.
[114] "Isadora Is Angry As She and Hubby Go to Ellis Island," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), Oct. 2, 1922, accessed May 12, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/60006811.

was a marriage of love, the age difference and the fact that Esenin was an intellectual contributed their portrayal as Bolsheviks. Both Duncan and Esenin were revolutionists and supported and sympathized with the Russian government; however, in order to avoid more serious accusations Duncan preferred to use her image as an artist. No matter how much she criticized America, it was her native country and she wanted to earn money to support her school in Russia. Thus Duncan hid behind her artistic image to protect both herself and her husband.

CHAPTER IV

AGAINST THE PURITANICAL SOCIETY

Like many other modernists, Isadora Duncan embraced modernism's potential to dissolve older structures and this included the restrictions about woman's freedom to choose her own way. She saw her dance as a way to diminish the impact of the Victorian culture on women. However, her nature as an outspoken woman led her to be cast aside in the beginning of the twentieth century; she was met with disdain, criticism and even insult. Duncan's desire was to save the women from the Victorian inhibitions still going on in the early 1900s. The Victorian Era liked the status quo and Duncan was in love with freedom and progress. As Victorianism drew to a close in the first decades of the twentieth century, Isadora came on the stage to stir, startle, shock and inspire her audience.

To her, freedom was paramount and this was not only in her art, but also in her daily life. She was not a feminist in any organized or political sense but she rejected marriage as an unnecessary and oppressive phenomenon and had to marry Sergei Esenin due to necessities. In her personal life, Duncan openly had love affairs with many men and her two children, Deidre, daughter of Gordon Craig, and Patrick, son of Paris Singer, were born out of wedlock.

She was an unorthodox figure for her contemporaries in the beginning of the century.

Usually barefoot and scantily clad in the Ancient Greek costumes of her own design, Isadora Duncan stands as a symbolic figure in dance. While many dancers of her time were wrapped in full clothes, she introduced healthy light dresses, got rid of the corsets and danced with a bobbed hair on the stage. For instance, the other pioneer of the modern dance, Loie Fuller danced in swirly and bulky that did not show her body. However, Duncan's costumes were inspired by the Hellenic tunics that revealed her body. The purpose of these costumes was to help the movements to be natural and free. While rigid ballet technique was producing unnatural, sterile movements, her dance technique, which found its source in solar plexus, allowed the dancer to move and express her emotions freely and without interruption. This was a significant change in dance in the beginning of the twentieth century, and Duncan was a figure that was loved and despised in the same era because of the innovations she brought to dance.

It is important to note that her tour to the United States coincided with the transition from the Victorian culture to a modern society. In the prewar years, as the traditional guardians of morality, women had been fixed in the church, home and family; however the dominance of the city, technology, working opportunities and commercialism of the decade all posed challenges to long held traditions. Dorothy M. Brown, in *American Women in the 1920s*, argued that the bombardment of automobile, jazz, confession magazines,

movies, Freud's impact alarmed the pulpit and the families, which started to believe that America was undergoing a revolution in manners and morals.[115] With all the changes in industrialization, immigration, urbanization, changing patterns in work, social life, family, religion, and politics, the 1920s depicted an unprecedented image compared to the late nineteenth century. The Victorian absolutes were eroding. On the one hand, American culture seemed increasingly secularized with the introduction of Freudian explanations, Darwin's theories and the scientific progress. The highly materialistic tenor of the period also suggested that religious values were in decline. On the other hand, the strength of old-time religious faith and morals continued. The changing sexual standards which suggested that people were breaking away from the religious proscriptions alarmed many, and the resistance to the efforts of the other Protestants to update the Christian message to make it more relevant to the modern world was carried out by fundamentalists and various organizations. The spread of modern ideas forced tradition-minded Americans to turn to the state to legislate morality and religion; the Prohibition was an example of that.

The 1920s image of flappers had already emerged when Duncan came to the United States in 1922. With their close-cropped bobbed hair and androgynous dresses, flappers scandalized their elders by their free and easy behavior. According to Sara Evans, all the changes proclaimed as "new" in the 1920s could be easily traced back to the prewar period. With dance crazes,

[115] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 167.

rising hemlines of the skirts and dresses, public amusements that allowed men and women to appear together in public for pleasure, jazz culture and new forms of dance and the bohemian culture, "sex o'clock" had struck already in 1913. Evans argued that the only difference was that while these activities were enjoyed by the "fringes of society or associated with specific subcultures," in the 1920s they were part of the white middle class American society. Jazz was no longer only in the black ghettos, it had become mainstream; the sexual changes in society and Freudian ideas were not only confined to Greenwich Village, they were talked and experienced in the college campuses.[116] The expansion of these changes to the middle-class was a warning alarm for those who supported the conservative Victorian values.

At a time when dance was just a form of entertainment, Duncan's endeavors to place dance among the high arts seemed like a slow process. According to Mark Whalan, dance was a big part of the vaudeville theatre with its "raucous galleries, women spectators engaging in rowdy and lascivious behavior, racy humor, and sexually suggestive performances."[117] The sex farce, the chorus girl revue, the dance craze and the birth of jazz had already placed dance into the entertainment category. Moreover, "the raw sexuality of dances" like turkey trot, slow rag, bunny hug, grizzly bear, and "shaking the shimmy" had shocked the middle classes in the beginning of the century. However, by 1910 somewhat more decorous versions of these dances

[116] Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 176.
[117] Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*, 53.

had become a new trend in middle-class cabarets.[118] The prewar image of burlesque and vaudeville, which bared shoulder and ankle to beguile the male public, had created an image of dance as an entertainment sexually directed to a mainly male audience. The freedom of movement and greater exposure of extremities like ankles in the beginning of the century by the flirtatious and active personalities of vaudeville and movie stars like Eva Tanguay and Clara Bow had also helped to create this image.[119] While the jazz age that produced half-dressed, fast-stepping women on the dance floor was entertaining and liberating for some, it was also alarming for the others. *The Lutheran Witness* asserted that modern dance was "undeniably indulgence in fleshly lust," a "training school for fornicating."[120] The breakdown of Victorian sexual norms was a gradual process and Duncan's desire to place dance among the high arts was met with prejudices. So it was not surprising when Mayor Shanks compared Duncan to a nude dancer and warned her that one day she might end up in a paddy wagon because of her dances. No matter how artistic it seemed, dance was still considered as a part of the male entertainment.

The conservative and repressive atmosphere that lurked behind the Roaring Twenties was also an indicator of the puritan heritage of America. According to David Foglesong, after the Bolshevik Revolution, "Puritan" Americans' concerns about social and cultural changes at home blended with their images of "Bolshevism" and they started to detest the changes "as a total

[118] Evans, *Born for Liberty,* 161.
[119] Banner. *Women in Modern America*, 172.
[120] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 183.

challenge to the American way of life and to their vision of the future of the world."[121] Under the influence of the Red Scare, what was affiliated with Bolshevism was a threat to the ideal of America. Duncan's identification by the press with her Russian experience and her Russian husband consolidated the "immodest" dancer image, which was an attack on the moral values. She had both an enthusiasm about Russia and a determination about wearing scanty clothes for her time; thus, she was met with severe criticism.

