

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jennie L. Embree for the degree of Master of Science in Apparel, Interiors, Housing, and Merchandising presented on September 24, 1998. Title: Belly Dance: An Example of Cultural Authentication?

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Abstract Approved: _____

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Cultural authentication is a concept that was developed by Erekosima (1979), Erekosima and Eicher (1981), and Eicher and Erekosima (1980, 1995) to aid in the description of the transfer of artifacts from one culture to another. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the development of belly dance costume in the United States is an example of cultural authentication and, in so doing, further test and refine the concept of cultural authentication.

Contemporary belly dance costume in the United States was described after conducting field research of the belly dance community over a period of ten months. The history of belly dance and its associated costume in America was explored through the review of previous historical research. Belly dance and its associated costume in the United States was then analyzed in terms of cultural authentication by addressing a series of seven questions. These seven questions were formulated to determine whether the four levels of cultural authentication (selection, characterization, incorporation, and transformation) occurred, and whether they occurred in that order.

Contemporary belly dance costume in the United States was classified into two categories: replicated and creatively interpreted. The dancer who wears replicated

costumes believes that he/she is imitating, to the best of his/her ability, a documented style of dress worn by a specific ethnic group, at a specific time, within the areas of the Near and Middle East. The dancer who wears creatively interpreted costumes believes that while he/she has been inspired by documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East, his/her costume is particularly reflective of his/her unique personality and aesthetic preferences.

It was concluded that the concept of cultural authentication is exceedingly vague. As currently defined, the concept and its four levels are inadequate to describe how Americans have acquired and used belly dance and its associated costume, what kinds of meanings Americans have attached to belly dance and its associated costume, and how market forces, advanced communication and transportation technologies, and individual and cultural identity issues are continually prompting and facilitating innovations to belly dance and its associated costume.

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BELLY DANCE: AN EXAMPLE OF CULTURAL AUTHENTICATION?

by

Jennie Embree

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Research Question	3
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
Cultural Authentication	4
Cultural Authentication in the Context of Kalabari Culture	6
Selection	7
Characterization	8
Incorporation	9
Transformation	10
Cultural Authentication in Other Contexts	11
Other Approaches to Cultural Contact	13
Acculturation	13
Assimilation	15
Diffusion	16
Orientalism	17
Previous Belly Dance Scholarship	21
History of Belly Dance	22
Contemporary Belly Dance	25
Belly Dance Costume	27
Summary	29
III. RESEARCH METHOD	31
Research Question	31

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Data Collection	31
Passive Participation	32
Moderate Participation	33
Active Participation	34
Reliability and Validity	35
Analysis	36
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	42
Costume Descriptions	42
Replicated Costume Styles	43
Creatively Interpreted Costume Styles	45
Costume Sources	49
Summary	50
Belly Dance - An Example of Cultural Authentication?	51
Selection	51
Characterization	58
Incorporation	63
Self Image	64
Community	65
Sexual Provocation	65
Reverence for Tradition	66
Fantasy Play	67
The Role of the Belly Dancer	67
Transformation	71
Summary	80
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	84
Methods	85

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Findings	86
Contemporary Belly Dance Costume	87
Belly Dance - An Example of Cultural Authentication?	88
Selection	88
Characterization	89
Incorporation	91
Transformation	92
Order of the Steps	93
Implications	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY	100
APPENDICES	106
Appendix A Research Methods and Sources	107
Appendix B Informed Consent Form	108
Appendix C Abstract of Findings	110
Appendix D Questionnaire	117
Appendix E An Example of Replicated Costume	118
Appendix F An Example of Cabaret Costume	120
Appendix G An Example of Fantasy Ethnic Costume	121
Appendix H An Example of Conceptual Costume	122
Appendix I A Summary of Possible Occurrences of the Levels	123

Belly dance: An Example of Cultural Authentication?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I initially embarked upon my undergraduate education in apparel design because of my love for fabric and clothing design. I supplemented the standard apparel design curriculum with art history, textile surface design, fiber art, and study and travel abroad. These explorations have made me aware of the fascinating tendency for textiles to be used to both reveal and conceal such individual and cultural intricacies as tradition, allegiance, intent and change. My interests in exploring these tendencies prompted me to focus on cultural and historical aspects of textiles and clothing for my graduate education.

I was introduced to the concept of “cultural authentication” in the course of my graduate studies. This concept was proposed by Eicher and Erekosima (1980), to aid in the description of the transfer of textile and clothing artifacts from one culture to another. However, probably because of my own cross-cultural experiences, when I encountered the seemingly simple four-step concept of cultural authentication, I was skeptical that it could adequately explain changes in material culture that occur in the course of cultural contact.

I realized I had the opportunity to further explore cultural authentication when, while I was working at a fabric store near Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon, I discovered that I was selling large amounts of polyester chiffon to “belly dancers” (dancers who claim inspiration for their performances from the geographical area

historically encompassed by the Ottoman Empire and commonly referred to as the Near and Middle East. The term “belly dance” may refer to a variety of dance styles, however, these styles share a common feature: articulated pelvic movements which are accentuated by controlled movements of the arms and upper torso). This initial encounter with the community of belly dancers in Corvallis intrigued me. I soon discovered that Corvallis has its own belly dance guild, two restaurants which feature regular belly dance performances, and that belly dance instruction is available to the public through classes at the local community college and the parks and recreation department. Upon searching the Internet, I further discovered that belly dance is popular throughout the United States. I uncovered web-sites with pictures of American women with names like “Sahara” and “Lotus,” draped with the polyester chiffon, wearing jeweled bras, and sporting Egyptian hieroglyphic tattoos.

I was compelled to investigate this belly dance phenomenon further, especially after Linda Arthur, a scholar who has used cultural authentication, questioned whether cultural authentication could be useful in describing the transfer of Near and Middle Eastern dance costume to the United States. Arthur’s question was in response to Sharon Page Ritchie’s presentation of her paper “Authentic Middle Eastern dance costume: True, false, or multiple choice?” at the Costume Society of America’s Region V Fall Mini-Symposium in San Francisco in September, 1997. I was interested to see that another textiles and clothing researcher was also pondering the relevance of cultural authentication to belly dance in the United States. It was then that I decided to formally address this issue with the hope that I would not only have the opportunity to further

explore belly dance in the United States, I would also have the opportunity to test the concept of cultural authentication.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States is an example of cultural authentication. Additionally, I sought to further test and refine the concept of cultural authentication in order to aid others who may consider using the concept in their own investigations of the transfer of textile and clothing artifacts from one culture to another.

Research Question

Is the concept of cultural authentication useful to accurately describe the transmission of Near and Middle Eastern dance and costume to the United States and the subsequent development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will review the definition of cultural authentication and the previous applications of cultural authentication. I also will review other approaches to describing cultural contact and briefly discuss “Orientalism” (European scholarship of Near, Middle, and Far Eastern countries). Lastly, I will review the findings of previous belly dance research.

Cultural Authentication

Erekosima used the term “cultural authentication” in the title of a paper he presented in 1979 (“The Tartans of Buguma Women: Cultural Authentication”). In this paper, Erekosima discussed how the Kalabari of Nigeria have used their aesthetic values to adapt to cultural changes prompted by contact with Westerners. Specifically, Erekosima discussed how contemporary Kalabari women modify imported textiles (gingham and madras) to create uniquely Kalabari textiles (*pelete-bite* and *fimete-bite*) which Erekosima termed “tartans”. However, it wasn’t until the annual meeting of the Association of College Professors of Textiles and Clothing, in 1980, that Erekosima and Eicher formally presented their conceptual definition of cultural authentication:

Cultural authentication is defined as the process of assimilating an artifact or idea external to a culture by accommodative change into a valued indigenous object or idea. When applied to the analysis of dress and adornment, the four levels of cultural authentication -- (1) Selection, (2) Characterization, (3) Incorporation, and (4) Transformation (SCIT) -- can

explain why some elements of dress, which would be categorized as Western, are indeed “non-Western” in the dress mode of adoptive cultures (Eicher and Erekosima, 1980, p. 83-84).

In 1994, Erekosima and Eicher revised this definition when they stated that cultural authentication is “the creative transformation of borrowed artifacts by members of one culture from another when artifacts are configured or used in different ways than initially conceived” (p. 116). The definition was revised again in 1995 when Eicher and Erekosima stated that cultural authentication is “the process of adaptation as a strategy of change or cultural authentication process (CAP)” (p. 145). Despite these attempts by the original authors to clarify cultural authentication, there nevertheless appears to be some confusion amongst scholars as to the definition of the concept. Lynch (1995) defined cultural authentication as “a four-step process by which a borrowed cultural element works its way into the culture through language (being assigned a specific name), patterns of significant use, and aesthetic transformation” (p. 261). Lynch, Detzner, and Eicher (1995) supplemented Eicher and Erekosima’s (1980) definition by adding that the “borrowed cultural element”, “becomes integrated and meaningful to the host culture” (p. 117). Steiner (1994) stated that cultural authentication refers “to the transforming of a selectively borrowed cultural object by the receiving culture into four differing possible levels of adaption” (p. 90). Other scholars have returned to the 1980 definition of cultural authentication in their studies (Arthur, 1997; Mead & Pedersen, 1995). It is clearly necessary to review Erekosima’s original concept of cultural authentication in order to elucidate the definition of cultural authentication.

Cultural Authentication in the Context of Kalabari Culture

Erekosima's 1979 paper contributed to the subject of "African Dress as Communication" at the Twenty-second Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association. Erekosima examined the value-system of the Kalabari and the historical and technological aspects of the Kalabari tartans in order to determine the meaning of the tartans.

In his paper, Erekosima asserted that Kalabari society was restructured as a result of contact with Europeans in the mid-fifteenth century. Erekosima stated that the Kalabari became "middle-men" in the European commercial slave trade and that this new role was "an indigenously inspired adaptation to the new situation" which led to the "transformation of their socio-economic and political institutions, with the result that their emerging city-states prospered considerably, and were able to control the historical developments in the area for several centuries" (p. 1). Erekosima emphasized that while the Kalabari historically, and currently, actively participate in foreign trade, they manage to maintain, "independence in matters of belief" (p. 2). Additionally, Erekosima found that "despite contact with the West, the Kalabari value premises and symbolic system remain unaffected," and that the value-premises and symbolic system have "served as a rudder, modulating activities in the material sphere" (p. 3). Erekosima also discussed the importance of investigating a culture's value system in order to understand the symbolic meanings of a culture's artifacts.

Erekosima concluded that Kalabari women have culturally authenticated textiles, acquired through trade with the West, by imposing the Kalabari value premises on the

textiles. This imposition of Kalabari culture on Western textiles is achieved through the creative process of cut and drawn thread-work (*pelete-bite* and *fimete-bite*). The resulting tartans are symbolic of the Kalabari's successful maintenance of culture despite contact with the West.

In 1980 Eicher and Erekosima conceptually defined the concept of cultural authentication, and in 1981 they applied it to Erekosima's study of Kalabari textiles (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981). Erekosima and Eicher expanded upon Erekosima's initial conclusions about the Kalabari tartans and applied the four levels of cultural authentication: Selection, Characterization, Incorporation, and Transformation (Eicher & Erekosima, 1980; Erekosima & Eicher, 1981).

Selection

The first level of the concept of cultural authentication is "selection." Selection occurs "when one foreign element or more of dress is assimilated in form only, but use changes" (Eicher and Erekosima, 1980, p. 84). In 1981, Erekosima and Eicher defined selection as "the borrowing and using of cloth as it exists" (p. 50), and "acquiring some specific cloth or other artifact to wear or use" (p. 51). Eicher and Erekosima (1995) have most recently stated that selection occurs "when a particular external cultural practice or product is *selected* as appropriate and desirable by members of another culture out of an almost unlimited number of other options or offerings" (p. 145). In the case of the Kalabari, selection occurs when "the individual chooses and wears a commercial cloth of modern trade for self-enhancement and for making a statement about positive self-

acceptance. To do so is to ‘dress up.’ The ‘dressed-up’ person is valued at a level different from that of the same person attired for work and production” (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981, p. 50).

Characterization

The second level of cultural authentication is “characterization.” This step occurs “when the element of dress is borrowed and not only use but the symbolic reference has changed” (Eicher & Erekosima, 1980, p. 84). In 1981, Erekosima and Eicher defined characterization as “the ‘naming’ of a cloth to make it more easily ‘visible’” (p. 50), and the “distinguishing [of] particular cloth or other artifacts by special naming” (p. 51). Eicher and Erekosima stated in 1995:

....the selected item is *characterized* in some symbolic form within the meaning reference-frame of the receiving society. The item may be renamed by members of the culture, in their own language, choosing the item or process or translating in any other expressive form into the mapping system of order by which members of the culture conceptually define or iconically portray their experiences and artifacts (p. 145).

The name given to the selected textile reflects the symbolic meaning of the textile within the Kalibari culture. Erekosima and Eicher demonstrated this when they stated that the act of acquiring foreign textiles represents “successful trade with the outside world” and therefore the acquired foreign textile is “characterized” by the assignment of the name of the trader in order to display the trader’s success (p. 49). Additionally, the characterization process is a benchmark for a culture’s acceptance of an artifact. For example, in their 1981 article, Erekosima and Eicher quoted Nielson (1977): “Once the

African public gives the [European fabric] design a name, sales will consistently improve, even though the name may not appear to the non-African to have any connection with the design....When wax-prints are not significant enough to be named by the consumers, they are not kept, not considered traditional” (p.87).¹

Incorporation

The third level of cultural authentication is “incorporation.” Incorporation occurs “when the elements are worn by a specific group to identify them as a category” (Eicher & Erekosima, 1980, p. 84). Erekosima and Eicher (1981) further defined incorporation as “the extensive owning of a specific cloth by a particular group (family or house),” (p. 50) and the “placing [of] such cloth or other artifacts into particular social categories or making them part of an ensemble” (p. 51). In 1995, Eicher and Erekosima stated incorporation occurs when “the innovation occupies some functional role within the receiving cultural system by being *incorporated* toward meeting some adaptation need in the society, at either individual or collective levels, and often at both” (p. 145). Incorporation of a Western textile within Kalabari culture occurs when the selected and characterized textile is worn to signify belonging to “a specific lineage, for example, that of the royal family or an important house” (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981, p. 50).

¹

Note: This quote is a rearrangement of Neilson’s (1977) original text. See pages 10-11 of Neilson.

Transformation

The fourth, and last, level of cultural authentication is “transformation.”

Transformation occurs “when the elements of dress are changed (as in creative ensembling) or as in creating new dress” (Eicher and Erekosima, 1980, p. 84). Erekosima and Eicher (1981) defined transformation as “the creating of a modified cloth that has an additional design cut on it. Cloth at this level of creative adaption is most valued and prized” (p. 50). In 1995 Eicher and Erekosima stated that transformation occurs “when the adopted artifact or practice (which may initially have been foreign or else from another generation or other segment of the same society) is *transformed* in itself. This entails an accommodation of its old form and purpose to the new setting in a holistic way. The outcome of this final phase invariably involves a creative or artistic change that envelops the product and setting” (p.145). Transformation of western textiles within Kalabari culture is “illustrated by the infinite variety of *pelete-bite* and *fimete-bite* designs” (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981, p. 51). The modification, or transformation, of the textiles through creative drawn and cut thread work of *pelete-bite* and *fimete-bite* symbolizes Kalabari women’s commitment to “guard the culture’s creative impulse” (p. 49). Therefore, the women’s modification of the textiles maintains Kalabari cultural identity despite foreign trade. Wearing the transformed textiles is an indication that “he or she belongs not just to a restricted group but also to a distinctive culture. When a Kalabari person wears *pelete-bite* and *fimete-bite*, with their cut-thread and pulled-thread designs, he or she exemplifies cultural authentication at this level” (p. 50-51).

Cultural Authentication in Other Contexts

Scholars have affirmed the use of cultural authentication to describe the adoption of Western textiles and clothing by non-Western cultures (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981; Lynch, 1995; Lynch, Detzner & Eicher, 1995; Steiner, 1997) and the adoption of non-Western textiles and clothing by Westerners (Kim & DeLong, 1992). However, others have questioned the concept's four levels (Arthur, 1997; Mead & Pedersen, 1995; Pannabecker, 1988).

Pannabecker (1988) applied Erekosima and Eicher's 1980 definition of cultural authentication and its four levels to her study of the historical development of ribbon-work of the Native Americans of the Great Lakes. She affirmed cultural authentication as a cross-culturally valid concept; however, she questioned the four levels of cultural authentication, because her study did not find evidence for the characterization level. Additionally, although she found evidence for the other three levels, she determined the levels did not occur in the order of SCIT.

Mead and Pedersen (1995) also questioned the four levels of cultural authentication in their study of West African apparel textiles and West African-influenced apparel textiles depicted in American magazines from 1960 to 1979. Mead and Pedersen used Erekosima and Eicher's 1980 definition of cultural authentication. They stated that the level of selection "refers to adopting an object or idea intact, without altering it physically, but changing its use" (p. 431), and they found clear evidence for selection in their study. However, they could only hypothesize evidence for the other three levels.

Therefore, Mead and Pedersen proposed that once the level of selection occurs, the process of cultural authentication may vary across cultures (p. 447).

Arthur (1997) attempted to refine the concept of cultural authentication as she applied it to her study of the historical development of the Hawaiian *holokū*. Arthur used Erekosima and Eicher's 1980 definition of cultural authentication and Eicher's 1994 definitions of the four levels. Arthur found evidence for all four levels, however she determined the levels did not occur in the order of SCIT. Therefore, Arthur concluded that while cultural authentication is a useful concept for analyzing material culture, "the order of stages may not be relevant to validate the concept" (p. 137). Arthur's recent research using cultural authentication undoubtedly prompted her to question whether cultural authentication can explain the development of belly dance in America.

Cultural authentication remains an unclear concept despite its use by these scholars to describe the transfer of textile and clothing artifacts from one culture to another. Is cultural authentication a process with four sequential steps (Eicher & Erekosima, 1980, 1995; Pannebecker, 1988; Lynch, 1995; Mead & Pedersen, 1995; Arthur, 1997), or is cultural authentication an umbrella term for four levels of artifact change possible as a result of interaction with outside cultures (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981; Steiner, 1997)?

