

Folk Dancing in the City

Individuality, Innovation and Hybridity of tradition among folk dancers and members of a young NGO in Beirut-Lebanon

By
Jana Al Obeidyine

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the specificities of the Lebanese *Dabkeh* through its enactment by city folk dancers and within a young Non Governmental Organization in Beirut, Lebanon. By examining the mutable structure of the dance and the space it opens for individual agency's interaction, as displayed in the field, this paper suggests that Lebanese *Dabkeh* enables constant novelty and change. By looking at the Lebanese social agents' historical construction, the study asserts that the long-standing social diversity of the geographical area, frequent travels and the hospitable reception of multiple "others" have formulated cosmopolitan social actors that values fusion, change and exchange. The project of homogeneity and authenticity brought by the Nation State project did not succeed in Lebanon, due to the loose structure of the state, and motivated enactment of Lebanese artists, who succeeded in maintaining and reinforcing the "mix and match" tendency and strengthening the hybridity of the dance rather than purifying it. A further look at *Marhabtain's* contemporary Dabkeh performance *Women under the line* reaffirms our statement of "hybridity" is embedded in *Dabkeh* tradition. This dissertation attempts to critically examine *Marhabtain's* safeguarding endeavours in relation to the socio-political environment of the practice, and proposes to protect the cosmopolitan character of the dance rather than creating a fixed "traditional" form.

Key words: Lebanon, Beirut, Traditional hybridity, interculturalism, mixture, innovation, individuality, change, cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

In short, each one of us has two heritages, a "vertical" one that comes to us from our ancestors, our religious community and our popular traditions, and a "horizontal" one transmitted to us by our contemporaries and by the age we live in. It seems to me that the latter is the more influential of the two, and that it becomes more so every day. Yet this fact is not reflected in our perception of ourselves, and the inheritance we invoke most frequently is the vertical one (Maalouf, 2000:102).

In 2011, Malek Andary, the founder of Marhbatain the Non-Governmental organizational within which I conducted my fieldwork, put on stage a solo dance performance entitled *Chronic Abortion*. The opening scene features an unmarried woman undergoing an agonising abortion. The performance then, takes off with the foetus coming back to life challenging a fundamental traditional convention that forbids an unmarried woman to be pregnant and her child to be born. While growing up the aborted foetus realizes his incapacity to cope with society's demands; hence, he struggles to adjust to an enormous *Sewral*, a traditional baggy trouser, to adapt to the way he is supposed to walk, sit and move and to handle the repetitive beats of the *tabel*, a drum instrument.

In this piece, Malek was attempting through traditional movement to challenge traditional values, norms and conventions. Questions this research will be attempting to answer are related to the space a "traditional" dance form can offer to individuals. To what extent does *Dabkeh*, the Lebanese traditional dance, enables individual's expression? Does the "traditional" practice encompass a space for innovation? If so, does the "traditional" become modern, hybrid or illegitimate? The key objective of this study is to understand the specificity of *Lebanese Dabkeh*, the traditional dance, through the way it is handled within *Marhabtain*, a young non-governmental organization and by other folk dancers in Beirut, Lebanon.

Marhabtain's aims are twofold, first, to work on the preservation and promotion of "tradition", including the traditional *Dabkeh*, and second, to mobilise *Dabkeh* in relation to contemporary concerns. Thus, understanding concepts of "tradition", "modernity" and "contemporaneity" from the Lebanese perspective would be a significant point of departure for this paper. "Tradition" seems to be better understood when juxtaposed to nineteenth century "modernity" and the age of capitalism. Social theorist Anthony Giddens asserts that 'modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away

from all traditional types of social order, in quite unprecedented fashion' (1990:4), which indicates a sharp divide between the two modes of living. Lebanese historian, Akram Khater, suggests that modernity, in Lebanon, was built on the foundation of tradition, since it was introduced partially by Lebanese emigrants who returned to their home villages in the beginning of the twentieth century. 'Unlike the case in surrounding regions—such as Iran, Egypt, and Turkey—where “modernity” was the preserve primarily of the elites and upper classes, in Mount Lebanon it was peasants for the greater part who engaged the processes of “modernity”’ (2001:188) and contributed to the formation of the middle-class, which constitutes today a majority of the Lebanese population.