This chapter will prove that Duncan's independent character led her to disobey to Victorian conventions and this included the use of body and nudity in art. As Duncan tried to challenge the traditional mores and morality of her time, she received criticisms in the early years of the century. As the 1920s witnessed a drastic change in the image of women, in spite of some accusations about her "immorality," her half-dressed performances were considered to be less shocking by the audience. However, her provocative attempt to bare her breast in her Boston performance on October 21, 1922 to criticize the puritanical society, was taking everything one step further and this incident attracted so much attention and affected her tour very negatively. Thus this chapter aims to put her Boston incident into a historical context while analyzing her choice of clothes, her thoughts on nudity in art and how she perceived the American society in the 1920s. As an expatriate who lived for almost twenty years abroad, Duncan's actions and clothes, combined with

[121] David Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 25.

her thoughts on the Soviet Russia, were magnified by the press and chastised by the authorities, which all caused an abrupt end in her tour.

4.1. Woman in Greek Robes

In order to understand the reactions Duncan got from the press and the government officials after her Boston incident, it is important to look at what she looked like during her performances. The Duncan image on the stage was a self-confident, talented, and ambitious woman clad in the loose Ancient Greek draperies, stepping, skipping, running and shocking her spectators. The turn of the century was a time for change and Duncan believed that she had to free the minds and bodies of women from the psychological and physical limitations placed on them in the male-dominated societies. Moreover, believing that a dancing body should be in its most natural form, she discarded corsets and slippers widely worn by the dancers, and went back to the origins of the theatre in early Greek religious rituals, where tunics of light clothes were worn by the dancers.

Duncan's choice to wear clothes that left her bare-armed, barefooted and barelegged coincided with a time when women compressed their feet into pointed-toe, high-heeled shoes and their bodies into tight corsets. The French motto "one must suffer to be beautiful" was prevalent and Isadora's abandoning of corsets, shoes, and conventional dress, not only on stage but

also in her daily life was revolutionary. She believed that women should not have sacrificed their health to attract men; men would be naturally attracted to healthy and intelligent women. But at this time, despite the attempts of the dress reformers and the protests about restrictive clothing that were beginning to gain ground, the majority of middle-class women were still covered in corsets and heavy clothes. Duncan rallied against the strictures placed on women and shed the corset in her dance. She danced in loose draperies, barefoot, barelegged and often with her hair flowing freely. Isadora's exposure of her limbs was nothing less than an unabashed challenge to the ethical standards of her time.

Her obsession with light clothes had started in her early ages. Feeling that her shoes and clothes hindered her like a chain and a prison, as a child, she took her clothes off and danced naked by the sea, while no one was watching her.[122] The desire to move freely was prevented by her clothes, thus she preferred to dance naked even before her dance theories were formed. Although Isadora's costumes at the beginning were bulky and awkward, usually made by window curtains, as her philosophy of dance started to shape, she headed towards lighter linens in the ancient Greek fashion. Inspired by the Greek vases and bas-reliefs in the British museums, she realized that the images of Greek sculpture and drawings were in harmony with her philosophy of dance that emphasized the importance of natural movement. After that realization, she believed that the Greek tunics were the right clothes to dance

[122] "I was Born in America," *Isadora Speaks,* 24.

with. Although the length of the dresses were down to the ankle or slightly above, the dresses had large openings in the armpit that bared her arms and in the middle of her thighs that exposed her legs as she moved on the stage.

The reactions she got regarding her costumes varied. In 1902, when she was working with Loie Fuller, who was also a pioneer of modern dance, Duncan went on the stage in a Grecian inspired attire that she made on her own. Despite Fuller's initial reaction about Isadora's clothes, when she started the dance, it turned out to be one of "the most beautiful things in the world," making Fuller forget Duncan's costume and her naked legs. "I saw only the dancer and the artistic pleasure she was giving me. When she had finished no one spoke," wrote Fuller in her autobiography. No matter how impressed she was, it was 1902 and upon the Viennese Princess Metternich's question about why Isadora had so little clothing on, in order to save the day, Fuller had to answer that Duncan's luggage had not arrived.[123] It was a sensational experience even for Fuller herself. The impression Duncan left with her dance made the audience forget about her scanty clothes. Likewise, in 1904 during the first performance of *Tannhauser* in Bayreuth, Germany, her transparent tunic revealed "every part" of her "dancing body," and it "created some stir amidst the pink covered legs of the Ballet." Duncan reasserted that while other dancers' "salmon-coloured tights" were vulgar and indecent, her naked body was just beautiful and pure as long as it was looked at with beautiful

[123] Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1913), 228.

thoughts.[124] The tights that the ballerinas wore were only to repress the male desire; the bare legged dancers would have looked better and less suggestive, Duncan believed.

Her visit to St. Petersburg in 1905 had a significant impact both on her political ideology and her philosophy of dance. Similarly, her choice of attire during her performances was solidified during her tour to Russia. After having the opportunity to observe the classes and exercises at the Imperial Ballet School in Moscow, she concluded that ballet was an enemy to art and when the audience watched ballet, they saw no further than the skirts and tricots. However, what Duncan saw was the deformed muscles and bones through incorrect dress and movement.[125] Therefore, after that trip she decided to dance invariably with arms and legs bare and with an uncorseted body, draped only with a light fabric that would cover her most private parts.

When she was performing she was frequently using kicks, jumps and running in her choreography and her limbs were revealed through her almost transparent tunic. The famous Russian actor and theater director, Constantin Stanislavski's befuddlement due to Duncan's almost naked body caused him not to understand the art of the dancer fully at the beginning. However, by the intermission, he had become "a newly baptized disciple of the great artist."[126] Like Fuller, after the initial surprise, Stanislavski was moved and impressed by the movements and gestures of the dancer, forgetting her unconventional

[124] Duncan, *My Life*, 157-58.
[125] William B. Chase, "Incorrigibly Dramatic Dancing," *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1922, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed April 30, 2014. Also Seroff, *The Real Isadora*, 86-87.
[126] Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 505.

attire. With her revolutionary costumes on stage, Duncan was creating a controversial figure, but in her daily life she was also continuing her tradition to shock everyone. In her autobiography, she commented on her attempt to start a new fashion in bathing suits. In a time when the traditional costume of women to enter the water was black skirts from knee to ankle, with stockings and shoes, Isadora's introduction of light blue tunics, skirts above the knees with barelegged and barefoot created a sensation among the socialite of Europe.[127] It was just the beginning of the twentieth century and the shock she created was understandable.