In this study, I have chosen to use the most recent definition of cultural authentication and its four levels as defined by Eicher and Erekosima (1995). According to this definition, cultural authentication is "process of adaptation as a strategy of change or cultural authentication process (CAP)" (p. 145). Eicher and Erekosima also stated that the four levels of cultural authentication are, "four broad categories of inter-related steps"

(p. 145). Therefore, I am interpreting cultural authentication to be a *process* with four sequential (selection, characterization, incorporation and transformation -- SCIT) steps.

Other Approaches to Cultural Contact

Cultural contact and change is a well-established area of anthropological exploration with a voluminous amount of literature, and it would be folly to attempt a thorough review of it here. Therefore, I will limit myself to comparing cultural authentication to the concepts of acculturation, assimilation, and diffusion.

Acculturation

Acculturation, as defined in *The Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Hunter & Whitten, 1976) and *The Dictionary of Anthropology* (Seymour-Smith, 1986), is the process of change in cultural patterns (social, economic, and political structures) which is the result of two or more cultures coming into contact. In order to describe changes in cultural patterns as a result of contact, the cultural baselines (descriptions of a culture as it was before contact with outsiders) must be defined for the cultures in question (Seymour-Smith, 1986). However, as Seymour-Smith pointed out, the cultural baseline is:

....too static a concept, as it leads us to assume that there is a traditional and unchanging pre-contact culture which may be regarded as a fixed and stable system before it came into contact with another culture. In reality, the phenomena of contact between cultures and the resulting transformations are so common and constant that it would be impossible to conceive of any meaningful cultural baseline in most ethnographic areas of the world (p. 61).

Seymour-Smith suggested that anthropologists perform “continuous historical and ethnohistorical” studies in order to discern the influences that different groups have had upon each other. This approach differs from the standard acculturative approach which assumes that there was a time when there were entirely separate and self-contained cultures (p. 61).

Yinger (1994) also concluded that the standard acculturative approach to describing cultural contact is not sufficient. He stated:

An additional refinement is needed in a full analysis of the process of acculturation. It is not simply the transfer of some elements from group A to group B or group B to group A, reciprocally. It includes, at least as background forces, the shared modifications and additions to culture that result from a whole set of circumstances acting on both A and B. These circumstances include demographic, environmental, technical, and international influences that suggest or even demand cultural changes for all the affected groups (p. 82).

Cultural authentication is similar to the standard acculturative approach in that cultural authentication describes the process of change as a result of contact. However, cultural authentication differs from acculturation in that acculturation addresses the process of change in a culture’s major cultural constructs whereas cultural authentication has been used by scholars to describe the process of change in artifacts (textiles and clothing). However, most significantly, both cultural authentication and acculturation rely upon defining the problematic cultural baseline (the term “cultural authentication” implies that there is, or was at some time, an “authentic” or original culture), and, in the case of cultural authentication, the baseline of the borrowed *artifact* must also be defined in order to describe how the borrowing culture has changed it.

Assimilation

Assimilation was defined by Seymour-Smith (1986) as “one of the outcomes of the acculturation process, in which the subordinate or smaller group is absorbed into the larger or dominant one and becomes indistinguishable from it in cultural terms” (p. 18). Hunter and Whitten (1976) stressed that assimilation “operates in one direction only: a part or all of one community is incorporated into another” (p. 47). Additionally, “changes in important features of the internal, subjective views” of the assimilated culture are required. The members of the assimilated culture “must alter their basic values and eventually transform their personal identities to become assimilated” (p. 47). Seymour-Smith (1986) cautioned, however, that the concept of assimilation has been questioned in modern anthropology. She contended that most modern anthropologists “argue for a more careful examination of the different dimensions of cultural interchange and social dominance in situations of contact between different sociocultural systems” (p. 18).

Cultural authentication is different from assimilation in that cultural authentication relies upon a culture maintaining its existing value premises and symbolic-systems despite contact with outsiders: the authenticating culture must maintain its value-premises and symbolic systems in order to impose them upon artifacts acquired through contact with outsiders. Eicher and Erekosima (1980) defined cultural authentication as “the process of *assimilating* [my italics] an artifact or idea external to a culture by accommodative change into a valued indigenous object or idea” (p. 83-84). Therefore, within cultural authentication, assimilation apparently takes place as a result of cultural

contact, but it is *artifacts* that are assimilated whereas the cultures in contact remain authentic.

Diffusion

Hunter and Whitten (1976) defined diffusion as the “worldwide tendency of human populations to share and pool creative efforts which are in origin locally known and used,” noting that the methods of diffusion are accelerating in the modern world due to mass communication and transportation systems (p. 126). Hunter and Whitten also stated that “all cultures exercise selectivity in what they accept” and that “the process of accepting an element from another society generally involves changes in its meaning, form, use, and function” (p. 126). The authors offered an example of diffusion to further clarify the concept. They stated, “One of the most dramatic examples of the diffusion of a cultural trait was the spread of tobacco across the world from the Americas, and the great importance it took on in many societies” (p. 126).

The concept of diffusion, like cultural authentication, acknowledges that cultures are selective about choosing elements to adopt and that elements are changed upon a culture’s acquisition of them. However, Hunter and Whitten did not prescribe one sequential process, such as cultural authentication’s four levels, for the adoption and transformation of cultural elements.

Orientalism

The exchange of cultural information between the West and the East was greatly enhanced by the improvement of political relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the early 18th century. When Western artists, scholars, and adventurers were allowed to travel to Constantinople, they returned with Turkish costumes and travel memoirs filled with fantastic stories of the “Orient” (the “Orient” was a term that was used broadly by Europeans to designate the multitude of cultures contained in the geographical areas now known as North Africa, the Near and Middle East, and Asia). In 1704, the French translation of *The Arabian Nights* caused a sensation in France and England. The ambassadorial visits by Turkish diplomats to Paris in 1721 and 1742 further fueled Parisian imaginations of the Orient and turkomania swept Europe. Literature, painting, costume, and interior design all felt the influence of the “exotic East” (Thornton, 1985).

Although turkomania eventually faded from fashionable society, Europe’s interest in the Orient continued throughout the political upheaval of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and the subsequent colonization of North Africa by European powers. Western Romantic artists and writers flocked to the Orient to experience and record picturesque natural surroundings, unpolluted by the industrial revolution. Berman (1993) stated, “Just as tourists wanted to discover nature untouched by man, they also hoped to look on people garbed in robes untainted by the inroads of change. To learn that the....Egyptian cavalry was dressed and equipped in a manner redolent of the *Arabian Nights* was to escape into a romantic and seemingly simpler world” (p. 182).

Orientalism, as defined by Kopf (1995), is the study of the Orient by the West, originally undertaken by Governor-General Warren Hastings of the British East India Company in the late 18th century. Hastings championed for a reformed cultural policy in India including an “Orientalized (British) service elite” (p. 141). Hastings believed that relations with India would be improved if the officials of the East India Company were knowledgeable about Indian languages, religion, history, and tradition. Hastings called for civil servants to take courses from English Orientalist scholars in India. Kopf stated, “British Orientalist scholarship was an incredible achievement, considering the lack of historical interest by Hindus in their own past. Orientalists had little with which to work, and it is miraculous that their research findings are still very much accepted today” (p. 142).

However, Said (1978) postulated that colonization of the Orient by the West has tainted the West’s perception of the Orient and the West’s scholarship about the Orient. Said stated:

Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe....Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections (p. 7-8).

Said (1978) briefly related the relationship of French novelist Flaubert with the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem as a metaphor for the relationship between the West and the East. Just as Flaubert's wealth and relative power allowed him to possess Hanem and to describe her for his Western audience in his words rather than hers (p. 6), Said believed that Western fantasies about the Orient have distorted Western perceptions of the East to such an extent that the West is now incapable of perceiving the true East. Said's choice of a metaphor is significant because Flaubert's description of Hanem and her performance of the erotic "Bee Dance" (a dance in which the dancer frantically removes her clothing in order to escape the imaginary bee that has flown inside her clothing) is also related in many writings about the history of belly dance (see, for example, Aradoon, 1979; Buonaventura, 1989; Stone, 1991). Buonaventura's (1989) lavishly illustrated book has been cited repeatedly by Western contemporary belly dancers on the belly dance computer mailing list (Medance list-serv) as a good source for historical information and belly dance costume inspiration. This is an example of how the West's historically distorted views of the East are perpetuated even in contemporary times.

The distortion of history has been a critical problem in the study of Western interaction with the East. Historical photographs, paintings, and written descriptions of the East by Westerners are all factually suspect. Thornton (1985) argued that many Orientalist painters never traveled to the Near, Middle, or Far East and painted only from their imagination and without benefit of first-hand knowledge of the areas.

Alloula (1986) examined postcards of Algerian women photographed by French photographers from 1900-1930. Alloula determined that while the photographs purported

to depict local women and their customs in natural settings, the photographs were actually of models in contrived poses and settings. For example, several postcards feature semi-nude women behind barred windows. However, it is not at all customary for Algerian women to be unveiled, let alone nude, in public. Alloula likened the bars to a veil -- both are symbolic of imprisonment -- and photographs in which the bars are behind the women indicate that the photographer has succeeded in unveiling the veiled women of Algeria. Alloula concluded that the postcards reveal French photographers', and the West's, fantasies of the Orient; they are not accurate representations of Algerian women.

Western traveler's descriptions of the East are also tainted by Western prejudices. Mabro (1991) demonstrated this in her book, *Veiled half-truths: Western travelers' perceptions of Middle Eastern women*. Mabro reviewed 19th century travel accounts for descriptions of Middle Eastern women. She stated:

Reading the mass of generalizations written about women in North Africa and the Middle East one is struck by the easy acceptance of what local men told travelers about women, the facile value judgements and preconceived notions and the refusal to recognize the enormous variety of situations in which women lived, apart from the obvious town and rural differences, or the most glaring differences of wealth (p. 13).

Mabro postulated that it was Westerners' defense of their own "proper" Western women that served to reinforce the perceived exotic nature of Middle Eastern women. Mabro stated, "When confronted with veiled and 'imprisoned' women, many male writers yearned to see and possess them while stressing how different were their own womenkind" (p. 11).

The West clearly has a history of distorted perceptions of the East. This fact makes the study of the West's interaction with the East particularly difficult. However, several authors have tried to tackle these problems in their research of belly dance in the United States. I have briefly reviewed these scholars' studies below; however, as I have used these scholars' studies as sources for examining belly dance in terms of cultural authentication, I will also make reference to their findings in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Previous Belly Dance Scholarship

While historical studies of belly dance have traced its development from ancient fertility rites to contemporary nightclub entertainment, scholars of the dance agree that the dance and costume have evolved most dramatically since the European colonization of North Africa in the mid-nineteenth century (Buonaventura, 1989; Berger, 1961; Monty, 1986; Ritchie, 1997; Sellers-Young, 1992; Van Nieuwerk, 1995; Wood & Shay, 1976). In fact, the dance has changed so much that scholars (and dancers) disagree as to what it should be called. Various terms have been used to signify this type of dance including, but not limited to, "belly dance," "hootchy-kootchy," "Oriental dance," and *danse du ventre* (Aradoon, 1979; Buonaventura, 1989; Carlton, 1994; Monty, 1986; Ritchie, 1997; Stone, 1991). For the purposes of this study, I will use the term "belly dance" to signify the variety of dance styles performed by American dancers who claim inspiration from the geographical area historically encompassed by the Ottoman Empire and commonly referred to by Americans as the Near and Middle East. The various dance styles share a common feature: articulated pelvic movements which are accentuated by controlled

movements of the arms and upper torso. “Belly dance costume” is the term that I will use to refer to the variety of costume styles worn by American dancers who claim inspiration from the Near and Middle East. I have chosen to use the term “belly dance” because it is the most familiar to American ears and because it encompasses a wide variety of belly dance sub-styles such as “cabaret” and “tribal” (Forner, 1993). It should be noted, however, that there are members of the belly dance community in the United States who object to the term “belly dance” because they feel that the term degrades the dance form. These dancers prefer the terms “Middle Eastern Dance” and/or “Danse Orientale.”

History of Belly Dance

The origin of belly dance is a hotly contested issue. Some dancers believe belly dance is “the oldest dance” (Buonaventura, 1983, p .1; Aradoon, 1979, p.1) or “Mother Nature’s oldest rite” (Gioseffi, 1991, p. 1). Aradoon (1979) stated that belly dance “originated as the Dance of the Mother Goddess, a fertility dance, ‘a pantomime of sexual possession,’ or a ritual performed in empathy at the bedsides of women in labor” (p. 42). Gioseffi (1991) stated belly dance originated as “birth dances” that were “dances celebrating life, meant to rally the communal energies of women and the vegetative fruition of earth” (p. 28). Other scholars, such as often quoted Wood and Shay (1976)(for example: Deaver, 1978; Forner, 1993; Sellers-Young, 1992; Stone, 1991), have denounced these theories as unfounded fantasies.

Despite disagreement about the ancient history of belly dance, scholars of belly dance agree that the dance and costume have evolved dramatically since the European

colonization of North Africa in the mid-nineteenth century. Additionally, scholars agree that belly dance was first introduced to the American public at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876 and the Chicago World's Columbian Exhibition in 1893 (Buonaventura, 1983, 1989; Berger, 1961; Gioseffi, 1991; Monty, 1986; Ritchie, 1997; Sellers-Young, 1992; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995; Wood & Shay, 1976).

Although the performances by Syrian and Algerian dancers at the Chicago Exhibition in 1893 were considered erotic and indecent by fair-goers, the dancers were nonetheless a popular attraction at the fair (Berger, 1961; Buonaventura, 1989; Ritchie, 1997). The existence of a dancer named "Little Egypt," who is said to have danced at the fair, was investigated by Donna Carlton (1994), who is a belly dancer and a belly dance instructor. Carlton examined many primary sources including exposition guidebooks, photographs, souvenir volumes, newspaper reports, and travel accounts. She also consulted previous historical research about the fair and reviewed references to "Little Egypt" and the "hootchy-kootchy." She concluded that there never was a dancer named "Little Egypt" at the fair. Her findings correspond with the findings of Barzel (1964).

The performances by Middle Eastern dancers at the fairs were so notorious, in fact, that American female entertainers who called themselves "Little Egypt" subsequently capitalized upon the popularity of the dance performances by imitating them in burlesque houses around the country (Barzel, 1964; Berger, 1961; Buonaventura, 1989; Monty, 1986; Ritchie, 1997; Sellers-Young, 1992; Wood & Shay, 1976). Their imitations of the Near and Middle Eastern dance presented at the fairs came to be called hootchy kootchy, Oriental dance, and belly dance.

Serious and influential female dancers of the late 19th and early 20th century such as Mary Louise “Loie” Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St. Denis also imitated Middle Eastern dance and elevated it from burlesque hootchy-kootchy to artistic interpretive dance (Berger, 1961; Buonaventura, 1989; Desmond, 1991; Gioseffi, 1991; Monty, 1986; Ritchie, 1997). An analysis of Ruth St. Denis’s 1941 dance-interpretation of the Hindu Goddess Radha by Desmond (1991) revealed that this performance symbolizes, through popular exotic imagery of the Orient, changing social attitudes toward women’s roles, female sexuality, and the physical body in the early 20th century. Desmond interpreted the meaning of St Denis’s *Radha* through “adapting contemporary insights drawn from literary criticism, film theory, and work on race and colonialism...” (p. 30). Desmond’s study is an example of an investigation of a specific American dancer borrowing a specific cultural feature from the Orient.

The Russian Ballet also appropriated elements of Near Middle Eastern dance and costume in its tremendously successful 1910 production of *Scheherazade* with lavish sets and costumes designed by Leon Bakst (Behling, 1979). The Near and Middle East and Near and Middle Eastern dance also inspired and brought success to European fashion designer Paul Poiret whose 1911 fête “1001 Nights” is infamous in fashion history (Buonaventura, 1989; Mackrell, 1990). Scholars agree, however, that it was the films of Hollywood, for example *Intolerance* (1916) and *Salome* (1918) which most significantly shaped and popularized belly dance in the early 20th century (Buonaventura, 1989; Monty, 1986; Sellers-Young, 1992; Stone, 1991; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995). Belly dance in Hollywood films was investigated by Stone (1991). Stone analyzed 33 films made between 1913 and 1983 which present belly dance as a solo performance. She compared

the performances in these films with non-film performances of belly dance in order to determine whether the latter deviated from the former. Additionally, she documented how belly dance and belly dance costume were portrayed in Hollywood films. She concluded that early Hollywood filmmakers combined elements of Orientalist fantasy and elements of reality to present “a kind of glamorous Hollywood version of the Oriental dance which, over the years, has played a part in shaping the performance of this dance in America and in northern Africa and western Asia” (p. 188).

Contemporary Belly Dance

The popularity of Belly dance waned after WWI, though it could still be found, primarily in restaurants, within Middle Eastern diasporas throughout the United States (Sellers-Young, 1992). Sellers-Young (1992) investigated contemporary belly dance in the United States by conducting interviews with amateur and professional dancers, attending belly dance events, and reviewing belly dance periodicals over a ten-year period. She concluded that the development of belly dance in America embodies “the romanticism of the Near East”(p. 142). She also believes general interest in belly dance was revived in the 1960s as a medium for women to increase awareness and acceptance of their bodies (see also: Buonaventura, 1989; Gioseffi, 1991; Ritchie, 1997). She believes that belly dance has been disseminated to Americans through professional performers at Middle Eastern restaurants who began to augment their income by teaching American women versions of Middle Eastern dance. The first school of belly dance was introduced in New York in the mid-1960s (Monty, 1986), and by the early 1970s notable

performer-teachers such as Serena and Dahlena also published instructional books so women could learn the dance at home, even though, by the 1970s, dance studios, YMCAs and local park and recreation departments were offering regular classes (p.143).

The evolution of belly dance in America and the complex specialized culture that revolves around it were explored by Forner (1993). Forner, an experienced belly dancer herself, used participant observation, interviews, and primary sources including “extensive reviews of books and magazines targeted to this dance public, mostly written by participants about themselves, the dance and the subculture” (p. 3) in order to describe the characteristics of contemporary dances and to identify and describe contemporary methods of disseminating the dance and its related products. Forner concluded that a “complex, fluid subculture has evolved” around belly dance (p.91). She stated:

Within the network of the subculture, factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, life experience and dance orientation intersect, collide, and produce the cultural expressions known as Oriental dance, “belly dance,” Middle Eastern dance, and so on. Oriental dance as manifested in all its products and features, in all its forms and variations, supported and promoted by all its groups and factions, conveyed through all possible channels is a form of creative cultural production on many levels, from individual dance performances to the total fabric of the subculture (p.92).