They travelled across half the world only to come back to the same village. They built large ornate houses right over their old hovels. They worked long days and nights peddling so that they could come back and become landowners—no longer poor peasants, but rich ones. They were, for the most part, illiterate, but they were bent on educating their children. They allowed their daughters to wear *franji*¹ clothes but assumed that the mores and values of classical patriarchy would hold. They sported timepieces as status symbols but were loathe to accept the dictates of the clock in their own lives (Khater, 2001: 180).

Thus, Lebanese “modernity” of today still overlays “tradition” without sweeping it away. “Tradition” in the Lebanese context does not solely belong to a forgotten past but to the present as well. When this paper refers to “Lebanese society”, it, basically, designates a society that is predominantly equally “traditional” and “modern”. Nevertheless, “contemporary” will be used in the proper sense, to refer to the present time. Whereas, “contemporary dance” will indicate the dance form developed in the United States and Europe, introduced to Lebanon in the 1990s by theatre students, who travelled to Europe to acquire and develop bodily skills and techniques to create their own performances. “Contemporary Dabkeh”, on the other hand, will be deployed as new term in this paper, since the attempt to merge Dabkeh with contemporary technique was initiated by the founder of *Marhabtain* during recent years. “Individuals” and “social agents” will be also recurrent throughout this dissertation it will mainly designate individuals who mobilize their capacities to initiate a change within a certain domain without being assigned, supported or funded by a given local institution. This does not negate their quest for local private or foreign support in their effort to accomplish their aims.

¹ Western

² Lebanon still suffer an electricity crisis that started with the civil war in 1975 causing a programming of electricity distribution

³ They perceive it as sequel of events of a set of wars connected in time, since enemies multiplied with time and sub

It is important to mention, from the beginning of this inquiry, the close position I have with my research field. I was born and raised in Beirut. I started folk dancing during my childhood before moving in my youth to other dance genres. The small size of the city and its peculiar relational web make it easy for dancers to know each other, even from a distance. Thus, my relationship to the dance environment in Beirut can be described as tight and personal. What drove me to my place of birth, despite the anthropological stance I was heading towards at the time of my field decision, was the strong feeling I had for *Dabkeh* and my sudden awareness that little attention was given to it in the scholarly field. Being a close insider had its advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, I believe my insider position provided me with a deeper knowledge of the field, which saved me time during my work and challenged me to find a more adequate interpretation of my material and its history during the evaluation process. I also have to state beforehand that my long practical dancing career in the field has informed the reading of its unwritten history. On the other hand, this close relationship made it hard for me to emotionally distance myself from the dance, the people and the collected material and find the pragmatic position of the researcher.

The first chapter of this dissertation gives an ethnographic description of the summer I spent with *Mahabtain* and some other folk dancers in Beirut. While situating my position as a researcher in the field, Chapter Two elaborates the methodology employed in the field and indicates the accessible literature related to *Dabkeh* whilst highlighting the existing lack of research related to the field. This Chapter introduces, as well, the theoretical framework employed in this research. Chapter Three presents a structural movement analysis of a main dance phrase that features in the most popular *Dabkeh* version *Dalouna*. The analysis will be compared, further, to three representations of the *Dalouna* enacted by *Marhabtain* in diverse occasions during my fieldwork. The analysis is realized by the means of Labanotation, Laban movement analysis system and verbal descriptions, and results in proposing the mutability of the dance form. *Dabkeh* flexibility, discerned through movement analysis, will be investigated in Chapter Four by looking at the role of social agency and the depth of its effects on the dance. Chapter Five looks at the construction of the Lebanese social character through a historical reading. It proposes that the intercultural encounters occurring on the Lebanese soil and the Lebanese emigration movements and travels have contributed to the formation of an individual open to cultural “others” and