Her tour in 1922; however, presents a different case. Since the late nineteenth century women were trying to expand their sphere, by forming associations, clubs and organizations that would allow them to unite and form a communion. With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, they had gained the right to vote thus enlarging their sphere a little more. The Roaring Twenties image of women with the flappers that wore short skirts, bobbed their hair, listened to jazz and stated their contempt for the conventional behaviors of the time was a true image in general. When she arrived America, the country was already going through a jazz and foxtrot frenzy especially in the metropolitan centers of the country like Chicago, New York and New Orleans. Women had started wearing lighter, brighter and shorter dresses and had shorter haircuts.

While the image of women had started to change considerably and

[127] Duncan, *My Life*, 109.

visibly, this change was not a sudden one. The old Victorian conventions persisted to some extent, primarily with the older generations or the authority mechanisms. However, with this completely unprecedented image of women, Isadora's tunic that exposed her arms and legs would not have been problematic but this time Isadora had wanted to take her actions one step further by displaying her breast. Duncan believed that dance would not be legitimate unless it stopped being perceived as a leg business, and it would be considered a leg business as long as female dancers were considered only as a body. She wanted to create a body that would not be objectified as a part of particularly male desire. In order to achieve her goal, combined with her philosophy of dance, she did not hesitate to show some parts of her body.

4.2. Her thoughts on nudity and dance

During her recitals in Boston's Symphony Hall, in October 21, she made the most remarkable statements and gestures of her America tour, and these became the breakpoint. As she shouted, "This is red! So am I!" she tore off the upper part of her red tunic, revealing one of her breasts. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it was not surprising that she revealed her breast; she was a longtime advocate of nudity in art. Even nearly twenty years earlier, in her lecture on "The Dance of the Future," she had prophesized:

> Only the movements of the naked body can be perfectly natural. Man, arrived at the end of civilization, will have to return to nakedness, not to

> the unconscious nakedness of the savage, but to the conscious and acknowledged nakedness of the mature Man, whose body will be the harmonious expression of his spiritual being…The noblest in art is the nude. This truth is recognized by all, and followed by painters, sculptors and poets; only the dancer has forgotten it, who should most remember it as the instrument of her art is the body itself.[128]

The civilized mature man should not have feared nudity; with a conscious mind he could have looked at a nude body without any sensual excitement and that was what made men civilized. Just like the Greek sculptors and the early painters, nudity should have been seen as an ordinary part of the dance and it should not have been reproached like the nude entertainers of the day, whose initial purpose was to be erotic. Although Duncan used the words "nude" and "naked" in her explanations, she never danced in a completely naked way. For her, being naked meant freeing the body from any restrictions caused by the clothes and having a visible body, whose details are moderately obscured like the fifth century Greek statues she loved. Her philosophy of dance had stemmed from her attempt to integrate nature with body. In order to be a part of the nature, body had to be in its most natural form, thus it had to be naked. "I would rather dance completely nude than strut in half-clothed suggestiveness, as many women do today on the streets of America," said she, pointing out to the hypocrisy she saw in America in 1922. Duncan believed that nudity was art and concealment of the body was vulgar and anything that would suggest indecency was in the eye of the beholder, rather than the displayer himself. Furthermore, she indicated that in the western countries instead of teaching young girls about the forms of their bodies and how they

[128] Duncan, "The Dance of the Future," *The Art of the Dance*, 55-58.

developed, they were taught to conceal the roundness of their breasts or to press their stomachs as flat as possible since it looked immodest.

The Grecian inspired tunic that unbound her from any limitations of movement on the stage was also a part of her dance philosophy. To Duncan, the body was in an eternal change through evolution, not through fashion. She believed that the corsets were physically and morally corrupt as much as aesthetically unpleasant. While the concept of beauty came from the human body and the source of dance was nature, the display of body during a dance performance should have been culturally and morally accepted. Classical ballet was considered decent and the ballerinas were wearing corsets; however, the corset was squeezing off the upper part of the body form the legs and thus preventing a wholesome, single-unit body. Duncan believed that the movement should have flowed from one part of the body to another freely, bringing emotions and the body together in a natural form. Moreover, her rejection of wearing ballet shoes or sandals on the stage was stemming from her belief that anything worn on the feet was defying gravity. Getting rid of the corsets and shoes or leaving the legs and arms bare were helping the dancer move easily as she danced under the stage lights. The Greek style tunic was combining both her admiration of the ancient Greek dancers and her desire to dance in a costume that would give her freedom of movement. To Duncan, concealment was the curse of the art of dance; it hindered movement and prevented the unification of soul with the body.

By trying to normalize "nudity" with the use of that kind of dresses on the stage, she hoped to free dancing from the leg business and place it to the category of "high" arts. However, still in 1922, dance was seen as a part of the entertainment business and with its association with Vaudeville Theater, the chorus girl revues and the newly formed and jazz inspired dances like turkey trot, Duncan's endeavors to give dance its deserved worth in America seemed very difficult to achieve.

4.3. Early Reactions

Duncan's half-naked Greek style outfit that exposed her legs, arms and feet found criticism both in Europe and America. According to H. R. Haweis, "the Greeks were proud of their beautiful bodies, as we are of a beautiful face, and a bare leg was no more to them than a bare arm is to us," but the harmless naked body in ancient Greece "would be impossible in nations who have lost to a great extent the simple instinct of natural beauty."[129] The early twentieth century was far away from sharing the Greek views of the ancient times; the half-naked dancer was a surprise for most of her first time watchers. Both in Europe and America, the critiques denounced her dance to be indecent, immoral and outrageous; however, because of the characteristics of Duncan's audience and her portrayal of Greek dance, her half-naked image on the stage

[129] Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, *The Art of Beauty* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878), 26.

was widely accepted by the art-loving circles.