Belly dance in the United States was viewed from two vantage points by Dox (1997). She concluded that while contemporary belly dance in the United States is often “critiqued as a hegemonic re-presentation of the colonial fantasy which extends to western spectators a simulcrum of a mythic east,” she also concluded that the dance, as an “intercultural performance,” can be understood differently (p. 150). Dox attended a performance of two American belly dancers at a Turkish-American wedding in

Wisconsin and discovered that the wedding was a site where meanings were experienced rather than analyzed. Here, the dance was clearly not part of a Western colonial fantasy, rather, it was being used as a means of cross-cultural communication. She stated, “At this site, ‘culture’ was not a pre-existing category, constructing binary oppositions, but a fluid exchange of movement and energy” (p. 158).

Belly Dance Costume

Belly dance in America is chiefly characterized by articulated pelvic movements accentuated by controlled movements of the arms and upper torso. This rudimentary definition of belly dance describes historical as well as contemporary belly dance in America. However, belly dance costumes worn by American belly dancers have historically differed dramatically from the dance costumes introduced to Americans by Near and Middle Eastern dancers at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876 and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893 (Buonaventura, 1989; Ritchie, 1997; Stone, 1991; Wood & Shay, 1976). Due to a lack of evidence documenting the kind of costumes worn by dancers at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876, I am limiting my discussion to costumes worn by dancers in the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893.

Buonaventura (1989) asserted that, prior to the twentieth century, dancers in the Near and Middle East were accustomed to performing in their everyday dress (p. 152). This is evidenced by the Algerians who danced in Chicago in 1893 barefoot and who wore long full skirts or trousers, undershirts and waistcoats (Buonaventura, 1992;

Ritichie, 1997; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995). This body-concealing costume was gradually transformed by dancers into what belly dancers call “cabaret” costume . Cabaret costume generally consists of a bra-top embellished with coins, jewels, and sequins and a diaphanous skirt held at the hipline with a matching embellished belt. The midriff is bare, and often the costume includes a veil (or veils) tucked into the skirt.

Some scholars believe cabaret costume was invented by European and American fantasies of the Orient and exported to the Near and Middle East through film and tourism (Buonaventura, 1989; Sellers-Young, 1992). Others believe it originates from costume styles of Indian dancers which were introduced to Egypt and North Africa by the British when Egypt was a British protectorate (Wood & Shay, 1976) . Whatever the origin may be, this style of costume is typical of many belly dancers in the United States, and it has become the typical costume of contemporary nightclub dancers in the Near and Middle East (Van Nieuwkerk, 1995; Buonaventura, 1989).

Ritchie (1997) investigated belly dance costume in the United States. She interviewed 30 belly dancers in northern California about their involvement in belly dance and their attitudes toward belly dance costumes. She found that “authenticity” in costuming is an issue which is constantly being negotiated in the belly dance community. She interviewed dancers whose costumes were replicas of historic belly dance costumes, however, she also found dancers whose costumes reflected personal and contemporary issues. For example, one of the dancers she interviewed had a costume inspired by a football uniform; it was in the team colors of blue and white and it had a team number on the bodice back.

Summary

Cultural authentication is a concept that was developed by Erekosima (1979), Erekosima and Eicher (1981), and Eicher and Erekosima (1980, 1995) to aid in the description of the transfer of artifacts from one culture to another. While some scholars have used the concept successfully, others have questioned whether all four levels of cultural authentication (selection, characterization, incorporation, and transformation) must occur and whether they must occur in that order. Arthur (1997) found mixed success with the concept in her study of the Hawaiian *holokū*, and she has recently questioned whether cultural authentication would be useful to describe the development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States.

Cultural authentication is a unique approach to describing the transfer of artifacts from one culture to another. An alternative concept, acculturation, describes changes in a culture's major cultural constructs as a result of contact with outsiders whereas cultural authentication describes changes in artifacts. Cultural authentication is different from the concept of assimilation in that cultural authentication requires that *artifacts* be assimilated by a culture which maintains its existing "value premises" and "symbolic-systems" despite contact with outsiders; the culture asserts its authenticity and thereby resists change (Erekosima, 1979, p.3). Cultural authentication is similar to the concept of diffusion, however, diffusion does not prescribe a four-step sequential process for the adoption of foreign cultural elements.

Cultural contact between the West and the Near and Middle East has been tainted by Western misconceptions of the Near and Middle East. The West's distorted

perceptions of the Near and Middle East have filtered through the generations to such an extent that it is difficult to discern reality from fantasy. However, despite the problems of accurately describing the West's adoption of Near and Middle Eastern cultural elements, scholars have tried to document the continuous evolution of belly dance: from nineteenth-century Near and Middle Eastern exotica displayed at international trade fairs to early twentieth-century interpretive dance and Hollywood fantasy to a medium of self-discovery in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. While the dance movements have not changed, the context of the dance, and the dance costume, have changed dramatically. Clearly the development of belly dance in the United States is an example of a culture borrowing an element from another culture. However, is cultural authentication useful to accurately describe the transformation of Near and Middle Eastern dance and costume to the United States and the subsequent development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States? This is the question I sought to answer.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States is an example of cultural authentication. Additionally, I sought to further test and refine the concept of cultural authentication in order to aid others who may consider using the concept in their own investigations of the transfer of textile and clothing artifacts from one culture to another.

Research Question

Is the concept of cultural authentication useful to accurately describe the transmission of Near and Middle Eastern dance and costume to the United States and the subsequent development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States?

Data Collection

Eicher and Erekosima proposed cultural authentication after they conducted field research of the Kalabari in Nigeria. Other researchers who have used cultural authentication have used a variety of other research methods. In all cases, these scholars, including Eicher and Erekosima, have not stated how they analyzed their data to determine whether or not the four steps of cultural authentication occurred and whether they occurred in the order of SCIT. My solution to this methodological problem was to devise a series of seven questions which guided my research of belly dance in the United

States and my analysis of it in terms of cultural authentication (these questions will be presented later in this chapter).

I used a variety of sources and research methods throughout this study (Appendix A). For example, I consulted secondary and tertiary sources for information about the history of belly dance and its associated costume; Orientalism; cultural contact; and American cultural traits. I also examined primary sources for information about contemporary belly dance and its associated costume; the evolution of English terms for belly dance; and Americans' perceptions of belly dance.

I also conducted field research of the belly dance community in the United States over a period of ten months in order to formulate an insider description of the belly dance community and to identify major styles of belly dance costume in the United States. While it is impossible to fully describe a culture after only ten months of observation, I do believe that I familiarized myself with the belly dance community enough to be able to analyze belly dance in terms of cultural authentication.

In order to achieve an integrated approach to the belly dance community in the United States, I conducted participant observation at three levels of involvement: Passive, Moderate, and Active (Spradley, 1980).

Passive Participation

Passive participation is achieved when the researcher is "present at the scene of action, but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent" (Spradley, 1980, p. 59). I conducted passive participation by subscribing to the belly

dance computer mailing list (MEDance) for ten months and by collecting and examining vendor catalogues and belly dance costume books. I was able to formulate initial impressions about the nature of the belly dance community by observing the dialogue among dancers; acquaint myself with well-known dancers and musicians; identify important issues and trends in the belly dance community; and discover costume styles, materials, manufacturers, and prices. Because of the tremendous volume of messages the list serve generates (usually between 20 and 30 messages per day), I only saved, printed, and indexed by theme, messages for the month of October 1997 (about 275 messages). During this month, I read every message and I saved all messages *except* those which focused purely on technical aspects of movements and instruments (such as how to tune finger cymbals or suggestions for warm-up exercises), notices for performances and workshops outside of Oregon, and minor performance tips (such as suggestions for how to pin a wig securely or how to conceal blemishes). These computer mailing list messages served as field notes; they are verbatim recordings of dialogue among dancers within the belly dance community.

Moderate Participation

Moderate participation is achieved when the researcher “seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participant and observation” (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). I conducted moderate participant observation by attending several belly dance performances in Corvallis, Oregon and an annual international belly dance festival, called Rakassah, in San Francisco, and by visiting dancers’ web-sites. In these

settings, I was a participating audience member observing dancers and their costumes. I recorded the venue of the performances, the styles of dancers' costumes, and audience reactions. This level of participation allowed me to observe how belly dancers presented themselves to audiences.

Active Participation

Active participation is achieved when the researcher "seeks to do what other people are doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules for behavior" (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). I conducted active participant observation by taking belly dance classes sponsored by the local community college (Linn-Benton Community College). The beginning and intermediate level classes were extremely useful to acquire personal understanding of belly dance. The classes met once-per-week for two hours at a time. I had three teachers: two have been belly dancing for 25 years or more and the other was the daughter of one of the aforementioned instructors (she proudly stated that she began dancing when she was in-utero - 19 years ago). This level of participation allowed me to experience learning and performing belly dance and it enabled me to understand performance standards and the camaraderie among dancers. I was also able to experience the reactions of non-belly dancers when I revealed to them I was learning to belly dance. I noted the instructors' and students' appearances, course structures, "right" moves vs. "wrong" moves, general level of student enthusiasm and participation, and student reactions to the courses. I spoke informally with students and instructors about why they

decided to belly dance, what their dance ambitions were, and where they acquired their dance attire.

Reliability and Validity

Kirk and Miller (1986) asserted that “The contemporary search for reliability in qualitative observation revolves around detailing the relevant context of observation” (p. 52). These authors stated that the best way to accomplish reliability in qualitative observation is to maintain detailed field notes and record questions. Field notes for this study took many forms. I maintained what Spradley (1980) called a “fieldwork journal” (p. 71). Spradley stated, “Like a diary, this journal will contain a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork” (p. 71). In addition to the fieldwork journal, I collected and indexed messages posted on the belly dance computer mailing list. These messages served as a type of field note because they are verbatim recordings of dialogue among members of the belly dance community. These messages were essential for my research because I did not have the opportunity to record any substantial dialogue among belly dancers as an audience member attending performances or as a student attending dance classes. I also photographed belly dancers and costume vendors when I attended Rakassah. These photographs served as a visual record of performances and various costume styles.

As a final check for the reliability of the research methods employed in this study and the validity of my description of contemporary belly dance costume, I shared my written description of contemporary American belly dance costume with ten belly dancers

(four local dancers and six dancers from around the United States) (Appendix B) and a provided the dancers with a questionnaire (Appendix C) requesting their written comments. The dancers overwhelmingly agreed with my definitions of contemporary belly dance costume, and they affirmed my use of the term “belly dance.” Finally, these dancers’ articulated reasons for belly dancing corresponded with my conclusions about why Americans belly dance.

Analysis

The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether the development of belly dance costume in the United States is an example of cultural authentication. This purpose was partially accomplished by conducting field research of the belly dance community in the United States over a period of ten months in order to familiarize myself with the belly dance community and to identify major styles of belly dance costume in the United States. As I stated previously, Eicher and Erekosima (1980) proposed cultural authentication after they also conducted, as an insider/outsider team, field research of the Kalabari. Other researchers who have used cultural authentication have not conducted field research. For example, Pannabecker (1988) and Arthur (1997) examined historic artifacts and documents, Kim and DeLong (1992) and Mead and Pedersen (1995) performed content analysis of popular periodicals, and Steiner (1994) reviewed previous scholarly research in order to gather data which he then analyzed in terms of the four steps of cultural authentication. In all cases, the scholars, including Eicher and Erekosima, have not stated how they analyzed their data to determine whether or not the

four steps of cultural authentication occurred and whether they occurred in the order of SCIT. My solution to this methodological problem was to devise a series of questions which guided my research and analysis of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication. These questions are as follows:

1. What dance and associated costume was borrowed? (Selection)
2. Was the borrowed dance and associated costume named, what was the name, and does the name signify acceptance of the dance and associated costume by Americans? (Characterization).
3. Did characterization occur after selection?
4. What kind of role does the borrowed dance and associated costume occupy in America? (Incorporation)
5. Did incorporation occur after selection and characterization?
6. Were changes made to the borrowed dance and associated costume, what were the changes, and did they reflect American cultural identity? (Transformation)
7. Did transformation occur after selection, characterization, and incorporation?

The first step of cultural authentication is selection. Selection, as defined by Eicher and Erekosima (1995) is “when a particular external cultural practice or product is *selected* as appropriate and desirable by members of another culture out of an almost unlimited number of other cultural options or offerings” (p. 145). A complete description

of the borrowed artifact before it was borrowed is necessary in order to determine whether the borrowing culture subsequently altered the artifact. Therefore, the question **“What dance and associated costume was borrowed?”** is relevant to the analysis of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication. In order to answer this question, I conducted a review of previous scholarship on the history of belly dance and its associated costume to determine what was borrowed and when. I also recorded contemporary dancers’ articulated sources of dance and costume inspiration.

The second step of cultural authentication is characterization. Characterization occurs when:

..the selected item is *characterized* in some symbolic form within the meaning reference-frame of the receiving society. The item may be renamed by members of the culture, in their own language, choosing the item or process or translating in any other expressive form into the mapping system of order by which members of the culture conceptually define or iconically portray their experiences and artifacts (Eicher and Erekosima, 1995, p. 145).

Additionally, because Erekosima and Eicher (1981) concluded that the popularity of an imported textile among the Kalabari increased after the textile was named, the characterization step is a benchmark for the culture’s acceptance of the artifact.

Therefore, the question **“Was the borrowed dance and associated costume named, what was the name, and does the name signify acceptance of the dance and associated costume by Americans?”** is relevant to the analysis of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication. In order to address this three-part question, I first recorded all of the names used by Americans to signify the variety of dance and associated costume styles performed and worn by American dancers who claim inspiration from the

geographical area historically encompassed by the Ottoman Empire and commonly referred to by Americans as the Near and Middle East. The various dance styles share a common feature: articulated pelvic movements which are accentuated by controlled movements of the arms and upper torso. I then determined whether the names used by dancers have been integrated into the English language, and when, by consulting *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Burchfield, 1972; Murry, Craige, & Onions, 1933; Simpson & Weiner, 1989). In order to identify whether the dance has been accepted by Americans, I examined whether a description of the dance is contained within encyclopedias of dance (Chujoy, 1949; Chujoy & Manchester, 1967; Clark & Vaughn, 1977; Cohen, 1998). I also examined whether dance departments within American colleges and universities offer courses for the dance by searching the most recent *Dance Directory* (Bonbright, 1997).

Some of the scholars who have used cultural authentication have found evidence for the four steps, but they determined that the four steps did not occur in the order of SCIT. In order to answer the question “**Did characterization occur after selection?**”, I first attempted to identify the date that Americans first selected the dance and associated costume. Then, I attempted to compare this date to the dates that the names of the dance first appeared in print and in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Burchfield, 1972; Murry, Craige, & Onions, 1933; Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

The third step of cultural authentication is incorporation. In 1995, Eicher and Erekosima stated incorporation occurs when “the innovation occupies some functional role within the receiving cultural system by being *incorporated* toward meeting some adaptation need in the society, at either individual or collective levels, and often at both” (p. 145). According to this definition, the borrowed artifact is incorporated when it

becomes a part of a role within the borrowing culture. Additionally, the borrowed artifact is incorporated in order to meet an “adaptation need.” The question **“What kind of role does the borrowed dance and associated costume occupy in America?”** directly addresses the step of incorporation and is relevant to the analysis of belly dance and its associated costume in terms of cultural authentication. I identified the role, or function, of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States by recording the articulated reasons why Americans belly dance.

In order to answer the question **“Did incorporation occur after selection and characterization?”**, I first attempted to identify the approximate date when the primary role (function) belly dance and its associated costume occupied in America was first articulated. I then attempted to compare this date to the dates when Americans first borrowed, and then named, the dance and associated costume. I accomplished this through reviewing previous historical belly dance research.

The last step of cultural authentication is transformation. In 1995 Eicher and Ereksomá stated that transformation occurs “when the adopted artifact or practice (which may initially have been foreign or else from another generation or other segment of the same society) is *transformed* in itself. This entails an accommodation of its old form and purpose to the new setting in a holistic way. The outcome of this final phase invariably involves a creative or artistic change that envelops the product and setting” (p. 145). The question **“Were changes made to the borrowed dance and associated costume, what were the changes, and did they reflect American cultural identity?”** addresses the step of transformation and is therefore relevant to the analysis of belly dance and its associated costume in terms of cultural authentication. I compared major styles of belly

dance and its associated costume as displayed by Americans to the dance and costume that was borrowed by Americans. I then analyzed the differences in the dance and costume as displayed by Americans to determine if the differences are reflective of American cultural identity and values as delineated by scholars of American culture.

Finally, in order to answer the question **“Did transformation occur after selection, characterization, and incorporation?”**, I attempted to identify an approximate date when changes were first made to the dance and associated costume in order to reflect American cultural identity. I accomplished this through reviewing previous historical belly dance research. I then attempted to compared this date to the dates when the dance and associated costume were borrowed and named, and when the functions of the belly dancer were first articulated.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the development of belly dance costume in the United States is an example of cultural authentication. My investigation consisted of conducting field research of the belly dance community in the United States over a period of ten months in order to learn the history of belly dance, familiarize myself with the belly dance community, and to identify major styles of belly dance costume in the United States. I also devised a series of questions that guided my research and analysis of belly dance costume in terms of cultural authentication (see page 33). This chapter contains my descriptions of popular belly dance costume styles and the results of my analysis of belly dance and belly dance costume in the United States in terms of cultural authentication.

Costume Descriptions

Belly dance costume in the United States today can be classified as replicated or creatively interpreted. I define replicated costume styles as costumes that are copies of documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups at some time within the areas now currently referred to as the Near and Middle East. The dancer who wears replicated costume styles believes he/she is imitating, to the best of his/her ability, a specific ethnic costume, at a specific time, within the areas of the Near and Middle East. I define creatively interpreted costume styles as costumes that deviate from documented styles of

dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East. The degree of deviation can be moderate to radical. The dancer who wears creatively interpreted costume styles believes that while he/she has been inspired by documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East, his/her costume is particularly reflective of his/her unique personality and aesthetic preferences.

While there is tremendous diversity within each of these two classifications, the classifications are useful to describe the general orientations of belly dancers in the United States. Furthermore, although these categories of costume styles are very different, belly dancers in the United States, regardless of their dance and costume orientation, share some commonalities. Issues such as legitimacy, artistic expression, and quality of presentation are constantly being negotiated within the belly dance community. There are certain issues, however, that are unique to each of these two costume orientations. Dancers who wear replicated costumes are primarily concerned with issues such as authenticity², respect for the ethnic groups they are imitating, and the preservation of ethnic traditions. Dancers who wear creatively interpreted costumes are primarily concerned with issues such as innovation and disclosure of creative intent.

Replicated Costume Styles

A dancer who wears replicated costume styles believes that he/she is imitating, to the best of his/her ability, a documented style of dress worn by a specific ethnic group, at

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For the purposes of this discussion, “authenticity” is defined as the degree to which the dancer adheres to a documented dance and corresponding costume originating from the areas now referred to as the Near and Middle East.

a specific time, within the areas of the Near and Middle East (Appendix D). Dancers who have this kind of costume orientation usually are also imitating documented dance movements. Dancers describe this kind of orientation using words such as, “folk,” “traditional,” “ethnic,” “historically accurate,” and “period correct.” Numerous different ethnic groups are replicated, however some of the most frequently replicated are the *Ghawazee* and *Almée* of Egypt, and the *Ouled Nail* of Algeria. Venues for the performance of belly dance with this type of orientation include belly dance festivals, cultural appreciation events, meetings of the Society for Creative Anachronism, and renaissance fairs.

Dancers with this kind of costume orientation consult a variety of reference materials before purchasing or creating a costume. Sources of information include historic photographs, drawings and paintings, folk costume books, historic written accounts of costume, archeological records, personal travel experiences, and personal interaction with members of the culture the dancer seeks to replicate.

There is a wide variety of costumes within the broad category of replicated costume styles. Some of the most popular costumes include the similarly styled *Ghawazee* coat and the Turkish coat (*anteri*), the *kaftan*, and the *Choli* blouse. It should be mentioned that dancers with this kind of costume orientation also replicate accessories and make-up. For example, dancers may paint their hands with henna, tattoo themselves with tribal symbols, and/or wear replicated jewelry and headdresses.

Dancers who wear replicated costumes are primarily concerned with issues such as authenticity, respect for the ethnic groups they are imitating, and the preservation of ethnic traditions. The degree of authenticity achieved by a dancer is determined by how

strongly the dancer adheres to a documented dance and corresponding costume which the dancer is trying to replicate. These dancers are not only concerned with maintaining the authenticity of costume styles, but they are concerned with accurately and respectfully presenting to their audiences the ethnic group they are imitating. These dancers also feel that their most important function is to preserve the traditions of the ethnic group they are replicating. It must be emphasized, however, that whether these dancers achieve these goals is open to interpretation.

Creatively Interpreted Costume Styles

Creatively interpreted costumes styles are defined as styles which deviate from documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East. The dancer who wears creatively interpreted costume styles believes that while he/she has been inspired by documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East, his/her costume is particularly reflective of his/her unique personality and aesthetic preferences. There are three primary styles of costumes that fall within this type of costume orientation. These styles are “cabaret,” “fantasy ethnic,” and “conceptual” costume.

Cabaret costume, also known as *bedleh*, is the most common form of belly dance costume (Appendix E). It usually consists of a bra-top embellished with coins, sequins, and/or jewels and a diaphanous skirt held at the hipline with a matching embellished belt. The dancer’s midriff is usually visible and often the costume includes a veil (or veils) tucked into the skirt. The skirt, which is sometimes multi-layered, is usually made of

several yards of a sheer fabric such as polyester chiffon. Sometimes dancers will wear “harem pants” (hip-hugging, full-legged pants which are gathered tightly at the ankle) under their skirt. The veil(s) are usually made of sheer, metallic, or shimmery fabrics. The surface of the belt usually has embellishment that matches the surface embellishment of the bra-top. Additionally, the belt may have chains of coins, paillettes (large flat sequins with the hole placed at one edge), beaded fringe and/or tassels. The primary purpose of the belt is to accentuate hip movement: the belt creates a strong horizontal line at the hip and the embellishment makes noise and/or catches the light as the dancer moves. Cabaret costume may also consist of a one-piece tunic-like dress, belted around the hips, often with one or two thigh-high slits. This particular style of cabaret costume is called *beledi*. The catalogue for Scheherezade Imports (1997), a vendor of *beledi* costumes, stated that their *beledi* costume is, “Very flashy - a great Beledi Dress for the full figured dancer or for a performance where you have to be very modestly dressed but glitzy” (p. 16).

Cabaret costume is a deviation from costume worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East. Some scholars believe that cabaret costume was invented by Western fantasies of the Orient (Buonaventura, 1989; Sellers-Young, 1992), while others believe it originates from costume styles of the Indian Nautch dancers (Wood & Shay, 1976). Regardless, cabaret costume was perpetuated in the West and in the countries in the Near and Middle East in the twentieth century by the forces of Western mass media and colonialism. Today, cabaret costume is worn by belly dancers all over the world. Dancers who wear cabaret costume consult a variety of reference materials before purchasing or creating a costume. Sources of inspiration include live or

videotaped performances, Hollywood films and television, belly dance paraphernalia vendors, costume books, personal travel, web-sites, and belly dance related publications.

Fantasy ethnic is another form of creatively interpreted belly dance costume (Appendix F). Fantasy ethnic costume is inspired by, and/or contains elements of, the costume and adornment of a variety of ethnic groups, at a variety of times, within the areas of the Near and Middle East. One fantasy ethnic costume may contain elements of dress and adornment drawn from multiple cultures. Additionally, because the costume is the dancer's fantasy, fantasy ethnic costume is both individualistic and expressive of the wearer's cultural interests. Dancers refer to fantasy ethnic costume with such terms as "tribal," "gypsy," "fusion," "non-traditional," and "period inspired."

Typical fantasy ethnic costumes, if there are such things, usually consist of many layers of garments that cover the entire body. For example, dancers may wear a long-sleeved blouse, vest, full legged pants, a coat, and head covering. The fabrics used are usually dull-finished cottons or linens. Not all fantasy ethnic costumes are designed to cover the entire body. Some fantasy ethnic costumes will combine a *choli*, or another vest-like top, with a very full, and often tiered, skirt worn at the hipline. In this case, the midriff of the dancer is visible. Dancers also commonly wear an abundance of heavy antique-looking jewelry and turban-like headdresses; often sport tattoos, face-paint, and/or body piercings; and nearly always dance barefoot. Dancers with this kind of costume orientation consult a variety of reference materials before purchasing or creating a costume. Sources of information include historic photographs, drawings and paintings, folk costume books, historic written accounts of costume, archeological finds, travel experiences, live or videotaped performances of other fantasy ethnic dancers (such as the

troupe FatChanceBellyDance), belly dance paraphernalia vendors, costume books, web-sites, and belly dance related publications.

Conceptual costume is very individualistic and is usually expressive of a dancer's spiritual connection to belly dance. Belly dancers use terms such as "goddess dancing" and "earth dancing" to describe this type of orientation to belly dance and belly dance costume. Dancers with this orientation often link belly dancing to ancient fertility rites, birth rituals, and the worship of female deities. "The dance is thought to celebrate the feminine principle rather than express an ethnic identity or provide an entertaining performance" (Forner, 1993, p. 18). For example, Daniela Gioseffi, in her book, *Earth Dancing* (1991), stated that "earth dancing" is a form of belly dance and "can be a means of earth homage and communion with the inner life, as well as a therapeutic improvisation for the healthy adjustment of mind and body to the sedentary rigors of contemporary life" (p. 17). The dancer Delilah urges dancers to "Explore the connections between the Bellydancer, the Mermaid, and the Muses within" (Delilah's Special Summer Belly Dance Retreat, 1998) (Appendix G).

Conceptual costume may consist of numerous symbolic components, or it may be a simple one-piece wrap. Gioseffi (1991) encouraged students of the earth dance to "be as imaginative and individualistic" as they like (p.180). She stated, "There are many other costume possibilities [other than cabaret], classic Greek robes and draped togas, diaphanous pantaloons, Egyptian *abas* (sleeveless, beltless gowns), Indian *saris*, Renaissance gowns with large scarves tied around the hips (p. 182).

Dancers who have the creative interpretational orientation to belly dance and costume also have a tremendous variety of diverse approaches to belly dance. However,

dancers with this orientation share a common interest in issues such as innovation and disclosure of creative intent. Dancers with this orientation to costume may follow current trends in costume styles, materials, and colors or they may modify current trends to create a new, innovative styles. These dancers feel a sense of freedom to create a costume that is expressive of their individual personalities and performance purposes. Dancers may feel a deep connection to a particular ethnic group within the areas of the Near and Middle East, but they do not attempt to exactly replicate the dance and costume of that group. Instead, they may attempt to replicate “the spirit” of the Near and Middle East; they are fulfilled by creating a personal interpretation of belly dance. These dancers often discuss the need to inform their audiences of their creative intent in order to avoid confusion or offense. There are dancers who engage in creative interpretation of belly dance and costume and do not disclose this to their audiences. However, there are many dancers who believe that disclosure is essential to legitimize belly dance in the United States.

Costume Sources

Dancers can purchase both replicated and creatively interpreted costume styles ready-made from American costumers or through vendors who import costumes made abroad. An informal survey of costumes offered for sale at Rakassah revealed that most of the imported costumes are manufactured in Egypt (I frequently saw the brands “Pharones of Egypt” and “Pharaoh’s Treasures”). However, there were also many scarves for sale at Rakassah which were manufactured in Japan. The cost of ready-made

costumes can be expensive, however. Full cabaret style costumes were priced from \$500 to \$900 at Rakassah.

Dancers also frequently make their own costumes. Dawn Devine Brown and Barry Brown's *Costuming from the Hip* (1997) and Zafira Aradoon's *The Belly Dance Costume Book* (1978) are two examples of belly dance costume manuals. Dancers can purchase belly dance costume patterns (Atira's Fashions is one brand), fabrics, and embellishment materials through vendors of belly dance paraphernalia (for example, Artemis Imports, Scheherezade Imports, and Sugar Petals) or through local fabric and craft stores. Some dancers recycle garments, curtains, and accessories found in used clothing stores into belly dance costumes. Dancers may also buy and sell used costumes at belly dance festivals and through the belly dance computer mailing list (MEDance list-serve).

Summary

The belly dance costume is one of the primary indicators of a dancer's orientation to belly dance, and it is a topic of much discussion among belly dancers. While there is a tremendous variety of belly dance costume styles in the United States, costumes can be classified as either replicated or creatively interpreted. A dancer who wears replicated costume styles believes that he/she is imitating, to the best of his/her ability, a documented style of dress worn by a specific ethnic group, at a specific time, within the areas of the Near and Middle East. Dancers with this orientation are concerned with such issues as authenticity, respect for the ethnic groups they are imitating, and the

preservation of ethnic traditions. The dancer who wears creatively interpreted costume styles believes that while he/she has been inspired by documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East, his/her costume is particularly reflective of his/her unique personality and aesthetic preferences. Dancers who wear creatively interpreted costumes are primarily concerned with issues such as innovation and disclosure. Dancers find inspiration for their costumes from a wide variety of sources and dancers can purchase their costumes ready-made, they can make their costumes themselves, or purchase custom-made costumes.

Belly Dance - An Example of Cultural Authentication?

My analysis of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication was guided by a series of seven questions (see page 37). The following section of this chapter presents the answers to these questions and thereby the results of my analysis of belly dance and its associated costume in terms of cultural authentication.

Selection

1. What dance and associated costume was borrowed?

The first step of cultural authentication is selection. Selection, as defined by Eicher and Ereksom (1995) occurs “when a particular external cultural practice or product is *selected* as appropriate and desirable by members of another culture out of an almost unlimited number of other options or offerings” (p. 145). Defining what, when,

and from whom the “external cultural practice or product” was selected is necessary in order to determine whether the borrowing culture altered the practice or product after selecting it. Therefore, the question **“What dance and associated costume was borrowed?”** is relevant to the study of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication.

In order to answer this question, a point of departure must be identified, that is, a description of the cultural practice or product before it was borrowed. Anthropologists refer to this “point of departure” as the cultural baseline. The *Dictionary of Anthropology* (Seymour-Smith, 1976) defined the cultural baseline as “the description of two cultures as they were before they came into contact with each other. This baseline is important in order to assess the impact that the contact has had” (p. 61). Defining the point of departure, or “artifact baseline,” in a cultural authentication study is problematic because the writings on cultural authentication do not contain discussions of whether selection of a cultural practice or product can only be said to have occurred historically (assuming it is possible to identify the culture’s first exposure to the artifact in question) or whether selection also occurs contemporarily every time a member of the borrowing culture borrows the practice or product in question.

Historically, there are difficulties in determining exactly when and from whom Americans selected the dance that is now known as belly dance. For example, Wood and Shay (1976) believe belly dance is of Egyptian origin (p. 19). However, they conceded that belly dance was most notably exported to foreign countries by Algerian dancers during the Paris International Exhibit of 1889, the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit of 1876 and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 (p. 20). Unfortunately, there is very little, if any, substantial research on the ancient origins of belly dance. I

believe this is due, in part, to the intangible nature of dance. Also, the Near and Middle East has been a hub of trade for thousands of years, and it is an area of intense political conflict which has resulted in blurry borders. In short, it may be impossible to tease-out the distinct origin of belly dance within the Near and Middle East because this is an area which is, and has been, a “melting pot” since the dawn of human civilization. Seymour-Smith (1976) acknowledged the difficulties in defining a cultural baseline (or, in this case, an artifact baseline). She stated that it is “too static a concept as it leads us to assume that there is a traditional and unchanging pre-contact culture which may be regarded as a fixed and stable system before it came into contact with another culture. In reality, the phenomena of contact between cultures and the resulting transformations are so common and constant that it would be impossible to conceive of any meaningful cultural baseline in most ethnographic areas of the world” (p. 61).

For simplicity’s sake, it is tempting to agree with Wood and Shay’s (1976) conclusion that Americans were first introduced to belly dance and its associated costume via the much documented performances at the World’s Fairs in Philadelphia and Chicago in the late 19th century. However, Salem (1995) believes images of Arab dancers were circulated widely in America well before the World’s Fairs, and one need only examine historic Western dress to understand some of the influences the Near, Middle, and Far East have had on Western dress – particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. Therefore, while the performances at the World’s Fairs are an important milestone in the history of belly dance in the United States, they were not without their own history. Indeed, the fact that the dancers were invited to perform in the United States at the fairs is a good indication that the dance was already known to Americans. However, the World’s Fairs

are significant because there does not appear to be any record of Americans performing belly dance before the World's Fairs. It seems that the performances by native Near and Middle Eastern dancers at the World's Fairs may have first inspired Americans to try performing the dance themselves.

Contemporarily, Americans are exposed to a broad range of belly dance styles and costumes through performances at Middle Eastern restaurants, "belly grams," (festive performance telegrams delivered by belly dancers) cultural events, and, occasionally, performances in films and on television. Additionally, belly dance classes (some including costume design instruction) are offered in many community recreational centers or dance studios throughout the United States (Sellers-Young, 1992). While the belly dance movements are somewhat consistent from performance to performance and from class to class, there is tremendous variation in belly dance costume. If selection of belly dance occurs contemporarily (as well as having occurred historically) every time an American sees belly dance or begins to belly dance him/herself, then a description of what is selected becomes complicated indeed. Dancers find inspiration for their costumes from many sources, including historical paintings, contemporary videos of performers from all areas of the Near and Middle East (primarily Egypt, however videos of dancers in Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco are also common) and the United States, Hollywood films, belly dance costume books, and personal interests that may be totally unrelated to the Near and Middle East. For example, a dancer named "Julia" is pictured in the book *The Costume Maker's Art* wearing a costume with Native American bead and feather work (Boswell, 1992, p. 110). Additionally, belly dancers may purchase costumes made by Americans while others are imported from Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, India, and even

Japan. Is it clear that American dancers have borrowed *something*; however, it is impossible to pin-point exactly *what* was borrowed on a large contemporary cultural scale, for the answer is different from dancer to dancer.

The difficulty of accurately identifying a baseline and the fact that Americans observed the dance (or knew of the dance and costume) before they performed the dance themselves (historically and contemporarily) leads to confusion as to exactly what dance and associated costume was borrowed and when. Perhaps the level of selection in this case has multiple sub-levels including the point when Americans were historically exposed to the dance and associated costume and the myriad of subsequent individual appropriations of the dance. Within these sub-levels, selection seems to occur at 1) the point in time when Americans merely observe(d) the dance and costume (through reading written descriptions, looking at published images, and/or observing as audience members) and 2) the point in time when Americans begin/began performing the dance and wearing the costumes themselves. Sub-levels of exposure and acquisition can be discerned in other cultural authentication studies as well. For example, Arthur (1997), in her study of the Hawaiian *holokū*, found that members of the Hawaiian royalty substituted Western textiles for *kapa* cloth for their traditional wrapped garments (the *malo* and the *pa'u*) before they actually started using Western textiles to make the Western-styled garment called the *holokū*. In this example, has selection of the *holokū* occurred, as Arthur asserted, when the Hawaiians first wore the *holokū*, or when the Hawaiians first acquired Western textiles – or at both times to different degrees?

Despite when selection actually occurs, it is important to note that the selection process is discriminating. Eicher and Erekosima (1995) stated that selection occurs when

the artifact “is selected as appropriate and desirable....out of an almost unlimited number of other cultural options or offerings” (p. 145). In other words, Americans have been choosy about what they have borrowed from the Near and Middle East. This concept became quite clear to me when I attended a Christmas party given by my belly dance instructor for her students. The evening was filled with Near and Middle Eastern music and belly dance and the students were dressed in their belly dance costumes. Each student was asked to bring a small snack to share with the others. I brought a box of Turkish candy (introduced to me by my Greek husband). The candy, called *loukoumia* in Greek, is sometimes called “Turkish Delight” in English. Nobody ate my candy, whereas a bag of Fritos® (a Mexican-styled snack-food) was practically inhaled. This is just a small example; however, it effectively demonstrates how Americans selectively embrace aspects of other cultures. On a larger scale, it is obvious that American dancers have not chosen to adopt Islam and the social rules that surround Islamic women. For example, belly dance that is performed in Egypt by women for women in the private sphere of the home is considered socially acceptable whereas public performance of belly dance is considered to be unacceptable and shameful behavior for polite women (Van Nieuwkerk, 1995). The social rule of polite women dancing at home, in private, for other women, has not been embraced by Americans. In fact, an American belly dancer’s proudest moment is her first public performance.