When she performed in loose tunics and bare feet, critics, who opposed to the objective and the effect of such a display, often mentioned the view of Duncan's flesh. Some considered Duncan an ideal and innocent being, while others were worried by her physicality and believed her performances to be blatantly erotic. In many cases, the dance critiques applauded her talent, ignoring her choice to expose her body. Even in 1908, a review in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* by W. L. Hubbard pointed out that one of the charms of her dance was its purity and despite the large portion of her body is visible to the audience, she was nothing "sensual or unpleasantly suggestive."[130] Quoting that "to the pure all things are pure," Hubbard had a similar idea to Duncan's idea about nudity on stage. Claiming that Duncan's approach was pure itself and her dances did not convey any ugly or debasing feelings, Hubbard concluded that it was this purity or impurity of the spirit that made a performance fine or vulgar. Likewise, for one her performances in the same year, President Theodore Roosevelt, after watching her dance, compared Duncan to an innocent child "dancing through the garden in the morning sunshine and picking the beautiful flowers of her fantasy," and asked: "What harm can these Ministers find in Isadora's dances?"[131]

The reactions of her audience were not necessarily accusatory or insulting because the late nineteenth century had started to perceive nudity in a

[130] W. L. Hubbard, "Isadora Duncan's Dancing High Example of Real Art," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Dec. 6, 1908, accessed June 16, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/28575951.
[131] Duncan, *My Life*, 225.

different way. For the upper-class late Victorians, the classical art had combined nudity and nobility which was impossible in the puritan culture. The naked or half naked bodies on the vases or the statues were a reflection of the ideal beauty. According to Daly, the unchallenged dominion of Greek art had permitted even a woman to look at the naked body with good intentions and created an elevation in her taste of art.[132] Therefore, possessing vases or statues that depicted half naked bodies were not immoral, in contrast, they stood as a symbolic elevation of the artistic taste of the owner. Like the ancient Greek dancers that wore some veil or drapery, Duncan put on a socially controversial outfit that actually moderately covered her groin and breasts as she tried to copy them. As her dresses were fastened on with elastics over the shoulders and around the waist, her intention was never to display the private parts of her body. As the warm stage light glowed on Duncan's body, the white Greek style tunic merged with her body, creating a unified, naked looking body that resembled a statue. Her chiton, the basic garment of the Ancient Greece, was her inseparable component. Even though she was criticized by the early critics, as the twentieth century brought social changes, her outfit started to be seen as a reflection of classical nudity, and this image of Duncan caused the elite to embrace her art as an instrument that would also elevate them socially.

Moreover, Duncan had affiliated herself only with the socialite: artists, royalty, celebrities, or the Four Hundred in America. Although in her later

[132] Daly, *Done into Dance*, 109.

years, she wanted to expand her art to the masses, her first choice of audience was the upper or upper-middle classes. Insisting on performing only in concert halls and opera houses, she created an audience constituted of a group of people who conceived Duncan's "Greek" style as a sign of high culture and refinement. Those who could read her Hellenistic references were the wealthy and the educated class of Americans that were able to buy her tickets to watch her perform in large concert halls or opera houses. By displaying a naturally naked body on the stage to a cultivated audience, Duncan was trying to remove her dance from any accusations of vulgarity and immorality. She was trying to turn nudity on stage, which would be otherwise erotic, into a chaste manner when she was displaying her body.

In the late 1910s her dance was not getting severe criticisms like it did at the turn of the century. Her style was respected and applauded by the critiques and her spectators. In 1918, her appearance in New York's Belasco Theatre with her "Isadorables," the original six pupil dancers, was described with the phrases such as the "serene beauty of Greek Statuary, and the simplicity and naturalness of a flower."[133] Her costumes did not create sensations and the reactions she got were mostly positive. However, when she arrived in 1922 with a Russian husband, her words and actions were magnified by the press, and this caused her to address her audience directly about her thoughts on Russia while displaying her body a little more than usual to protest against the America she saw in 1922. The Boston incident was on the

[133] "Concert and Lectures," *The Washington Herald* (Washington, District of Columbia), Dec. 15, 1918, accessed June 15, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/76019255.

headlines for days all over the country, and her "red" statements resulted in the cancellation of many engagements. Despite the attempts of her manager to silent Duncan, the fiery-tongued dancer did not stop making statements in the following performances. In Indianapolis four detectives were stationed on the sides of the stage, by the order of Mayor Lew Shanks, to make sure that Duncan would not reveal more of her body. Duncan's reaction to the repercussions was wild and resentful. Mentioning that her dances were copied all over the country by other dancers, the originator of the dance was banned by the "American Puritanism."[134] The moral inhibitions brought by the government authorities caused her to question the puritan culture of her native country. According to her, the United States, especially the city of Boston, was still under the influence of puritanism.

4.3. The 1920s and puritanism in the United States

With the impacts of urbanization, industrialization and the war, women were going through a transition in terms of clothing in the early twenties. According to Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast, starting from 1919, women's clothes in America went through a drastic change in their forms; the modest body coverings and the flaring skirts of the late nineteenth century left its place to a tubular line with flat chests and low waists. The knee-length

[134] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 172-73.

skirts still hid women's feminine curves with loose waists and sashes covering the hips. Moreover, in the late 1910s and early 1920s, flatteners that gave women a flat-chested look had become quite popular. The tubular dresses hanging loose from shoulders to knees required a look that did not emphasize large breasts or hips like the late 1800s and 1900s did. Instead, this new style emerged in the late 1910s promoted a boyish look and the flatteners made this look possible.[135]

The restrictive undergarments that women wore in the early 1920s to flatten their breasts were even too much for Isadora Duncan. Her philosophy emphasized the unity of the body with the soul and this could be done with clothes that allowed the person to move freely. Any postures, forms or choreographed routines that blocked her movement should have been eliminated from the stage. Moreover, any restriction on the body was an obstacle in reaching the aesthetic understanding of the ancient Greece. Despite the raising hemlines, Duncan's choice of clothes was confronted with criticism even in the early 1920s. It was true that women's clothes were more revealing than ever; they were wearing knee-length skirts and leaving their arms bare in their tubular dresses. However, when Duncan danced, the large cuts in the front side of her white or red tunics displayed her limbs to the watchers. Even the 1920s fashion that made knee-length hemline popular was not in favor of showing that much of the body in public. Although the majority of her

[135] Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast, *Fashion, Costume and Culture: Clothing, Headwear, Body Decorations and Footwear through the Ages*, ed. Sarah Hermsen, Vol. 4 (Detroit: UXL, 2004), 721-779.

audience consisted of the socialite that saw nudity in art as an instrument of elevating the social taste as Ann Daly argued earlier, her clothes could not escape to become the target of criticism by the authorities.

Duncan's last visit to the United States demonstrated the slow pace changes regarding gender in society. Sara Evans, in *Born for Liberty,* argued that although in popular memory, the twenties are associated with flappers, this image of the Roaring Twenties was already a powerful image by 1913.[136] Thus Duncan's clothes were not a surprise to the American audience. She had given performances in 1908, 1914 and 1918 with the same costumes. Although her choice of clothes had become a target of criticism in each decade by the social or dance critiques, her dance in a revealing tunic and the assertions about the exposure of her breast once more became the center of criticism by the authorities in 1922.

Other than being a political exclamation, the scandalous Boston performance was also an outburst of her belief in nudity. While exclaiming, "I'm Red! You were once wild here. Don't let them tame you!" and waving her red scarf above her head, she had aroused murmur among her audience because one of her breasts was displayed. When people started to grumble about this situation, she asked, "if canned Greek Art is permitted," pointing at the nude statues in the niches around the hall, "why object to the beauty of the living body?"[137] Although her initial purpose to expose her breast was to gain the attention of the audience, she also wanted to provoke them for their

[136] Evans, *Born for Liberty,* 161.
[137] Duncan quoted in Ann Daly, *Done into Dance*, 201.