The reasons why Americans have chosen to borrow some aspects of Near and Middle Eastern culture and have eschewed others is a topic worthy of exploration. Certainly Americans, and Westerners in general, have harbored fantasies about the Orient for quite some time. Discovering why this is so would serve to reveal much about

American culture. Unfortunately, this is a topic that is beyond the immediate scope of this thesis. It suffices to say that the selection process is culturally revealing. That is, patterns of borrowing can reveal preferences of the borrowing culture. Furthermore, it is my belief that a lending culture can and does identify patterns of choice and may eventually cater to borrowing cultures' preferences. For example, the costumes of the Algerian dancers at the Chicago fair in 1893 consisted of ankle-length full skirts or trousers, undershirts, and waistcoats (Buonaventura, 1989; Ritchie, 1997; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995). Stone (1991) found that these costumes and those of the early American fair and carnival dancers strongly resembled the costumes of the public dancers of Egypt (called the *Ghawazi*). However, in the early 20th century, Egyptian belly dancers in Egypt, who wished to be popular among Western tourists, wore costumes similar to the style of costumes American dancers wore in Hollywood films (Van Nieuwkerk, 1995, p. 42). This Hollywood style costume consisted of a bra-like bodice, a bare midriff, a diaphanous skirt, and veils. Similarly, Wood and Shay (1976) concluded that Egyptian dancers adopted this style of costume in order to be popular among English soldiers (when Egypt was an English Protectorate) who were accustomed to seeing this type of costume on the *Nautchnee* dancers in India (p. 24).

These findings have led me to conclude that the development of belly dance and belly dance costume is a result of dynamic mutual exchange between East and West, and it is therefore not possible to accurately pin-point a time when the costume was without influence from the other. While Americans have clearly borrowed the dance and associated costume, they have also contributed to its evolution in the lending cultures. Therefore, what exactly Americans borrowed as a group cannot be conclusively

identified. Additionally, because of the difficulty in identifying the artifact baseline, I also can not identify when Americans borrowed belly dance and its associated costume.

Characterization

2. *“Was the borrowed dance named, what was the name, and does the name signify acceptance of the dance and associated costume by Americans?”*

The second step of cultural authentication is characterization. Characterization, as defined by Eicher and Erekosima (1995), occurs when

....the selected item is *characterized* in some symbolic form within the meaning reference-frame of the receiving society. The item may be renamed by member of the culture, in their own language, choosing the item or process or translating in any other expressive form into the mapping system of order by which members of the culture conceptually define or iconically portray their experiences and artifacts (p. 145).

Additionally, because Erekosima and Eicher (1981) concluded that the naming of an imported textile increased its popularity among the Kalabari, the characterization level is a benchmark for the acceptance of the artifact.

In order to answer the question **“Was the borrowed dance named, what was the name, and does the name signify acceptance of the dance and associated costume by Americans?”**, a generally accepted name for this dance must first be identified. As stated previously (page 21), various terms have been used to signify this type of dance including, but not limited to, “belly dance,” *danse du ventre*, “hootchy-kootchy,” Oriental dance, *danse Orientale*, *raqs al-sharki*, *raqs al-baladi*, *cifte telli*, “Middle Eastern dance,”

(Aradoon, 1979; Berger, 1961; Buonaventura, 1983, 1989; Forner, 1993; Monty, 1986; Ritchie, 1997; Sellers-Young, 1992; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995; Wood & Shay, 1976), “earth dance” (Gioseffi, 1991), and “goddess dance” (“Jamie Miller/Sabah”, 1998).

Some scholars of the dance believe the first name that was used by Americans to describe this type of dance was *danse du ventre* - the name given to the dance by the French (Buonaventura, 1989; Carlton, 1994; Monty, 1986). *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) stated that the first written use of this term was in Paris in 1899, and the first written use of the term “belly dance” (the direct translation of *danse du ventre*) was in the United States in 1943 (p. 95) although the term “belly dance” did not appear in *The Oxford English Dictionary* until 1972 (Burchfield, 1972). However, some scholars have stated that the term *danse du ventre* was in use well before 1899. Additionally, these scholars have stated that this term was translated into the English term “belly dance” by Sol Bloom, an American visitor to the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1889 where there were performances by Near and Middle Eastern dancers, and the most notable promoter of Egyptian and Algerian dancers at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893 (Carlton, 1994; Monty, 1986). Buonaventura (1983), on the other hand, stated that American servicemen stationed in Egypt at the end of the 19th century are responsible for the translation.

Other scholars have stated that early travelers to the Orient used the term “Oriental dance” or *danse Orientale* to describe the dance (Stone, 1991; Wood & Shay, 1976). Stone (1991) theorized, “If the local dance was performed in cafes frequented by Westerners, for whom it was the only example of local dance and who would pay for entertainment, one could see how the term might have developed. In essence, they may

have simply been calling it ‘Oriental Dance’ the way the food might be called ‘Oriental food,’ ‘Oriental’ being equivalent of the possessive ‘their.’ Their dance” (p. 40). Wood and Shay (1976) stated:

Travelers who have written about this dance offer no encapsulated terminology, nor, apparently, was any need felt for a specific name until the “dance of the Orientals,” as it was most commonly called, came under the broader scrutiny attending its emergence as an item of export and exploitation. Terms such as *danse lascive* and *danse voluptueux*, descriptive of the total effect of the performance, or, as in the case of the *Ghawazee*, *Ouled Nail* or *Almees*, appellations designating the class of persons who performed the dance, were replaced, by the end of the century, with the anatomically descriptive terms in common use today (p. 23).

“Oriental dance” is also the literal English translation of the Arabic term *raqs al-sharki*. However, Stone (1991) believes that the French term, *danse Orientale*, and the English term, “Oriental dance”, actually predate the Arabic term. She stated, “In Arabic, the professional dance is called ‘raqs Sharqi’ meaning Eastern or Oriental dance. The non-professional dance is called ‘raqs baladi’ meaning dance of the people, village, or countryside. There is a strong possibility that the dance originally existed only as rraqs baladi, before European colonization, before there was a recognized professional context for the dance” (p. 33-34). The term “Oriental dance” is not contained within *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

The first written use of the term “hootchy-kootchy,” which first appeared in the 1933 *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* (Murray, Craigie, & Onions, 1933), was in 1890. According to Monty (1986), this term was widely used to describe the dance at the turn of the century (p. 24). Scholars have stated that this term is derived from the

name of a group of dancers in India (Buonaventura, 1989; Stone, 1991). Stone (1991) stated that the term “may derive from a word for a certain type of East Indian dance called ‘Kutch’ or ‘Kotch.’ In similar fashion, dancers from these latter regions were often called ‘nautch dancers’ (actually a term for Indian temple dancers)” (p. 47). Wood and Shay (1976) stated that these dancers were also the primary inspiration for cabaret style belly dance costume.

In the course of my field research of contemporary American belly dancers, I found the most commonly used names to signify this dance were “belly dance,” “Middle Eastern dance,” and “Oriental dance.” Other less commonly used names were *raqs al-sharki* (“dance of the Orient” in Arabic) and *raqs al-baladi* (“dance of the people, or folk” in Arabic). Of all of these most commonly used names, only the term “belly dance” is contained within *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989), and, as stated previously, this term was not incorporated into the dictionary until 1972 (Burchfield, 1972).

Although the dance clearly has been named and two of these names are contained within *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989), “belly dance” and “hootchy-kootchy,” the naming of the dance does not signify acceptance of the dance by Americans. For example, despite the long history of these two terms, neither appear in the 1949 or 1967 *Dance Encyclopedia* (Chujoy, 1949; Chujoy & Manchester, 1967) or the 1977 *Encyclopedia of Dance* (Clark & Vaughn, 1977). And, although “belly dance” can be found in the 1998 *International Encyclopedia of Dance* (Cohen, 1998), none of 603 colleges and universities listed in the 1997-98 *Dance Directory* (Bonbright, 1997) acknowledge courses in “belly dance” or “hootchy-kootchy” (although three offer courses

in “Middle Eastern dance”). Most importantly, belly dancers feel ostracized by the American dance community and by other Americans; they often discuss how they can work to “legitimize” the dance in order to gain respect. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that while the dance has been named, the dance has not been accepted by Americans. Additionally, although Americans may call the dance by familiar terms, Americans are attracted to belly dance because of its exotic and foreign nature. Dancers and audience members alike are compelled by the striking dissimilarities between belly dance (with its associated costume) and the more familiar dance styles such as ballet (see also Buck, 1991).

3. *“Did characterization occur after selection?”*

I cannot conclusively answer the question “**Did characterization occur after selection?**” because I cannot identify what, exactly, was selected and when. Additionally, I cannot conclusively identify the first term used by Americans to describe this dance nor can I conclude that the naming of the dance has indicated acceptance of the dance by Americans. However, hypothetically, it could be said that the American public, as a group, was first exposed, as audience members, to this type of dance at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876. The date that the term “hootchy-kootchy” first appeared in print was 1890, and the date it was first included in *The Oxford English Dictionary* was 1933 (Murray, Craige, & Onions, 1933). Therefore, it could be said that the dance was named after it was selected. However, the first notable American dancer to be influenced by the dance and costume of the Orient, Loie Fuller, first performed her “serpentine

dance” with veils in an 1891 play in Brooklyn, New York (Monty, 1986, p. 171) - one year *after* the term “hootchy-kootchy” first appeared in print. Therefore, if selection occurs at the point of acquisition (when an American first performed the dance and wore associated costume), than the naming of the dance can be said to have occurred *before* selection.

Incorporation

4. *“What kind of role is the borrowed dance and associated costume a component of in America?”*

The third step of cultural authentication is incorporation. In 1995, Eicher and Ereksomá stated incorporation occurs when “the innovation occupies some functional role within the receiving cultural system by being *incorporated* toward meeting some adaptation need in the society, at either individual or collective levels, and often at both” (p. 145). The borrowed artifact is incorporated when it becomes part of a role within the borrowing culture. Additionally, the borrowed artifact is incorporated in order to meet an adaptive need. In order to answer the question **“What kind of role is the borrowed dance and associated costume a component of in America?”** I recorded American dancers’ articulated reasons for why they belly dance. However, this proved to be problematic because belly dance, as a method of non-verbal communication, is difficult for dancers to talk about. When I asked belly dancers why they belly dance, instead of clearly articulating their reasons for dancing, they most often said that they dance in order to express themselves in a way no other medium facilitates. Dancers often describe belly

dance as an art form and say the dance is simply a form of “self-expression” while the dance costume, as an extension of the dance, is an extension of the self-expressing function of the dance. However, my field research of the American belly dance community has led me to conclude that dancers may also dance for other reasons, some of which include the enhancement of self-image, a heightened sense of community, sexual provocation, the reverence and maintenance of tradition, and for the engagement in fantasy play. These findings were also verified by the questionnaire responses I received from dancers.

Self Image

Some Americans belly dance to enhance their self-image. Women who are self-conscious about their non-conformity to American society’s standard of ideal beauty and body shape are welcomed into the belly dance community – dancers declare that belly dance can be done by women of any size, shape, or age and that the act of belly dancing can actually improve self-esteem and self-acceptance. Belly dance can be a gentle or vigorous form of exercise, and it is often taught at community recreation centers. Many women who are preparing for, and recovering from, childbirth belly dance to tone their abdominal muscles and to maintain and restore their sensuality despite the changes in their physical appearance and the stress of motherhood.

Community

Belly dance classes, festivals, and internet sites (see, for example, Cyr, 1998 and Stefan, 1998) offer dancers the opportunity for social interaction with other members of the belly dance community. The sense of community is particularly strong in dance classes. A dancer's classmates are her first audience members, and they offer encouragement, praise, and instruction. Dancers who suffer from shyness and/or are self-conscious about their bodies and their dancing may receive tremendous emotional support from their classmates.

Belly dancers have strengthened and enlarged their community through the use of the internet. Many dancers (from the United States and around the world) have web-sites that can be visited and many of these web-sites are connected in a "web-ring." Additionally, dancers communicate with each other via e-mail, chat-rooms, and a belly dance computer mailing list (MEDance). Many dancers greatly enjoy interacting with the belly dance community, and they dance to maintain and strengthen their ties to it.

Sexual Provocation

Some dancers maximize the erotic nature of the dance and perform with the explicit intent of sexual provocation. Some women belly dance to "feel sexy" or to enhance sexual relations with their partners, while others perform provocative belly grams for bachelor parties and other private engagements. However, it should be noted that the majority of the members of the belly dance community are vehement in their assertions that belly dance is not "strip-tease" dance. For example, the Corvallis Belly

Dance Guild has strict dance and costume regulations that prevent dancers from performing in an overtly sexual manner. All guild dancers must wear pantaloons under their skirts and cover themselves when not performing. Additionally, dancers must have their performances previewed by the Guild before performing publicly (Corvallis Belly Dance Performance Guild, 1998).

Reverence for Tradition

Some dancers dance as part of a personal mission to preserve the traditional dances of the Near and Middle East that they feel are being forgotten due to modernization. For example, the dancer Morocco stated on her web-site, “....I created the Casbah Dance Experience especially to show the varied, fascinating and exciting ethnic dance forms of the Near and Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean to the general public and give ‘a bit of home’ to North Africans and Near and Middle Easterners in the West. I've spent over 37 years trying to find, recover, preserve and present them before they disappear, due to modernization and/or fundamentalism. It's a valuable heritage that must be saved from extinction!” (Morocco, 1997).

There are also some dancers who say that performing belly dance fosters their own personal feelings of connectedness with the people of the Near and Middle East. Additionally, some dancers feel that their performances of belly dance educate Americans about Near and Middle Eastern cultures. Therefore, in this sense, belly dancers feel they serve as ambassadors of Near and Middle Eastern culture.

Fantasy Play

There are also those who belly dance as a way to give life to an alter-self or fantasy-persona; like theater actors, historical reenactors, and clowns, the dancers actually feel as though they are “someone else” when they put their costumes on and belly dance. Dancers also adopt “dance names” to name their fantasy-selves. Dance names are usually, though not always, Arabic, or Americanized Arabic, and have personal meanings to the dancers. Some dancers choose their own names while others are given names by their dance instructors.

Those who belly dance as a method of fantasy play have many opportunities to interact with others who also are engaging in fantasy play. Renaissance Fairs, Haflas (parties for belly dancers and musicians), belly dance festivals such as Rakkasah, and even the belly dance class room, just like a costume ball, are real-life theater-sites where the actors interact with each other through their fantasy personae.

The Role of the Belly Dancer

The fact that there are numerous reasons why Americans belly dance leads me to conclude that the roles, or functions, of the belly dancer in American society are also numerous. According to the reasons that I described above, belly dance and its associated costume in America occupies any or all of the following roles: performance artist, self-image promoter/healer, community member, sexual provoker, tradition bearer, and fantasy player. In addition to these roles, and because the dance and costume are so foreign to American culture, belly dance and its associated costume in America also

clearly occupies the role of “exotic dancer” or “exotic woman.” This role, although superficial when one considers the very personal and serious relationship dancers have with this dance, dominates American society’s perception of belly dancers in the United States and cannot be ignored. According to Tenkotte (1987), this dance has been perceived as exotic since its appearance in America at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit of 1876.

Eicher and Erekosima (1995) stated that the selected and characterized artifact is incorporated because it meets an “adaptive need” of the society which results in the artifact occupying a functional role (p. 145). According to this definition, an adaptive need for the most obvious role, exotic women, fueled the acquisition of belly dance and its associated costume and resulted in belly dance and its associated costume occupying the role of exotic woman or exotic dancer. However, it could be that this role evolved independently of any pre-conceived need and as a direct, perhaps unexpected, *result* of cultural contact. After all, one cannot perceive the exotic without being aware of differences between self and other. Additionally, once aware of the other, donning the mask (or playing the role) of the exotic, or other, is a method of negotiating, in an unthreatening and noncommittal way, issues with the self. Buck, 1991, stated:

Only through the distinct relief cast by contrasting elements, such as light versus dark and noise versus silence, do we perceive either. Dancers who learn ‘exotic’ movement vocabulary may come to understand more about their own cultural movement patterns and assumptions. Movement is connected to our experiences in the world and to our perceptions and understandings of the world. Forbidden or restricted movements in one culture may connote something totally different in another. Modern dance pioneers Duncan, St. Denis, and Graham confronted themselves and their culture’s attitudes about the body and its movements. Greek, Oriental, and African movements offered a vehicle for these dancers to break out of

Victorian constraints that demeaned the body by considering human sexuality and bodily functions as base, shameful, and contemptible...For puritans, prudes, and those deceived by the stigma placed on the dance, danse orientale epitomizes the threat of the sensual body to society. For others who are willing to explore a foreign idiom and their bodies, danse orientale opens doors (p. 99-100).

My field research has led me to conclude that Americans use belly dance and its associated costume to *negotiate* self-image in a society that demands physical perfection from women, place in community when individuals are becoming increasingly isolated, sexuality that has been repressed, tradition within the American throw-away industrialized reality – in short, identity amidst change. Therefore, while it could be said that belly dance and its associated costume does occupy numerous roles within American culture, the primary function of belly dance and its associated costume is that of negotiation, rather than display, of self and culture. The nature of this role is distinctly different from the Kalabari role in which Erekosima and Eicher (1981) placed Western textiles. These authors stated that incorporation of Western textiles among the Kalabari has occurred when the selected and characterized textile is worn to display belonging to “a specific lineage, for example, that of the royal family or an important house” (p. 50). In other words, the Western textiles are incorporated when they are absorbed into an existing Kalabari cultural construct; the Western textiles are not used to negotiate change. Therefore, because belly dance and its associated costume in the United States functions primarily as a medium for the negotiation of identity amidst change, the concept of incorporation inadequately conceptualizes the function of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States.

5. “*Did incorporation occur after selection and characterization?*”

Belly dance has been seen as an exotic dance in America since it was introduced to the American public at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876 (Tenkotte, 1987). Therefore, the role of exotic dancer or exotic woman could be said to be the first role belly dance and its associated costume occupied. If selection occurs at the time of exposure to the dance and costume, then incorporation occurred *after* selection because, presumably, Americans first saw the dance and then judged it as exotic and the performer as an exotic dancer. Additionally, if incorporation occurred in 1876, then incorporation could be said to have occurred *before* characterization because the term “hootchy-kootchy” did not appear in print until 1890.

If, however, selection occurs at the time when an American actually danced the dance and wore the costume, then incorporation occurred *before* selection because, as stated previously, the first American woman to perform a dance that was directly influenced by the dances of the Near and Middle East was Loie Fuller and she first performed her “serpentine dance” with veils in 1891, well after the dance would have been judged as exotic in 1876. In this case, incorporation can be said to have occurred *after* characterization, because the term “hootchy-kootchy” first appeared in print in 1890.

Transformation

6. *“Were changes made to the borrowed dance and associated costume, what were the changes, and did they reflect American cultural identity?”*

The fourth, and final, step of cultural authentication is transformation.

Transformation occurs “when the adopted artifact or practice (which may initially have been foreign or else from another generation or other segment of the same society) is *transformed* in itself. This entails an accommodation of its old form and purpose to the new setting in a holistic way. The outcome of this final phase invariably involves a creative or artistic change that envelops the product and setting” (Eicher & Erekosima, 1995, p. 145). In order to answer the question **“Were changes made to the borrowed dance and associated costume, what were the changes, and did they reflect American cultural identity?”** it is necessary to first describe the dance and costume that was borrowed (in order to determine whether Americans changed it). As stated previously, it is not possible to conclusively identify what has been borrowed due to the dynamic cultural exchange that has existed historically (and contemporarily) between the East and the West. However, for the purpose of discussion, the baseline, or point of departure, could be identified as the dates when the American public, as a group, was first exposed to this dance and associated costume. These dates are, as stated previously, the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893.

A comparison of the major styles of belly dance as performed by Americans to the dance that was performed by the dancers at these fairs reveals that while some American

belly dancers have historically supplemented the rudimentary dance movements with ballet, tap, or other dance movements, the dance itself has continued to be characterized by articulated pelvic movements accentuated by controlled movements of the arms and upper torso. However, a comparison of the major styles of belly dance costume as worn by Americans to the costume that was worn by the dancers at these fairs reveals some dramatic transformations.

The dancers at the fairs were mainly from Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey. The dance and costume of these dancers is preserved in written descriptions, drawings, and photographs. Generally, the costume of these dancers appears to have consisted of long full skirts and/or full pantaloons, a blouse (with long, full sleeves or tight, three-quarter-length sleeves) tucked into the skirt/pantaloons, and a vest worn over the blouse. The dancers are pictured wearing slippers, pill-box-type hats, an abundance of necklaces, bracelets, and rings, and a belt or sash tied around the waist. Some of the dancers also are pictured wearing an overskirt made of numerous strips attached together at the waist (Buonaventura, 1992; Carlton, 1994; Stone, 1991; Ritchie, 1997; Van Nieuwkerk, 1995).

As stated previously, contemporary belly dancers in the United States wear costume styles that can be classified as replicated or creatively interpreted; however, creatively interpreted costume styles are the most popular. These include cabaret (or *bedleh*), fantasy ethnic, and conceptual costume styles.

Cabaret costume, the most popular costume style for contemporary American belly dancers, differs dramatically from the costume worn by the dancers at these fairs. Typical cabaret costume reveals the dancer's midriff, whereas the dancers at these fairs covered their midriffs. Cabaret costume consists of a matching embellished bra-top and

hip belt, while the dancers at these fairs wore a blouse and vest with a waist sash. Cabaret costume is embellished with flashy sequins, beads and fringe; and the fabrics used are sheer, shimmery, and/or metallic, whereas the costumes of the dancers at these fairs were made of dull-finished, opaque, and natural-fiber fabrics. Supplemental jewelry is usually not incorporated into cabaret costume - only the bra and hip-belt are embellished. However, as stated previously, the dancers at these fairs wore quite a lot of heavy jewelry. Finally, veils are an important part of cabaret costume. Dancers often drape themselves in one or more veils and remove them as part of their dance routine. However, none of the photographs I examined of dancers at these fairs pictured dancers with veils.

Scholars have theorized reasons for these startling differences between cabaret costume and the costume of the dancers at these fairs. Stone (1991) hypothesized that the embellished cabaret belt is a mutation of the strip-skirts worn by some of the dancers at these fairs (p. 172-173). Stone also argued that the addition of sequins and rhinestones to cabaret costume in the 1940s and 50s was the result of an intermingling of belly dance and nightclub acts (p. 72).

The addition of veils to cabaret costume is almost certainly due to the various performances of “Salome” (and her dance with the seven veils) at the turn of the century. The performances of Loie Fuller, Ruth St. Denis, and Theda Bara as Salome could have easily influenced the development of cabaret costume. For example, Loie Fuller, who performed as Salome, is famous for her manipulation of veils and electric light (Monty, 1986). Ruth St. Denis, who also performed as Salome and is well-known for her dance-interpretations of the Orient (*Egypta* and *Rhada*, for example), formed the Denishawn School in California and trained dancers to perform belly dance in Hollywood films

(Buonaventura, 1989). Finally, Theda Bara played Salome in the 1918 film *Salome*.

Buonaventura (1989) stated that Bara's costumes in this film, some of which incorporated breastplates with coiled serpents, highly influenced belly dance cabaret costume (p. 138).

Contemporary fantasy ethnic costume and conceptual costume also differ dramatically from the costume worn by dancers at these fairs. Fantasy ethnic and conceptual costumes are individualized eclectic blends of dress and adornment practices from numerous cultures and time periods whereas the costumes worn by dancers at the fairs were said to be representative of dress typically worn by dancers in their own countries.

Clearly, changes have been made to the costume by Americans since the turn of the century; however, are these changes reflective of an American cultural identity or of a set of American values? This question is complicated by the inherently dubious prospect of accurately identifying and describing an "American cultural identity" or a set of "American values." Cultural groups, in general, are becoming less easily defined due to increasing globalization, transnationalism, deterritorialization, and displacement. Indeed, many contemporary anthropologists believe definitions of cultural groups are "more of a narrative device" than empirical truth (Kearney, 1995, p. 556). Instead of studying individuals within "bounded groups" or by using an "either-or" classification system, anthropologists are beginning to study the "both-and-ness" of individuals who share "partial, overlapping identities with other similarly constituted decentered subjects" that inhabit decentered social systems (p. 558).

Banton (1994) concluded that while “culture” may be a convenient term, “it is usually impossible to conceive of cultures as having clear boundaries. It is therefore impracticable to treat them as distinct and finite units that can be counted. Cultures tend to be systems of meaning and custom that are blurred at the edges. Nor are they usually stable. As individuals come to terms with changing circumstances (such as new technology) so they change their ways and shared meanings with them (p. 76-77).”

Spindler’s (1977) study of American college students from 1952-1961 and 1968-1974 revealed that American values are unstable. Spindler hypothesized that traditional American values such as “Puritan morality, the work-success ethic, individualism, achievement, and future-time orientation” were being replaced by “emergent values” such as “sociability, relativistic rather than absolute moral attitudes, consideration for others, present-time orientation, and conformity to the group” (p. 21). He concluded that while students maintained a “stable core of values,” none of the values “remained static during this twenty-two year period.”

Hing (1997) argued that the definition of what it means to be an American is different for different people. He stated, “Recognition of these differences helps develop a respect for other cultures and sets the groundwork for a workable multiracial society....Clinging to a Euro-conformity paradigm of what constitutes an American is simultaneously fruitless and dangerous” (p. 176). Hing justified this statement by adding that immigrants in America “....are indeed Americanized, picking up the habits, cultural traits, values, interests, and languages of the dominant group. However, market forces have also worked in a manner that constantly changes American culture and redefines

what an American is. As immigrants become more ‘American’ due to these market forces, their native cultural traits also influence existing social norms” (p. 176).

The book, *Culture Wars: Opposing Viewpoints*, (Whitehead, Bender, & Leone, 1994), contains numerous scholars’ perspectives on American cultural identity and, as the title indicates, none agree on what the United States is, or should be. Even the *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* (Levinson, 1996) does not have an entry for American culture; instead, it contains entries for 292 distinct cultures that are contained within the borders of the United States.

While I am inclined to admit that American cultural identity cannot be conclusively defined, for the sake of argument I have relied upon the entry for “Americans” contained within The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mankind (Carlisle, 1979) to identify several general cultural characteristics of Americans. According to this source, “Most Americans are (or at least their forefathers were) people who have broken with a rigid or tyrannical past in search of freedom. Their national mentality suggests a sudden release of pent-up forces and consequent pursuit of change almost for its own sake. In particular, this leads to a remarkable degree of social mobility” (p. 63). This source also stated that this “social mobility” may also be disadvantageous for Americans, for it “means that a man born with a low status and who does not improve on it is seen as a failure: American society, so compassionate in many ways, cannot go very far in compassion toward the poor without entering into conflict with itself. Mobility also leads to a certain rootlessness. Anyone can get anywhere, by appropriate efforts, but there is the danger that nobody belongs anywhere” (p. 64).

The fact that “Americans sense that their country is still in the making, its identity is still to be established, its future very much in their hands” has led Americans to be insecure about themselves (Carlisle, 1977, p. 64-65). This insecurity results in a “slightly nervous need to assert the national identity at every point. Americans are very conscious of being American; they make a great deal of their flag and certain of their rituals - notably the Pledge of Allegiance - are taken with starry-eyed seriousness” (p. 65). The patriotism of Americans is “directed toward the thing which basically unites Americans and defines them as such – a celebration of American history, the political and legal framework under which they live, and the associated social and economic traditions” (p. 65).

The mixture of cultural influences in creatively interpreted American belly dance costume could be said to be reflective of America’s ethnic diversity. Personalized costume designs could be said to be reflective of the value in America of individual freedom. The use of flashy embellishments, sheer fabrics, and the exposure of bare midribs could also be said to reflect the American search for freedom, self-expression, and the need to obtain social mobility – fame and fortune. However, I believe it is more probable that the changes Americans have made to belly dance costume are more reflective of the reasons Americans belly dance than of any generic American identity or set of values. For example, American dancers who belly dance to negotiate body-image issues may select a body-revealing costume to facilitate self-acceptance or a body-concealing costume for security and comfort. Dancers who belly dance to achieve a heightened sense of community may copy the dance costume of others or perform in a dance troupe with matching costumes. Dancers who belly dance for sexual provocation

may select a costume with sexually stimulating design details, while dancers who belly dance for the purpose of maintaining a perceived tradition will replicate a costume of a documented ethnic group from the area encompassed by the Near and Middle East. Finally, dancers who belly dance as a means of engaging in fantasy play may select costumes that exhibit characteristics consistent with the personality of their desired fantasy personae.

American belly dancers come from a variety of social, geographical, and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, American belly dance costumes are variously styled, highly individualistic, and purpose-specific. Americans have clearly made changes to belly dance costume, and it could be said that American belly dance costumes are reflective of a generic American identity in the broadest sense, and therefore transformation has occurred. However, I believe I must emphasize that American belly dance costumes are more reflective of *individual* American dancer's aesthetic preferences, personalities, and dance philosophies - the definition of transformation does not account for this. I must also emphasize that transformation has not occurred in the case of dancers who wear replicated costumes. The intent of dancers who wear replicated costumes is to preserve documented styles of dress worn by specific ethnic groups, at specific times, within the areas of the Near and Middle East, not transform them.

7. Did transformation occur after selection, characterization, and incorporation?

This question is difficult to answer (Appendix I). For arguments sake only, selection could be said to have occurred either in 1876 when Americans first saw the

dance and associated costume or in 1891 when Loie Fuller first performed her “Serpentine Dance.” Characterization could be said to have occurred in 1890 when the term “hootchy-kootchy” first appeared in print, however, the term “belly dance,” which is used most frequently today to describe this dance, did not appear in print until 1943 and was not included in *The Oxford English Dictionary* until 1972 (Burchfield, 1972). Therefore, characterization could be said to have occurred in 1943, 1972, or not at all because, as I have demonstrated previously, the naming of this dance does not indicate its acceptance by Americans.

Incorporation could be said to have occurred in 1876 when Americans first saw the dance and concluded that the dance and its associated costume occupied the role of exotic dancer. However, contemporary belly dance and its associated costume occupies more roles than just exotic dancer, therefore, incorporation could be said to be continually re-occurring, or, as I demonstrated previously, the concept of incorporation may simply be inadequate to conceptualize the primary function of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States.

Transformation could be said to have occurred when Loie Fuller first danced her Serpentine Dance in 1891 because, although she was inspired by the dance and costume of the Near and Middle East, she did not replicate it - she transformed it. Therefore, transformation could be said to have occurred *after* or *during* selection, and *after* characterization. However, it could be theorized that the dance and associated costume that was presented at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit of 1876 actually already had been transformed. For example, Wood and Shay (1976) argued that Egyptian performers adopted some of the costume styles of Indian Nautch dancers due to the English

colonization of Egypt. If the dancers in Egypt transformed their performance to please the English audience, then it is possible that the Near and Middle Eastern performers in America also transformed their dance and associated costume to be more popular with the American audience. If this is the case, then transformation could be said to have occurred *before or during* selection.

It should also be noted that the costume continues to transform. While contemporary cabaret style costumes are similar to the costumes that were worn by American dancers in the early 20th century, fantasy ethnic and conceptual costume styles have only been developed and adopted since the early 1970s. Additionally, it is not just the costume styles that have transformed. The names for this dance and the roles this dance and associated costume occupy have also transformed since the American public was first introduced to the dance. Therefore, transformation could be said to be occurring continuously, within each step, throughout the cultural authentication process.

Summary

Contemporary belly dancers in the United States wear replicated and creatively interpreted costume styles. Creatively interpreted costumes are the most popular; they include cabaret, fantasy ethnic, and conceptual costume styles.

My analysis of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication was guided by a series of seven questions. The first question I addressed was, “What dance and associated costume was borrowed?” I could not answer this question because, 1) Eicher and Ereksomá’s (1995) definition of selection does not specify whether selection of a cultural

practice or product can only be said to have occurred historically, or whether selection also occurs contemporarily every time a member of the borrowing culture borrows the practice or product in question; and 2) while Americans have borrowed the dance and associated costume, they (and the West, in general) have also contributed to its evolution within the lending cultures. Therefore, to identify a time when the dance and its costume was without Western influence would be an over-simplification of the historic exchange between East and West.

The second question I addressed was, “Was the borrowed dance named, what was the name, and does the name signify acceptance of the dance and associated costume by Americans?” I was able to identify several names for this dance; however, only two of these names are contained within the *Oxford English Dictionary* (belly dance and hootchy-kootchy) (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). I was not able to conclude that naming the dance is indicative of its acceptance by Americans because, 1) belly dance is not included in several encyclopedias of dance; 2) none of the 603 colleges and universities listed in the 1997-98 *Dance Directory* (Bonbright, 1997) acknowledge courses in belly dance or hootchy-kootchy; 4) belly dancers are continually discussing ways to “legitimize” the dance because they feel the American public does not perceive it as such, and 4) although Americans use familiar terms to refer to this dance, they are attracted to it because of its perceived foreign qualities.

My third question was, “Did characterization occur after selection?” I was unable to definitively answer this question because of the inconclusive answers to questions one and two.

The fourth question was, “What kind of role does the borrowed dance and associated costume occupy in America?”. Dancers describe belly dance as a form of self-expression and the costume as an extension of the self-expressive function of the dance. However, I discovered that Americans also belly dance for the enhancement of self-image, sexual provocation, the reverence and maintenance of tradition, and for the engagement in fantasy play. While it could be said that incorporation has occurred because the dance and costume do appear to occupy numerous roles (performance artist, community member, tradition bearer, exotic woman, etc.), this observation does not address the broader issue of *why* Americans have chosen *belly dance and its associated costume* to occupy these roles. I have concluded that Americans primarily use belly dance and its associated costume to negotiate identity amidst change and that the level of incorporation inadequately conceptualizes this.

My fifth question was, “Did incorporation occur after selection and characterization?” I was unable to definitively answer this question because of the inconclusive answers to questions one, two, three, and four.

My sixth question was, “Were changes made to the borrowed dance and associated costume, what were the changes, and did they reflect American cultural identity?” Americans have clearly changed belly dance costume since the performances by Near and Middle Eastern dancers at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. However, I could not conclude that the changes are primarily reflective of American cultural identity and values. On the contrary, I believe that changes made by Americans to this costume were, and are, more

indicative of dancers' *individual negotiations* of self-identity and personal values as well as individual aesthetic preferences and dance philosophies.

The last question I addressed was, "Did transformation occur after selection, characterization, and incorporation?" It is clear that transformation of this dance and associated costume in the United States (and abroad) has occurred continuously since the turn of the century. Therefore, I cannot conclude that transformation only occurred after selection, characterization, and incorporation.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Eicher and Erekosima (1980) first conceptually defined cultural authentication in 1980. They stated:

Cultural authentication is defined as the process of assimilating an artifact or idea external to a culture by accommodative change into a valued indigenous object or idea. When applied to the analysis of dress and adornment, the four levels of cultural authentication -- (1) Selection, (2) Characterization, (3) Incorporation, and (4) Transformation (SCIT) – can explain why some elements of dress, which would be categorized as Western, are indeed “non-Western” in the dress mode of adoptive cultures (Eicher & Erekosima, 1980, p. 83-84).

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether belly dance costume in the United States is an example of cultural authentication. Additionally, I sought to further test and refine the concept of cultural authentication in order to aid others who may consider using the concept in their own investigations of the transfer of textile and clothing artifacts from one culture to another.

Belly dance costumes worn by most American belly dancers have historically differed dramatically from the dance costumes introduced to Americans by Near and Middle Eastern dancers at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibit in 1876 and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893. It is clear, then, that Americans have acquired and changed *something*, but can cultural authentication be used to accurately describe what and how?