“puritanical” views. Her audience met her with mixed views; while a large portion of the spectators left the hall in fury, she was applauded by the rest of the hall.

The Boston incident was like a volcanic eruption; she was wearisome of the accusations of the press about her Russian experiences and her young Russian husband. Moreover, after spending months in Russia and experiencing communism firsthand, the materialistic and capitalist America that did not provide her with a dance school had started to irritate her. What she wanted from the people and the government was a dance school in America that would carry on her teachings and continue her philosophy of dance. As her requests were turned down by her audience, she got annoyed and started to criticize the American culture, which did not value art and caused her artists to flee to other countries.

To Duncan, this disapproval of a dance school was a sign of the puritan background of her native country that did not know how to enjoy arts as Europe did. According to her, the soaking market of the twenties and the mass-consumerism that emerged in the early 1920s were what made America. It was a greedy, capitalist country that cared about money more than enjoying arts. Some of the contemporary social critics also shared Duncan’s views. According to the journalist and critic Henry Louis Mencken of Baltimore, America was unfit for serious artistic endeavors. Capitalism, democracy, and religion were obstacles in front of creativity and arts. Capitalism was giving so much importance to what would sell, not what was interesting or artistic;

democracy was opposing individualism and aiming to destroy it; similarly, religion, "puritanism" in Mencken's words, confirmed repression and censorship in the name of morality.[138] The commercial, money-loving culture of the twenties was preventing the establishment of dance as a high culture in America; instead, it was promoting sexually appealing, money making entertainment facilities that Duncan greatly despised.

Affected by the progressive reforms of the late nineteenth century, she had developed a vision of personal liberation in her early years. Focusing more on the personal freedom, she had seen the new century as a step toward a better society. Later her vision of personal liberation turned into the criticism of capitalist wealth; she was criticizing the governments and how they mismanaged the society and she was also criticizing the wealthy and the privileged for not considering the needs of the masses.

She was an American by birth but she was running away from the capitalistic hegemony that she believed to be supreme in the country. It was the reason why she had left the United States in 1899 and sailed to Europe, which would appreciate her art more. When she visited America in 1922, she was alienated by her native culture. As the economy turned its direction to positive after a slight recession in 1920, the commercial and capitalistic culture started to show itself in a massive way. Materialism flourished like an evangelical cult as the country placed its faith in the ultimate importance of automobiles and washing machines. It was this new American culture that

[138] Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994, c1992), 198.

Isadora Duncan protested against and severely criticized just before she left the country. The America that she hated was a country suppressed by Puritan decency and guilt, ruined by materialism, and blinded by duplicity.

To Duncan, America's puritan background had prevented people enjoying art, especially her dance that showed the lines of her body. Inspired by the dances of the ancient Greece, Duncan had followed the Grecian understanding of beauty. The display of body was not embarrassing or debasing; on the contrary, it was a way to glorify the body. However, it had been a long time that nudity was considered to be indecent and obscene in the western civilizations. The fully covered female clothes of the nineteenth century of America were just starting to modernize in the early twentieth century and, leave alone showing a breast on the stage, Duncan's display of her legs up to her limbs was considered indecent and immoral. "They say I mismanaged my garments," said Duncan and asked: "Why should I care what part of my body I reveal? Why is one part more evil than the other? Is not all body and soul an instrument through which artist expresses his inner message of beauty?" The nude body was beautiful and it should not have aroused horror. Instead, to Duncan, it should have aroused reverence like it did in the ancient times. She explained to the reporters after her Boston performance that if her dance was symbolic of one thing, it was "the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hidebound conventions that are the warp and woof of New England Puritanism." [139] According to Duncan, when she was

[139] "Boston Vulgar Says Isadora; Her Dancing Barred There," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*

performing, she was not addressing to the lower instincts of people; it was the half-clad chorus girls who did that. Comparing herself to Christ before Pilate,[140] she noted that both of them were doomed before they made any speeches; her clothes were causing her to be criticized even before she performed. She had been the target of the moral and ethical accusations and her art was not taken seriously. She believed that the Puritan spirit in the United States had a destroying effect on the people and caused them to be narrow-minded, sanctimonious, loathsome, blind and intolerant. Accused of being a "hussy," she opposed the half-clothed dancers in the country, who were allowed to dance because they satisfied the "the Puritan instinct for concealed lust." Whereas a naked body drove off people, an obscene clothed dancer pleased the authorities. Adding that she did not know "why this Puritan vulgarity" should have been limited to Boston, other cities were not scared of the beauty of dance and did not have "a smirking taste for burlesque semi-exposures"[141] like they did in Boston.

According to Duncan, Boston's conservative, bigoted views had caused her to be repelled by the authorities; the Bostonians were in a "rigor mortis because of its fearful conception of life and culture." In order to understand Duncan's use of "puritanism" to describe the Boston culture, it is also important to define puritanism first. Historically, "puritan" was used to

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(Brooklyn, New York), Oct. 24, 1922, accessed June 15, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/60015706.

[140] "Mayor Can See No Art in the Duncan Dances," *The Indianapolis News* (Indianapolis, Indiana), Nov. 20, 1922, accessed May 13, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/37440185.

[141] Irma Duncan, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 166-69.

describe a person who stood for the religious purity in the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. In the American context, the puritan community concentrated in the New England region in the northeastern corner of the United States. Boston, being a part of Massachusetts, was a center of puritanism for almost two centuries. The moral foundations of the early United States had a huge impact on the country's morality for the next centuries. Referring to this Puritan background of the United States, Duncan used the word in a more general or even stereotypical sense to describe someone who adhered strict moral or religious principles. Boston, in Duncan's eyes, even in 1922, was an embodiment of that Puritan culture that America had long cherished.

Ann Daly argued that Duncan's attack on the puritanism came from the puritan faith that the spirit is sacred and the body is profane.[142] This dualism was unacceptable for Duncan. She saw body as a reflection of beauty in nature; the body with its soul and flesh belonged to the nature. Moreover, since the most beautiful form of body was in its most natural way, the display of body should not have been avoided. She was using her body as a part of her art, just like the painter used his brushes and a musician used his instrument, and this was what made a difference between offensiveness and art.

Despite Duncan's desire to dance "naked," her performance was followed by several repercussions. Besides the cancellations of many appearances, the consequences of the Boston performance were an

[142] Ann Daly, "Isadora Duncan's Dance Theory," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994): 27, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1477914.

introduction of a ban of her performances in Boston by the Mayor Curley and the placement of police on the stage during her performance in Indianapolis, as well as a lynching by the media and being called a "Bolshevik hussy who doesn't wear enough clothes to pad a crutch" by the fundamentalist Billy Sunday. Native-born Protestants were not a monolithic group; class, religion, location and gender were among the many variables that differentiated them. Not all responded to the transformation of American culture with worry and alarm, and when Duncan's clothes became an issue, the nationwide opinion was not like the authorities'. Newspapers were flooded with letters to the editors about Mayor Curley's decision to ban Duncan in Boston. Even in Indianapolis, where cautions were taken by the Mayor Lew Shanks, calling the sanctions as "main street morality in its most idiotic form," a reader wrote to editor of the newspaper that "if to be pure and Christian is to see vice and carnality in the human body then I pray that… I remain a pagan."[143] Although many letters were sent to the newspapers about the repercussions brought to her performance and the official reactions she got were not reflected nationally, the sanctions massively printed in the media were enough to create a negative public image in general.

Moreover, the reactions that Duncan got demonstrated the fundamentalist controversy of the 1920s. When the Reverend Billy Sunday called Duncan a "Bolshevik hussy" that should have been deported, his words

[143] Jack Harding, "Our Half of One Per Cent Art: To the Editor of the Star," *The Indianapolis Star* (Indianapolis, Indiana), Nov. 21, 1922, accessed June 15, 2014, http://www.newspapers.com/image/7275978.

reflected the atmosphere of the early 1920s very clearly. The rise of a secular society that cherished materialism, mundane pleasures of life, changing sexual standards, scientific approaches, and technological advances posed a threat to the religious community in America. Influenced by the European "modernist" ideas in literature, art and sciences that were endangering conventional ways of thinking, intellectuals in particular had started to question traditions. Sigmund Freud had become a part of everyday life and a part of the battle against the restraints of a repressed culture; Albert Einstein's theories of relativity showed that the world was more unpredictable than the common sense knowledge suggested; Darwin's theory of evolution, the biblical criticisms and the study of comparative religions had undermined the truths of evangelical Protestantism for many.[144] These evangelical Christians worried about the deterioration both in American society and in the churches and feared that the country was slipping into a moral and spiritual regression that signaled Protestantism's shrinking role in defining the culture. The defenders of Biblical literalism believed that only a restoration of pure religious faith could halt the nation's slide into immorality and social chaos. Therefore, conservative theologians like Gresham Machen of Princeton and flamboyant revivalist preachers like Billy Sunday struggled to maintain the old-time religion, both in the churches and in American society in general. Duncan's image as a half-clad, dancing woman with views promoting the necessity and the importance of nudity in art was an issue that should have been handled.

[144] Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, 145-49.

She was seen as a threat to the social and religious traditions of America and her deportation would have relieved America from such an immorality. Despite the changing views of the society about the place of nudity in arts, Duncan's view of nudity was still unorthodox for some in America.

The puritan ideals were not only shaken by Duncan's clothes that revealed her body. According to David Foglesong, the traditional religion, morality and culture that characterized as "puritanism" was also challenged by Bolshevism, which seemed to many to symbolize the increasing indifference or hostility to religion. As an orthodox Presbyterian elder and Wilson's foreign policy advisor, Robert Lansing argued that "puritanism and independence" were "the two pillars of the United States." These two things that created the United States were undermined by Bolshevism, which also threatened "life, property, family ties, personal conduct, all the most sacred rights." Bolshevism was not only seen as a threat to the government or the political system of the United States; it was a threat to the American way of life, the social and cultural morals. Similarly in October 1918, Lansing had advised Presbyterian leaders that the radicalism that endangered "the present social order" required "a living aggressive Christianity to win in this supreme conflict and to vanquish the evil ideas which now seem so potent in the world." Moreover, after November 1917, Americans who favored equality for women and challenged traditional sex roles were increasingly labeled "Bolsheviki."[145] For

[145] Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism*, 33-43.

those, Duncan was a threat to the American moral ideals both as a Bolshevik and a supporter of "nudity" in the art of dance.

To Duncan, the reactions of the press and the officials that preached social and ethical morality were all caused by the puritan background of the country. Her words were a passionate outcry against the brutal unfairness with which she was treated during these three and a half months. In her autobiography, she argued that it was her Irish blood that revolted against that "puritanical tyranny." Having been brought by the early settlers to America, this tyranny was never lost entirely and it had tamed the wild men and the art of America.[146] To Duncan, this puritan faith was the reason of that intolerant atmosphere that caused America to be less revolutionary. It was intolerant towards revolutions and it was similarly intolerant to nudity in dance as a form of expression. She was disappointed by the rooted "puritan" faith that persisted even in the twenties and caused her tour to be a complete wreck.

[146] Duncan, *My Life*, 19.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Isadora Duncan should never be analyzed only on the basis of her sensational life. It was true that she witnessed so many sensational and interesting incidents like the drowning of her children in Seine or her tragic death because of her symbolic shawl. A revolutionary in dance, a social critique, a liberator of women's rights, and a fashion designer, she was a character full of surprises and novelties. Isadora Duncan tried to change humanity but she failed; however, she was able to change the direction of her art and its function as an adjunct to theater, opera and music hall entertainment. After her contributions to dance, she managed to restore the place of dance among the other high arts. Despite her failure in changing humanity, she was at least successful in changing that.

It is true that her dance and techniques are known and respected in France, Germany and Russia, more than they are appreciated in the United States; however, the interest in her dance faded soon after her death. Despite the success of Duncan dances in Russia, the Duncan School in Moscow, was closed by the order of Stalin in 1949. Although her schools in Europe did not last long, her work and techniques were tried to be spread through the efforts

of Irma Duncan, Maria-Theresa Duncan, and Anna Duncan, three of her adopted daughters. Her young Russian students performed her dances for large audiences in Russia, Siberia, China and after Isadora's death, they performed in France and the U.S. for several times. However, the lack of a school that would continue her teachings caused her dance to disappear. Also, her dances were not transcribed into written form and this caused many alterations of the original form of her dance. Likewise, her choreographies depended on the particular nuances of the dancer who performed them, thus this created her dances to be interpreted differently by the each generation. Moreover, although she lived in a time when films were available, not one foot of film exists of her dancing and her dance techniques are continued through her disciples and with the help of the photographs and drawings of her on the stage. This was another reason why Duncan dances could not exceed its boundaries.