Methods

In order to determine whether cultural authentication can be used to accurately describe the transmission of Near and Middle Eastern dance and costume to the United States and the subsequent development of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States, I first conducted field research of contemporary belly dancers in the United States over a period of ten months in order to formulate an insider's description of the belly dance community and to identify major styles of belly dance costume in the United States. While it is impossible to fully describe a culture after only ten months of field research, I do believe that I was able to sufficiently familiarize myself with the community to be able to analyze belly dance and its associated costume in terms of cultural authentication. Additionally, because I conducted participant observation at three levels of involvement (passive, moderate, and active - see page 31-32) (Spradley, 1980), and because members of the community reviewed my description of contemporary belly dance costume in the United States, I was able to cross-check and verify my findings.

I also conducted an extensive review of previous historical belly dance scholarship. I relied heavily on this previous scholarship for information about the origin of belly dance and the history of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States. Since many of these sources were referred to me by members of the belly dance community, the information contained within these sources can be considered reliably indicative of how this community perceives its own history.

I analyzed belly dance in the United States in terms of cultural authentication by addressing a series of seven questions (see page 21). I developed these questions, after

carefully studying numerous previous applications of cultural authentication, in order to clearly state my analysis process and thus facilitate the replication of this study, and further clarify cultural authentication. However, I must emphasize that the concept of cultural authentication, and the steps, or levels, of cultural authentication, as currently defined, are exceedingly vague. For example, Eicher and Erekosima (1980) stated that cultural authentication is “the process of assimilating an artifact or idea external to a culture by accommodative change into a valued indigenous object or idea” (p. 83-84). However, Eicher and Erekosima do not define such ambiguous terms as “assimilating,” “accommodative change,” “valued,” and “indigenous.” In 1995, Eicher and Erekosima stated cultural authentication is “the process of adaptation as a strategy of change or cultural authentication process (CAP)” (p. 145). Again, Eicher and Erekosima did not elaborate upon the meanings and implications of the phrases “process of adaptation” and “strategy of change.”

Findings

I formulated a description of contemporary belly dance costume in the United States after conducting field research of the belly dance community. I then addressed a series of seven questions (see page 37) in order to analyze belly dance and its associated costume in the United States in terms of cultural authentication.

Contemporary Belly Dance Costume

I developed two categories to describe contemporary belly dance costume in the United States. These categories are replicated costume styles and creatively interpreted costume styles. Replicated costume styles are sometimes referred to as folk, traditional, or ethnic costumes. Creatively interpreted costume styles include cabaret, fantasy ethnic, and conceptual costumes. These categories, though admittedly broad, do encompass all forms of contemporary belly dance costume. It should be noted, however, that because belly dance costume is subject to fashion trends, my description of contemporary belly dance costume is only directly applicable to costumes worn by dancers in the United States from 1997-1998.

A dancer who wears replicated costumes believes that he/she is imitating, to the best of his/her ability, a documented style of costume worn by a specific ethnic group, at a specific time, within the areas of the Near and Middle East. These dancers are not only concerned with maintaining the authenticity of costumes, but they are also concerned with accurately, and respectfully, presenting to their audiences the ethnic group they are replicating. These dancers feel that their most important function is to preserve the traditions of the ethnic group they are replicating. However, whether these dancers achieve these goals is open to interpretation.

Creatively interpreted costume styles deviate from documented costumes worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East. The dancer who wears creatively interpreted costumes believes that while he/she has been inspired by documented styles of costume worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and

Middle East, his/her costume style is particularly reflective of his/her unique personality and aesthetic preferences.

Belly Dance - An Example of Cultural Authentication?

My analysis of belly dance in terms of cultural authentication was guided by a series of seven questions. These questions and their answers, and thereby the results of my analysis of belly dance and its associated costume in terms of cultural authentication, are presented in the following section of this chapter.

Selection

Selection, as defined by Eicher and Erekosima (1995) occurs “when a particular external cultural practice or product is *selected* as appropriate and desirable by members of another culture out of an almost unlimited number of other options or offerings” (p. 145). I believe it is necessary to describe the “external cultural practice or product” before it was acquired by the selecting culture in order to determine, 1) whether the selecting culture actually selected the item in question and, 2) whether the selecting culture changed the artifact after acquiring it. Therefore, to establish whether selection of belly dance and its associated costume by Americans has occurred, I formulated the following question: “What dance and associated costume was borrowed?”

However, in the case of belly dance and its associated costume, it is not possible to identify and describe, conclusively, what it was that Americans selected (and what they continue to select) because there is evidence that this dance has been directly and

indirectly influenced by the West, through contact and trade with the East, over hundreds of years. As stated previously, Americans clearly acquired something; however, the development belly dance and belly dance costume, both in the East and the West, is a result of dynamic mutual exchange between East and West, and it is therefore not possible to pin-point a specific time when the dance and costume was without influence from the other. To do so would be to over-simplify a complex, mutually dependent, evolutionary process and deny the existence of a long history of cultural contact between East and West. Perhaps the dance has not been “selected,” or “borrowed”, by Americans as much as Americans have *inherited* this dance that has been passed down through many generations in many different cultures around the world. I have therefore concluded that the level of selection is insufficient to describe how Americans have acquired belly dance and its associated costume.

Characterization

The second step of cultural authentication is characterization. Characterization occurs when:

....the selected item is *characterized* in some symbolic form within the meaning reference-frame of the receiving society. The item may be renamed by members of the culture, in their own language, choosing the item or process or translating in any other expressive form into the mapping system of order by which members of the culture conceptually define or iconically portray their experiences and artifacts (Eicher & Erekosima, 1995, p. 145).

Additionally, the level of characterization is a benchmark for the widespread acceptance of the artifact by the borrowing culture. Erekosima and Eicher (1981) demonstrated this when they concluded that the popularity of Western textiles among the Kalabari increased after the textiles were named.

I formulated the following three-part question in order to determine whether characterization of belly dance and its associated costume has occurred: “Was the borrowed dance named, what was the name, and does the name signify acceptance of the dance and associated costume by Americans?” Perhaps there is another method, besides assigning a name, that Americans use to “conceptually define or iconically portray their experiences and artifacts” (Eicher & Erekosima, 1995, p. 145); however, I did not explore what this other method might be.

Although the dance has clearly been named since the first notable public performance of the dance in America, and two of these names, “hootchy-kootchy” and “belly dance” are contained within the English language, as evidenced by the most recent edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989), the naming of the dance has not resulted in acceptance of the dance by Americans, as evidenced by its omission from the most recent *Dance Directory* (Bonbright, 1997) and encyclopedias of dance (Chujoy, 1949; Chujoy & Manchester, 1967; Clarke & Vaughan, 1977) as well as the findings of my field research. Therefore, it is not useful to cite the act of naming the dance as the indicator of acceptance of the dance. Indeed, to state that this dance has been accepted simply because it has been named is to deny the fact that Americans are attracted to belly dance and its associated costume precisely because of its exotic and foreign nature. Therefore, I must conclude that characterization has not occurred.

Incorporation

In 1995, Eicher and Erekosima stated incorporation occurs when “the innovation occupies some function role within the receiving cultural system by being *incorporated* toward meeting some adaptation need in the society, at either individual or collective levels, and often at both” (p. 145). I developed the question “What kind of role does the borrowed dance and associated costume occupy in America?” in order to assess whether incorporation of belly dance and its associated costume has occurred. Belly dance and its associated costume does occupy numerous roles in America, and, therefore, it could be said that incorporation of belly dance and its associated costume has occurred. However, identifying these roles does not, in itself, explain why Americans have chosen *belly dance and its associated costume* to occupy these roles. I believe that while incorporation may have occurred, it may not have occurred in the sense that Erekosima and Eicher (1981) intended. For example, these authors concluded that incorporation of a Western textile within Kalabari culture occurs when the selected and characterized Western textiles are absorbed into an existing Kalabari cultural construct, such as being worn to display belonging to “a specific lineage, for example, that of the royal family or an important house” (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981, p. 50). I, however, have concluded that Americans primarily use belly dance and its associated costume to negotiate identity amidst change and that belly dance and its associated costume reflects this negotiation of change. Therefore, I have concluded that the concept of incorporation inadequately conceptualizes the function of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States.

Transformation

Transformation occurs “when the adopted artifact or practice (which may initially have been foreign or else from another generation or other segment of the same society) is *transformed* in itself. This entails an accommodation of its old form and purpose to the new setting in a holistic way. The outcome of this final phase invariably involves a creative or artistic change that envelops the product and setting” (Eicher & Erekosima, 1995, p. 145). Eicher and Erekosima (1981) concluded that the modification of Western textiles by the Kalabari (through cut and drawn thread work) maintains Kalabari cultural identity despite foreign trade. Wearing the transformed textiles is an indication that “he or she belongs not just to a restricted group but also to a distinctive culture. When a Kalabari person wears *pelete-bite* and *fimete-bite*, with their cut-thread and pulled-thread designs, he or she exemplifies cultural authentication at this level” (p. 50-51).

I formulated the following question in order to determine whether Americans have transformed belly dance and its associated costume: “Were changes made to the borrowed dance, what were the changes, and did they reflect American cultural identity?” Whereas belly dance in the United States continues to be characterized by articulated pelvic movements, accentuated by controlled movements of the arms and upper torso, belly dance costume has been changing continually since the first time an American performed this dance. However, I cannot conclude that Americans and Europeans have changed the dance and associated costume by themselves and for themselves, for there is some evidence that the peoples of the Near and Middle East may have changed the dance and associated costume to be more popular with European and American audiences.

Additionally, while it could be said that the changes Americans have made to belly dance costumes are reflective of a generic American identity in the broadest sense, it would be more accurate to conclude that American belly dance costumes are reflective of individual American dancers' aesthetic preferences, personalities, and dance philosophies. Therefore, I have concluded that while transformation has occurred, I have also concluded that the level of transformation is insufficient to accurately describe how this dance and its associated costume has changed over time.

Order of the Steps

I have concluded that the four levels of cultural authentication (selection, characterization, incorporation, and transformation), in the case of belly dance and its associated costume in the United States, have either not occurred, or have occurred, but only at degrees that are insufficient to accurately describe Americans' acquisition and use of the dance and its associated costume. I believe this is due, in part, to the fact that the definitions of the four levels are too vague to determine whether these levels have occurred, or could occur, in the order of SCIT. For example, it is not clear whether selection should only occur historically (when Americans were first introduced to Near and Middle Eastern dance and its associated costume), or also contemporarily (every time an American is introduced to the dance and costume). It is also unclear whether selection should occur the moment Americans first witnessed the dance and costume or the moment when Americans first danced the dance and wore the costume.

In the case of characterization, it is not clear whether belly dance and its associated costume is to be considered named when the various names for belly dance were first spoken, written, or recorded as part of the language. Additionally, the definition of characterization does not allow for the fact that Americans have adopted foreign names for the dance and costume as well as the dance and costume (such as *raqs al-sharki*, *danse Orientale*, and *cifte telli*). Finally, the first name which was recorded as part of the language, “hootchy-kootchy,” was replaced by other names that were either not immediately recorded as part of the language (for example, “belly dance”), or not recorded at all (for example, “Oriental dance,” “Middle Eastern dance,” or “goddess dance”). Therefore, has the dance and its costume become de-characterized, re-characterized, or both?

Eicher and Ereksomima (1995) stated that incorporation occurs when “the innovation occupies some functional role within the receiving cultural system by being *incorporated* toward meeting some adaptation need in the society....”(p. 145). This definition indicates that an “adaptation need” fuels selection and suggests, contrary to the definition of cultural authentication, that incorporation actually occurs before selection. This is unclear. The definition of incorporation also indicates that an artifact occupies one functional role; it is not clear whether incorporation can be said to have occurred if the artifact occupies many different roles, as is the case with belly dance and its associated costume in the United States. Finally, Ereksomima and Eicher (1981) concluded that incorporated Western textiles have been absorbed into an existing Kalabari cultural construct (for example, Western textiles are worn to signify belonging to certain segments of Kalabari society), whereas belly dance and its associated costume in the United States

functions primarily as a medium for the negotiation of identity amidst change. It is unclear whether the definition of incorporation conceptualizes this function – that artifacts may be used to negotiate fundamental social and cultural changes triggered by cultural contact.

The final step of the cultural authentication process, as the concept is currently defined, should be transformation. However, transformation of belly dance and its associated costume has occurred from the moment Americans were first exposed to the dance and costume. For example, Americans at the turn of the century determined that the dance was exotic whereas the Near and Middle Eastern dancers may have considered the dance to be, simply, a familiar form of entertainment. It is also unclear whether the definition of transformation addresses the fact that aspects apart from the physical attributes of the artifact may undergo transformation (such as function, value, and meaning). Additionally, the definition of transformation does not allow for the fact that Near and Middle Easterners have altered the dance and costume to be more popular with Western audiences. For example, there are contemporary belly dancers in Egypt who, because they wish to attract Western tourists and their spending monies, wear costumes similar to those worn by dancers in Hollywood films. In this case, who is transforming the artifact?

Finally, and most importantly, the definition of transformation requires that the changes made to the artifact in question reflect the identity and values of the borrowing culture. However, according to Kearney (1995), cultural groups, in general, are becoming less easily defined due to increasing globalization, transnationalism, deterritorialization, and displacement. Indeed, many contemporary anthropologists believe definitions of

cultural groups are “more of a narrative device” than empirical truth (Kearney, 1995, p. 556). Banton, 1994, stated:

Whereas it may be convenient to refer to, say, “Japanese culture” and its characteristics, and to recognize subcultures within such a unit, it is usually impossible to conceive of cultures as having clear boundaries. It is therefore impracticable to treat them as distinct and finite units that can be counted. Cultures tend to be systems of meaning and custom that are blurred at the edges. Nor are they usually stable. As individuals come to terms with changing circumstances (such as new technology) so they change their ways and shared meanings change with them (p. 76-77).

However, as the level of transformation is currently defined, artifacts that have been transformed must reflect a defined set of cultural values and characteristics. This definition assumes that cultures do have clear boundaries. It also excludes the possibility that artifacts, such as belly dance and its associated costume, may be used to negotiate changes prompted, in part, by cultural contact.

Implications

I have discovered that Americans have acquired and changed something that they now call belly dance. However, cultural authentication does not aid in the explanation of what was acquired, how it was changed, and why it is significant to Americans. Additionally, I strongly believe that the concept’s shortcomings in addressing these issues in the case of belly dance and its associated costume will also be encountered by other researchers who may choose to use this concept.

For example, is cultural authentication a process with sequential steps (Eicher & Erekosima, 1980, 1995) or is it an umbrella term for four levels of artifact change

possible as a result of interaction with outside cultures (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981)?

Must all four levels take place in order to conclude that cultural authentication has occurred? Does selection occur at the moment of exposure, acquisition, or both? And, does selection occur historically, contemporarily, or both? The level of characterization is particularly problematic because it is clear that the act of naming an artifact does not necessarily signify its acceptance. The definition of incorporation does not allow for the possibility that the artifact in question may occupy numerous roles and perform numerous functions within the borrowing culture. Additionally, it does not account for the fact that members of the culture in question may have differing perceptions of the roles and functions of the artifact. Finally, the level of transformation necessitates a description of a static cultural identity and value system - cultural generalizations that contemporary anthropologists (Hing, 1997; Kearney, 1995; Seymour-Smith, 1986) have dismissed.

Perhaps cultural authentication would be more useful if the definitions of the four levels were refined in order to clarify the factors that determine whether the levels can be said to have occurred. However, because the concept of cultural authentication is based upon the premise that there is such a thing as authentic culture, and in light of the fact that anthropologists have observed cultural boundaries blurring in recent years, I suspect that the concept of cultural authentication may be fundamentally flawed and a redefinition of the concept and its levels may not be enough to repair it.

My study of belly dance and its associated costume in terms of cultural authentication is different from all other studies which have used cultural authentication. I examined a specialized culture (the belly dance community) within a large Western culture (the United States) that has been described as being diverse and multicultural

(Banton, 1994; Whitehead, Bender, & Leone, 1994; Hing, 1997; Levinson, 1996). It could be that cultural authentication is more useful to describe changes in artifacts within societies where member roles, personal identities, and group values are more stable than in the United States, such as the Kalabari of Nigeria. However, I do not believe my findings should be dismissed because of the transitory nature of the culture I examined. On the contrary, I believe that my findings exemplify the fact that while artifacts may reflect resistance to change, they may also be used to negotiate fundamental change. The central premise of cultural authentication is that the borrowing culture resists change, despite contact with outsiders, and that the resistance of the borrowing culture is reflected in borrowed and changed artifacts. However, my findings clearly demonstrate that the opposite may be true as well. Specifically, a borrowing culture may take advantage of the foreign qualities of artifacts in order to negotiate changes prompted by cultural contact.

Cultural authentication assumes that a culture can and does assert its authenticity, and I fear that scholars operating under this assumption may attempt to delineate a hierarchy of authenticity among the material culture of the culture in question. For example, one might distinguish blue jeans as being more authentically American than belly dance costumes. However, does this statement provide any insight as to why some Americans occasionally choose to wear belly dance costumes instead of blue jeans? Clearly this avenue of scholarship, that of delineating cultural authenticity, denies the possibility that fundamental change can take place within cultures and that material culture can reflect these changes.

It is for all of these reasons that I have concluded that cultural authentication, as it is currently defined, may not be the best way to describe the transference of artifacts from

one culture to another. Perhaps the transference of artifacts could be described better if artifacts were explored as if they were “inherited” rather than “selected” or “assimilated.” Scholars could examine the “heritage” of artifacts by addressing such questions as, “What was/is inherited?”, “What was/is discarded?”, “What was/is resurrected?”, and “What was/is forgotten?” I believe the answers to these questions, combined with investigations of dissemination pathways and generational changes, could reveal, better than the concept of cultural authentication, how artifacts reflect complex individual and cultural responses to cultural contact and change.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH METHODS AND SOURCES

Secondary and Tertiary Sources

Previous Research About: The History of Belly Dance, Historic Costume, Art History, Orientalism, Cultural Contact, American Values/Identity

Primary Sources

Costume Manuals, Catalogues, Web-Sites, Fliers, Dance Directories, Encyclopedias, Dictionaries

Participant Observation

Passive: *Subscribed* to a Computer Mailing List

Moderate: *Attended* Performances and Festivals

Active: *Enrolled* in Belly Dance Classes

Reliability and Validity

Fieldwork Journal

Field Notes and Photographs

Insider Reviews

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elaine Pedersen

Student Investigator: Jennie Embree

Title of Research Project: Belly Dance: An Example of Cultural Authentication?