The post-Duncan years, starting from the thirties through World War II and beyond witnessed dramatic alterations in all art forms. Radical changes in style, form and content appeared as the artists sought new ways of expression, communication and interpretation. With the changes in the society, modernism in dance that Isadora pioneered at the beginning of the century created its own loyal audience; however, Isadora's dance disappeared not long after death. Unable to establish a school in New York, her legacy continued through the efforts of her students but the impact of her dance in America never became widespread. Although she stood out as a unique figure in America, she was

cast away in the twenties especially due to her last tour to the United States in 1922. Nevertheless, according to Fredrika Blair, during the Great Depression, the dances of her final period including the *Marche Slav* were widely performed in the United States in 1929 and they had a great impact on the American choreography of the 1930s.[147] According to Thomas Helen, with the Depression in America and the rise of fascism in Europe, many artists concluded that art should not be confined to the elite and it should be taken to the masses as well. Furthermore, the new art should have reflected the social problems of the day in a clear and direct way. Helen also argued that this view in art found an opportunity to come alive with the introduction of the New Deal Federal Relief projects for the arts in 1935.[148] Groups like *Red Dancers* and *Rebel Dancers* prepared choreographies on subjects like poverty, unemployment and hunger to a great number of audiences in workers' centers and trade union halls. Duncan's attempt to portray the downtrodden, to give voice to immortal anguish was revitalized by the Depression that followed.

The disappearance of her dance does not diminish her importance as a dancer. She opened a way to todays' modern dance techniques almost a hundred years ago. Moreover, her philosophy of dance was not the only thing that made her significant. She was not an ordinary figure. No matter what the consequences were, the sense of heroic effort that Duncan showed was what moved people. The compassionate, witty, eager, stubborn and even self-

[147] Blair, *Isadora: Portrait of the Artist as a Woman*, 297.
[148] Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture: Explorations on the Sociology of Dance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 68.

destructive woman was what surprised and inspired her audience. After reading her autobiography or any biography written about her, one can conclude that it was her character that caused her outrageous claims and behaviors. She did not think; she felt and acted right away. Mostly insensible and irresponsible, she taught people not to calculate the costs or predict the ending but to take action and accomplish something even though it sometimes failed. She put her courage like an armor and fought for her own beliefs and truths. In this sense she was very American. She wrote of her pioneer ancestors with pride and she enjoyed the traits of an American. She was courageous, hardworking, ambitious, active, impulsive and optimistic. Although living as an expatriate for many years abroad, according to Max Eastman, the editor of the monthly socialist magazine *The Masses*, she managed to stay American:

> The great big way in which she conceived things, and undertook them, and the way she succeeded with them, was American. Even her faults were American – her passion for pulling off stunts – "gestures" is the refined way to say it – was American. She made a grand sport of her public position and character. She played with publicity like a humorous Barnum. Even her extravagant and really bad irresponsibility, which went almost to the point of madness in late years, was in the reverse sense an American trait. It was an exaggerated reaction against America's "righteousness." *Wrongtiousness* is what it was… America fighting the battle against Americanism - that was Isadora.[149]

Although she was criticized, tried to be silenced, banned and almost sent back to Europe because of her pro-Soviet remarks, and although her citizenship was taken away and her affiliations with the United States were ended by the

[149] Max Eastman quoted in *Done into Dance*, 16.

authorities, she was, in essence, an American even after her United States tour. It was her uniqueness that made her electrifying and influential.

Despite her Americanism in character, she was defeated by the America she witnessed in 1922. From her arrival to her departure, her tour was an unsuccessful one in terms of her career. She was vilified as a "Moscow agent" sent to America for a dark mission by the order of Lenin or Trotsky, and labeled as a "Bolshevik hussy" by the preachers on the front pages of the newspapers. Moreover, she was deprived of her citizenship. Despite the ovations she got from her audience, she was "red" in its most possible form for the government officials, the press and some parts of the society. She became the target of the "Red Scare" as the wartime repression of dissent continued in the early 1920s in the United States.

The Red Scare of 1919-20 was indeed a manifestation of the effort for conformity and homogeneity that characterized the 1920s. The fear, coupled with the Russian revolution, the 1919 formation of two Communist Parties in America, the postwar wave of strikes, wartime nationalism, long standing hostility to immigrants as well as a series of bombings aimed at political and business leaders mushroomed into a hysteria that led to a widespread suspicion of radicals, immigrants, organized labor, and dissenters. During these years, public officials, business leaders, voluntary associations, and the press fortified the anxieties that caused a massive violation for civil liberties and a tremendous insistence upon conformity. After a witch-hunt that silenced most of the radicals, the extremes of the Red Scare died down, but the

animosity toward immigrants did not. As Mark Whalan argued in *American Culture in the 1910s,* the association of immigrant communities with Bolshevism starting from 1918 "sharpened a spirit of 100 percent Americanism, which assaulted the institutions and cultural practices of America's cultural diversity."[150] After the Red Scare faded, anti-radicalism was embodied in other forms of nativism later in the decade, but the fear of "reds" did not dissipate altogether, as Sacco and Vanzetti case proved in 1927.

For those who were alarmed by the transformation of the American culture, the immigrants, the extremists, Jews and Catholics became an appropriate scapegoat, a way of explaining the escalation in modernity that appeared to deteriorate the idealized community of shared values. Through anti-radicalism, immigration restriction prohibition and the Ku Klux Klan, old-stock Americans sought to reassert their political and cultural hegemony and reinstitute community. With the evaporation of the Red Scare as a dominant concern, the nation returned to its more traditional racial prejudices against blacks, Jews, and southern and eastern Europeans. The intense hysteria of 1919-20 was also a significant factor in the widespread support for the immigration quota system, and Congress passed a series of laws that severely restricted European and Asian immigration in the 1920s. In April 1921 the emergency immigration law, for the first time, fixed a ceiling on annual immigration form any European country, by limiting it to 3 percent of the number of citizens who lived in the U.S. a decade earlier. The Johnson-Reed

[150] Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s,* 178.

Immigration Act of 1924 provided immigration visas to only two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in America as it was in the 1890 national census. This new act restricted the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans and excluded Asians. Americans still welcomed the tired and the poor and the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," but they preferred them to come from northern or western Europe and from sturdy Protestant stock.

The reflections of nativism could be seen in the official papers of the government as well. According to the Congressional Record, the Polish community was a "beaten folk"; people from the Russian Caucasus were "not only illiterate" but also might have been impregnated with Bolshevism.[151] As Americanism became a unifying force that would stop disintegration of the society, the recent immigrants were introduced to one hundred percent Americanism. While legislators barred the nation's doors to keep undesirables out, the Ku Klux Klan reemerged to preserve America within. By 1921 it had an estimated 100,000 members; by 1924 it had grown to be the most powerful nativist organization in American history.[152] The old Reconstruction era Klan had concentrated on destroying black political power in the south; this newly created Klan focused on Catholics, Jews, atheists, and other groups that did not fit in "Klan's vision of a racially and morally pure America."[153] With the

[151] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 20.
[152] Brown, *American Women in the 1920s*, 21.
[153] Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 115.

efforts to convert "hyphenated Americans" into "real Americans," one hundred percent Americanism remained as the goal of old-stock Americans.

Isadora Duncan's case can be seen as a part of that effort of conformity and conservatism in America in the 1920s. The ultimate object of the Red Scare was to end the disintegration of American culture by deporting radicals and insisting on a rigid conformity that would stop societal divisions. Duncan, although she arrived America after the years of the Red Scare, proved that the intolerance to "un-American" ways of living was still a part of the culture that insisted on creating a homogeneous society. Despite the disappearance of arrests and detentions in massive forms, the atmosphere of red menace still lingered on and hurt the basic rights.

Duncan's unsuccessful U.S. tour was just an extension of this political agenda that the American government and society had been going through for the last couple of years. Although her art was welcomed by the audience and the public in general, the investigations and interviews made right after her arrival with the suspicion of her being a Bolshevik agent was an indication of the Red Scare still resuming in the beginning of the 1920s. The presence of Sergei Esenin, a sixteen-year younger Russian husband, reinforced the suspicions. The government's and the media's reactions toward her "redness" were mostly caused by her impromptu pro-Soviet speeches she never hesitated to make. The sanctions and the cancellations were a result of the on-going anticommunist sentiments of the First Red Scare.

The atmosphere of anti-radical and anti-immigration fervor of the late 1910s was carried to the early 1920s. To many government officials like the Mayor Shanks and Mayor Curley, she symbolized a threat to their way of life. She was outspoken, passionate and full of Soviet connections; Duncan's demand for revolution should have been repressed. Indeed, this anti-puritanical and revolutionary spirit was more naïve and dreamy than political. However, many times in her career she used her identity as an artist as an excuse to hide her political thought. Whenever she was asked whether she was a Bolshevik or Communist, her answer was negative. However, partially to avoid the accusations, she always added that she was an artist, an artist that looked "red": the creative, revolutionary, unyielding. The disappearance of the border between political and artistic caused her to be labeled, accused and alienated. By the end of her tour, in the eyes of the press and the public she had become a dangerous outsider.

Actually Isadora's American tour can be seen as a herald of the Second Red Scare, lasting roughly from 1950 to 1956. Just like the first Red Scare, the political repression against communists and anti-communist pursuits were grounded on the fear of spreading communist propaganda and the espionage by Soviet agents. Thousands of Americans were accused of being a communist or a communist sympathizer and were subjected to investigations and questionings. Although the primary targets of these investigations were government employees and union activities, those in the entertainment industry were also placed under close examination. The artists were

blacklisted on the ground of their alleged alignment with the communist party. Refusing to answer the questions of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, many screen writers, directors and producers were blacklisted. Duncan's American experience in 1922 was like a testing of this red-hunting that would happen nearly thirty years later. The fear of communism and revolution would cause many artists to be alienated and scared of during the fifties. Similarly, Duncan was almost persecuted during her tour because of her closeness to the Soviet Union that provided her a dance school. The unresolved issues of the First Red Scare were carried to the mid-twentieth century within a different context. According to Robert Murray, the Red Scare is an example of "what happens to a democratic nation and its people when faith and reason are supplanted with fear."[154] The fear led to state and local level efforts for conformity and homogeneity in society.

This conformity and homogeneity did not only find shape in Duncan's Russian affiliations. Her image on the stage with clothes that bared her legs and arms while dancing looked like a revolt against the demand to protect the old values in the 1920s. As Sara Evans argued, "as the internal strictures of Victorian repression lifted, external forces of government repression and conservatism grew."[155] Duncan's visit to the United States illustrated the presence of the conservatism in the 1920s. It was a time when religion was shook by the modernist approaches of the twentieth century. The challenge of evolutionary science to the biblical story of creation became a central focus of

[154] Murray, *Red Scare*, ix.
[155] Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 186.

many fundamentalists as they struggled to maintain the old-time religion. However, the Scopes Monkey trial of 1925 showed that despite the image of the roaring twenties as a modern and even secular decade, religion was a deeply contested issue that mattered to millions of Americans.[156] Moreover, the attitude towards Duncan and her clothes were also an indication of the not-so-changing gender roles of the 1920s. Despite the fact that there were more liberated looking women working outside, according to Michael E. Parrish, the 1920s saw the transition of college-educated urban middle class women from public sphere to the private sphere. It was a reinstated emphasis on the "traditional feminine roles - capturing a male, raising a family, and managing a household supplied with the latest consumer goods."[157] The "New Woman" of the twenties was not unchained by the restrictions of the earlier decades. Mayor Curley's order to ban Duncan's performances in Boston or Mayor Shanks' decision to place police in the wings of the stage during her Indianapolis performance to prevent her from displaying more of her body exemplified the government's police role in protecting the morality of her citizens. What Duncan called "puritanism" in America prevented her from performing her art in a time when modernism was not enjoyed by all parts of the society. She was crucified in her native country.

In Spring 1921 before her U.S. tour, she had noted that people were "too close to understand" communism and probably maybe those who will live a hundred years later would understand that "by the reign of communism

[156] Dumenil, *Modern Temper,* 190.
[157] Parrish, *Anxious Decade*s, 147.

humanity has made a great step forward from which it can never go back…" and "all men will be brothers, carried away by the great wave of liberation that has just been born here in Russia."[158] She had expected communism to spread and to be successful in the following decades and she believed that it was too early to understand that success in 1921. Whether it was her naïve belief in the communist system or her insistence upon wearing "immodest" clothes to express her emotions correctly, with all she did, she appeared to build between the decadent old world and the dynamic new, but her own time was too early to understand the changes that would follow. 1922 was also "too close to understand" what Duncan wanted was not a threat to the American ideals. Availability of the arts for the masses, cherishing dance as a form of high art and educating children as dancers under a dance school to help the fight against child labor were what she demanded; however, partially because of her character and partially because of the conditions of the day, her demands were met with criticism and disapproval. It is interesting to note that much of the things Isadora stood for during her lifetime now seem very outmoded. What outraged and aroused criticism back then is no longer shocking, at least to the same degree. Her remarks about equality, revolution and change and her naked legs or arms do not disturb people today. She stands as a symbolic figure in the field of dance and no dance book concerning modernism ignores her significance and contributions.

[158] "A Great Step Forward," *Isadora Speaks,* 65.

However, as this thesis have tried prove, Isadora Duncan also demonstrated how a person's ideas, no matter how naïve or artistic they are, could be met with persecution under the right conditions even in her native country. The unsuccessful tour of 1922 was a good example of that. No matter what the consequences were, Duncan's revolutionary spirit remained as red as it could. Freedom was her keyword but she was expelled from the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

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APPENDICES

A. Illustration Related to Chapter IV

a. Her early bulky costumes

Photograph taken by Jacob Schloss.
Isadora Duncan in dance dress fashioned from her mother's lace curtains in 1899.
Archives of American Art (Smithsonian Institution)
http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/viewer/isadora-duncan-2072

b. Her Grecian inspired tunic

Photograph taken by Arnold Genthe.
Duncan performing Frédéric Chopin's Mazurka Opus 17, No: 4 in New York during her visit to America in 1915.
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