Project Description: The purpose of this research is to investigate whether belly dance costuming in the United States is an example of the concept called 'cultural authentication'. Cultural authentication is a conceptual framework that describes the transfer of artifacts from one culture to another. Additionally, this investigation is designed to further test and refine the concept of cultural authentication in order to aid others who may consider using the concept in their own investigations of the transfer of textile and clothing artifacts from one culture to another.

Activity Description: You have been asked to read an abstract of a portion of the findings of a study on belly dance costuming in the United States and to respond to a questionnaire about the abstract. This activity should take approximately one-half hour. The objective of this activity is to obtain your evaluation of this study's findings. By participating in this activity, you will be able to share your expertise with a wider audience and it will be preserved for posterity. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to read current research on belly dance costuming. There should be no risks associated with participating in this activity. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Your identity will be known to the researchers, however, unless you request otherwise, the comments you provide will be confidential and you will not be identified as a source of information for this research project. If your responses are used verbatim your name will not be utilized, instead you will be referred to as "Respondent A", or "Respondent B" and so forth. Your comments will be kept by the researchers for a period of one year at which point your comments will be discarded.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and understand the general purpose of the study. By signing this consent form, I give Jennie Embree, a graduate student in the Apparel, Interiors, Housing, and Merchandising Department of Oregon State University, permission to provide me with a copy of an abstract of the findings of a study about belly dance costume and a short questionnaire. Additionally, I give permission for my responses to be used as an evaluation of the study's findings. I will be provided with a copy of this Informed Consent Document and questions about the research should be directed to Jennie Embree at (541) 737- 0991 or Dr. Elaine Pedersen (541) 737-0984. All other questions should be directed to Mary Nunn, Sponsored Research Officer, OSU Research Office, (541) 737-0670.

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Phone _____

Date _____

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Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and understand the general purpose of the study. By reading and responding to this email message, I give Jennie Embree, a graduate student in the Apparel, Interiors, Housing, and Merchandising Department of Oregon State University, permission to provide me with a copy of an abstract of the findings of a study about belly dance costume. Additionally, I give permission for my written comments to be used as an evaluation of the study's findings. Questions about the research should be directed to Jennie Embree at embreej@ucs.orst.edu or Dr. Elaine Pedersen at (541) 737-0984. All other questions should be directed to Mary Nunn, Sponsored Research Officer, OSU Research Office, (541) 737-0670.

APPENDIX C

ABSTRACT OF FINDINGS

Belly Dance Costume in the United States

Instructions: Please read the following abstract and respond to the attached questionnaire. Please return the abstract and the completed questionnaire within one week to Jennie Embree using the provided pre-addressed and stamped envelope. Thank-you for your participation!

Costume Descriptions

Belly dance costume in the United States today can be classified as replicated or creatively interpreted. Replicated costume styles are defined as costumes that are copies of documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups at some time within the areas of the Near and Middle East. Creatively interpreted costume styles are defined as costumes that deviate from documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East. While there is tremendous diversity within each of these two classifications, the classifications are useful to describe the general orientations of belly dancers in the United States.

Replicated Costume Styles

Dancers describe this orientation using words such as, “folk,” “traditional,” “ethnic,” “historically accurate,” and “period correct.” Many ethnic groups are imitated, however some of the most frequently imitated are the *Ghawazee* and *Almées* of Egypt, and the *Ouled Nails* of Algeria. Venues for the performance of belly dance with this

orientation include belly dance festivals, cultural appreciation events, meetings of the Society for Creative Anachronism, and renaissance fairs. Dancers with this kind of costume orientation consult a variety of reference materials before purchasing or creating a costume. Sources of information include historic photographs, drawings and paintings, folk costume books, historic written accounts of costume, archeological finds, personal travel experiences, and personal interaction with members of the culture the dancer seeks to replicate.

Some of the most frequently replicated costumes include the *Ghawazee* coat and the Turkish coat (*anteri*), the *kaftan*, and the *Choli* blouse. It should be mentioned that dancers with this kind of costume orientation also replicate accessories and make-up. For example, dancers may paint their hands with henna, tattoo themselves with tribal symbols, and/or wear replicated jewelry.

Dancers who wear replicated costumes are primarily concerned with issues such as authenticity, respect for the ethnic groups they are imitating, and the preservation of ethnic traditions. The degree of authenticity achieved by a dancer is determined by how strongly the dancer adheres to the documented dance and corresponding costume which the dancer is trying to replicate. In addition to concerns with authenticity of costume styles, the dancers are concerned with accurately and respectfully presenting the ethnic group they are imitating. These dancers feel that their most important function is to preserve the traditions of the ethnic group they are imitating.

Creatively Interpreted Costume Styles

The dancer who wears creatively interpreted costume styles believes that while he/she has been inspired by documented styles of dress worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East, his/her costume is particularly reflective of his/her unique personality and aesthetic preferences. There are three primary styles of costumes that fall within this type of costume orientation. These styles are “cabaret,” “fantasy ethnic,” and “conceptual” costume.

Cabaret costume, also known as *bedleh*, is the most common form of belly dance costume. It usually consists of a bra-top embellished with coins, sequins, and/or jewels and a diaphanous skirt held at the hipline with a matching embellished belt. The dancer’s midriff is usually visible and often the costume includes a veil (or veils) tucked into the skirt. The skirt, sometimes multi-layered, is usually made of several yards of sheer fabric. Sometimes dancers will wear “harem pants” (hip-hugging, full-legged pants which are gathered tightly at the ankle) under their skirt. The veil(s) are usually made of sheer, metallic, or shimmery fabrics. The surface of the belt usually has embellishment that matches the surface embellishment of the bra-top. The belt may have chains of coins, paillettes (large flat sequins with the hole placed at one edge), beaded fringe and/or tassels. The primary purpose of the belt is to accentuate hip movement by making noise or by catching the light as the dancer moves. Cabaret costume can also consist of a one-piece tunic-like dress, often with one or two thigh-high slits, and a belt worn around the hips. This particular style of cabaret costume is called *beledi*. The catalogue for Scheherezade Imports (1997), a vendor of *beledi* costumes, states that their *beledi*

costume is, “Very flashy - a great Beledi Dress for the full figured dancer or for a performance where you have to be very modestly dressed but glitzy” (p.16).

Cabaret costume is a deviation from costume worn by ethnic groups within the areas of the Near and Middle East. Some scholars believe that cabaret costume was invented by Western fantasies of the Orient (Buonaventura, 1989; Sellers-Young, 1992) , while others believe it originates from costume styles of the Indian Nautch dancers (Wood & Shay, 1976). Either way, cabaret- styled costume was perpetuated in the West and in the countries in the Near and Middle East in the twentieth century by the forces of Western mass media and colonialism. Today, cabaret styled costume is worn by belly dancers all over the world. Dancers who wear cabaret styled costume consult a variety of reference materials before purchasing or creating a costume. Sources of inspiration include live or videotaped performances, Hollywood films and television, belly dance paraphernalia vendors, costume books, personal travel, web-sites, and belly dance related publications.

Fantasy ethnic, another form of creatively interpreted belly dance costume, is inspired by, and/or contains elements of, the costume and adornment of a variety of ethnic groups within the Near and Middle East. One fantasy ethnic costume may contain elements of dress and adornment drawn from multiple cultures. Fantasy ethnic costume is both individualistic and expressive of the wearer’s cultural interests. Dancers refer to fantasy ethnic costume with such terms as “tribal,” “gypsy,” “fusion,” “non-traditional,” and “period inspired.”

Typical fantasy ethnic costume, if there is such a thing, often consists of many layers of garments that cover the entire body. For example, dancers may wear a long-

sleeved blouse, vest, full legged pants, a coat, and head covering. The fabrics used are usually dull-finished cottons or linens. Some fantasy ethnic costumes will combine a *choli*, or another vest-like top, with a very full, and often tiered, skirt worn at the hipline. In this case, the midriff of the dancer is visible. Dancers also commonly wear an abundance of heavy antique-looking jewelry, often sport tattoos, face-paint, and/or body pierces, and nearly always dance barefoot.

Dancers with this kind of costume orientation consult a variety of reference materials before purchasing or creating a costume. Sources of information include historic photographs, drawings and paintings, folk costume books, historic written accounts of costume, archeological finds, travel experiences, live or videotaped performances of other fantasy ethnic dancers (such as the troupe FatChance Belly Dance), belly dance paraphernalia vendors, costume books, web-sites, and belly dance related publications.

Conceptual costume is costume that is very individualistic and is usually expressive of a dancer's spiritual connection to belly dance. Belly dancers use terms such as 'goddess dancing' and 'earth dancing' to describe this type of orientation to belly dance and belly dance costume. Dancers with this orientation often link belly dancing to ancient fertility rites, birth rituals, and the worship of female deities. "The dance is thought to celebrate the feminine principle rather than express an ethnic identity or provide an entertaining performance" (Forner, 1993, p.18).

Conceptual costume may consist of numerous symbolic components, or it may be a simple one-piece wrap. Gioseffi (1991) encouraged students of the "earth dance" to , "be as imaginative and individualistic" as they like (p.180).

Dancers with the creative interpretational orientation to belly dance and costume also have tremendously diverse approaches to belly dance. However, dancers with this orientation share a common interest in issues such as innovation and disclosure. For example, these dancers may follow current trends in costume styles, materials, and colors or they may modify current trends to create new, innovative styles because they feel a sense of freedom to create a costume that is expressive of their individual personalities and performance purposes. Additionally, dancers may feel a deep connection to a particular ethnic group within the areas of the Near and Middle East, but they do not attempt to exactly replicate the dance and costume of that group. Instead, they may attempt to replicate ‘the spirit’ of the Near and Middle East; they are fulfilled by creating a personal interpretation of belly dance. Dancers with kind of orientation also discuss the need to inform their audiences of their creative intent in order to avoid confusion or offense. There are dancers who engage in creative interpretation of belly dance and costume and do not disclose this to their audiences. However, there are many dancers who believe that disclosure is essential to legitimize belly dance in the United States.

Costume Sources

Dancers can purchase both replicated and creatively interpreted costume styles ready-made from American costumers or through vendors who import costumes made abroad. An informal survey of costumes offered for sale at Rakassah revealed that many of the imported cabaret style costumes are manufactured in Egypt. The cost of ready made costumes can be prohibitive, however. Full cabaret style costumes were priced

from \$500 to \$900 at Rakassah.

Dancers also frequently make their own costumes. Dancers can use belly dance costume manuals and/or purchase belly dance costume patterns. Fabrics and embellishment materials are available through vendors of belly dance paraphernalia or through local fabric and craft stores. Some dancers recycle garments, curtains, and accessories found in used clothing stores into belly dance costumes. Dancers also can buy and sell used costumes at belly dance festivals and through the belly dance list-serve.

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE


Please read the attached abstract of the findings of this study and then respond to the following questions (feel free to attach pages if you need more space):

1. Do you agree with the researchers' description of belly dance costume in the United States? If not, please explain why.
2. Do you object to the researchers' use of the term "belly dance"? If so, what term would you prefer the researchers use?
3. Why do you belly dance?
4. Please use the space below to provide the researchers with any additional comments you may have about the findings of this study.

APPENDIX E

AN EXAMPLE OF REPLICATED COSTUME

"Dances of the Silk Road"
an Uzbek and Persian Dance Seminar and Tomashah with*
Laurel Victoria Gray



April 18 & 19, 1998
from 11a.m. - 4p.m. at the Mahea
Uchtyama Center for Int'l. Dance
729 Heinz Ave. #4, Berkeley, Ca.

**the tomashah (Central Asian performance)*
will be Sat. eve. from 7 - (approx.) 9:30 p.m.

Register by April 6 and receive both days of
classes and show for only \$80! \$100 at the door.
One day of class only: \$45 in advance or \$50 at
door; show separately: \$15/\$20 at door.

TURN flyer OVER for DETAILS!

"Her spirituality and emotion show through her tender and skillful
movements, expressing the character of an Uzbek woman,
her subtlety and sense of tradition."
Dilfruz Rakhmarullaeva, "Sharq Taronalari" Int'l. Festival Guide

"Uzbek Ambassador, Fatikh Tashabayer requested that Laurel
perform at a state dinner for President Karimov, inaugurating
Uzbekistan's new embassy in Wash. DC.... President Karimov
gave Laurel a standing ovation and kissed her hand.... she was
presented with a gold embroidered robe of honour...."
Seattle Tashkent News

to register send cheque or M.O. to: Spectrum, POB 14926,
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95402-6926. Call or e-mail Kajira
Djoumahna for info: (707) 546-6366; Ghaziya@aol.com

Laurel Victoria Grey (page one of two). Photograph and flier design by Kajira Djoumahna. Reproduced with permission of Kajira Djoumahana.

Saturday: 'Introducing Uzbek Dance' ~ Experience one of the Islamic world's most intricate and fascinating dance forms, once performed at the courts of emirs and khans. Lyrical arm movements, lively facial expressions, dazzling spins and playful shoulder isolations characterize Uzbek dance. Students will be introduced to the three major styles: graceful Ferghana, mischievous Khorezm and energetic Bukharan. A Bukharan folkloric wedding dance will be taught and video footage of native dancers will be shown.

Sunday: 'Classical and Modern Persian' ~ Enjoy a complete warm-up especially for the intricacies of Persian dance. Participants will learn the Classical Persian Etude based on Laurel's research on "miniature" paintings. Dance combinations will be thoroughly broken down and cultural history explained. Video viewing included. A lyrical, classical style choreography will utilize steps and combinations taught in the seminar. (No ballet, Arabic or salsa elements used.) Written choreography provided.

Participants will receive detailed dance notes and costuming information. Uzbek and Persian music and costuming elements will be available for purchase. Bring a sack lunch both days as the videos will be shown during the lunch break.

Directions from Hwy. 80: take the Ashby Ave. exit. Turn left at the first light (7th St.) Turn left again at Heinz Ave. Look for the "Magic Gardens Nursery" on the right and turn in to the parking lot. MUCID is straight ahead! 729 Heinz St. #4, Berkeley, Ca.

LAUREL VICTORIA GRAY is an internationally acclaimed dancer, scholar, instructor and choreographer who has taught and performed throughout the US, Canada, Europe, Central Asia and Australia. Specializing in the cultures of the Silk Road, Ms. Gray has traveled to Uzbekistan ten times, lived there for two years and appeared on television dance shows over a dozen times. She has lectured for the Middle East Institute and the Assembly of Turkish American Associations, has written articles for the Oxford University International Encyclopedia of Dance, The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, Dance Magazine and numerous other publications. She has also performed at the National Press Club and at the Uzbek Embassy for President Islam Karimov. Ms. Gray teaches Persian dance at the Iranian Community School and is Artistic Director of the Silk Road Dance Company.



Laurel Victoria Grey (page two of two). Photograph and flier design by Kajira Djoumahana. Reproduced with permission of Kajira Djoumahana.

APPENDIX F

AN EXAMPLE OF CABARET COSTUME



The Habibi Dance troupe at the 1996 Festival of Trees, Lansing, Michigan. Photograph by Rick Martin. Reproduced with permission.

APPENDIX G

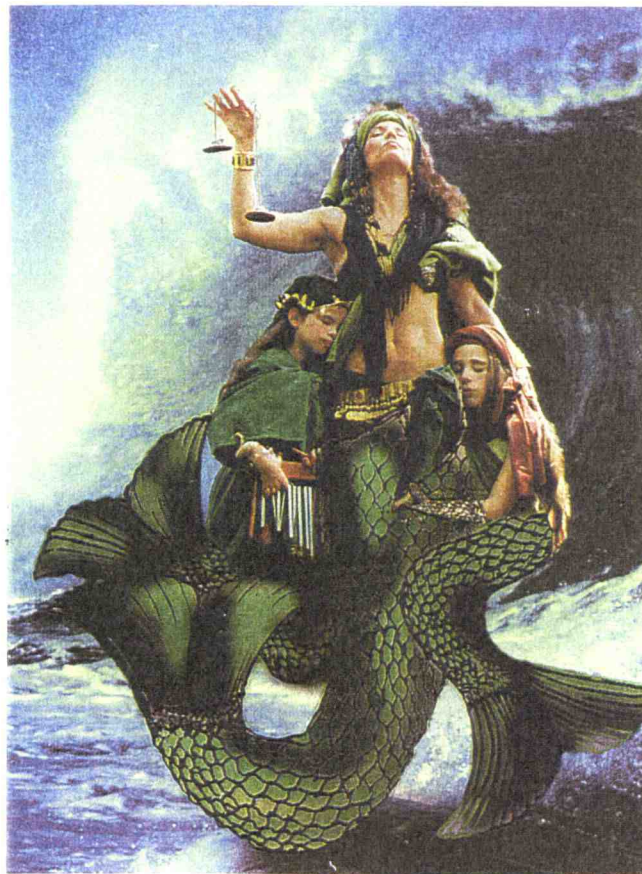
AN EXAMPLE OF FANTASY ETHNIC COSTUME



FatChanceBellyDance. Photographs by Marty Sohl. Reproduced with permission.

APPENDIX H

AN EXAMPLE OF CONCEPTUAL COSTUME

*Delilah's Special Summer
Bellydance Retreat:**Mermaids & Mentors:
Mother, Daughter, Sister, Friend*

Delilah and her daughters. Photograph by Steve Flynn and Collage by Jonnie Gilman.
Reproduced with Permission.

APPENDIX I

A SUMMARY OF POSSIBLE OCCURRENCES OF THE LEVELS

Selection could be said to have occurred:

1. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876.
2. At Loie Fuller's 1891 performance.
3. Every time a contemporary American sees or starts to belly dance.
4. Impossible to say due to the long history of mutual exchange between East and West

Characterization could be said to have occurred:

1. When the term "Hootchy Kootchy" first appeared in print in 1890.
2. When the term "Hootchy-Kootchy" first appeared in the dictionary in 1933.
3. Not at all because belly dance is still not accepted.

Incorporation could be said to have occurred:

1. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876.
2. Every time a contemporary belly dancer finds a new role that belly dance and its associated costume can occupy.
3. Not at all because belly dance and its associated costume does not clearly occupy one role.

Transformation could be said to have occurred:

1. During the European colonization of North Africa.
2. At Loie Fuller's 1891 performance.
3. Every time a contemporary American dancer creates a new costume.
4. Not at all because the changes made to the dance and costume do not reflect one cultural identity or set of values.