admirers of change. It argues that these individuals contribute to the perpetual making of the *Lebanese Dabkeh* implementing its hybrid character. Chapter Six, argues that the birth of the Nation State did not help in offering the traditional dance a homogenising stand, as it did in several States around the world, but rather deepened its mixture, affirming the hybridity of the *Lebanese Dabkeh* and Lebanese identity. Chapter 7 moves away from history to enter the contemporary realm by focusing on *Marhabtain's* endeavours in communicating contemporary concerns through “traditional” vocabulary. The first part of the chapter investigates *Marhabtain's* attempt by contrasting it to well-established examples where tradition has been interacting with contemporary movements and interests. While the second part departs from the conclusion of the previous chapters proclaiming that, in the Lebanese case, hybridity is a tradition. I assert further that Lebanese *Dabkeh*, in its current form, is eligible to enter the international heritage discourse. Nevertheless, *Marhabtain's* endeavours in collecting and safeguarding is better, if accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of the political dimension of the heritage discourse and by a willingness and ability to conduct these activities taking into consideration the present local and regional political situation.

Before entering the field a short description of the Dabkeh would be beneficial. *Dabkeh*, *dabki*, *dabka* or *dabke* is the name of the most common Lebanese traditional dance. The term *Dabkeh* is a ‘generic name for a kind of line dance that exists in variant forms in the Levant [Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and some regions of Iraq] and, under different names, in Turkey and Eastern Europe’ (Stone, 2008a: 65). In addition, the traditional dance of Kurds in the diaspora carries the same name. The Arabic word “*Dabkeh*” signifies the act of hitting the ground, which is the common feature of all *Dabkeh* variations along with the chain figure; apart from these two common features, *Dabkeh* types differ. Therefore, *Dabkeh* as a word illustrates a function. From an Arab perspective any dance that involves chain figures, stamping the ground and a particular set of musical instruments can be identified as *Dabkeh*. This applies to some Turkish, Armenian, Cypriot, and Greek dances, which share similar costumes as an additional common feature. The diversity of Latin orthographies is due mainly to the wide variations of Arabic language dialects, which led to a variety of western spellings. Dialects vary from one Arab country to another and they differ within a single country according to the region, which is also applicable to *Dabkeh's* wide-ranging versions.

The Lebanese *Dabkeh* is basically performed in a line chain, held together by performers' hands or arms, depending on which local variation is being performed. The line then transforms into a circle of a semi-circle rotation in an anti-clockwise direction. The chain is usually led by one of the more skilful performers of the group, who can occasionally spring out of it and perform a more complex step variation. The leader 'signals changes of dance patterns and the tempo for the musicians by means of a handkerchief or scarf' (Cohen, 2005) manoeuvred in the form of a braid. *Dabkeh*, in Lebanon, is originally attributed to mountains, valleys and internal cities. However, Beirut's constant expansion had encompassed a huge population from all over the country, which transfused the dance into the shore city. *Lebanese Dabkeh* is, currently, a gender mixed practice with some rare exceptions, where men prefer to exhibit their manhood more explicitly.

Chapter 1 - Entering the Field

Entering the field means incorporating a particular sense of place, which is experientially inseparable from the social space, and becoming captured within it— often unawares (Hastrup, 2010:193)

My flight landed in Beirut International airport at 10:20 pm. Like every other city, at night, lights are the main distinguishing marks one can admire from the sky before landing. Though, the uneven distribution of lights² covering the landscape made the city look different. It looked like an old jewel that lost some of its pearls over time. Yet, still glowing with what is left of it. In the car, leaving the airport, I had a strong stomach ache remembering through experience that driving in Beirut streets is a matter of instinct and full senses awareness. This was my first bodily reaction to the reality I was back too after a whole year in Europe. Lebanese have their own driving rules, which they acquire only by practice. Conventional driving lessons do not count unless they are being held in real location, the streets, in real timing, different times of the day. In order to have a, relatively, safe trip in the city's streets, one has to have strong nerves and controlled reactions to random occurrences, such as dumps, bumps, sudden cut of streets' electricity, unexpected necessity to use the brakes, and enough knowledge of Lebanese way of thinking giving them the capacity of predicting other drivers, motorcycles' and pedestrians peculiar patterns. Surviving the Lebanese streets, on daily basis, is an achievement that demonstrates the unpredictable, irregular mode that inhabits the city.

Lebanon is a little country of 10, 452 km² at the edge of the Arab world and the Middle East, and a part of the Mediterranean coast as well. Lebanon incorporates over eighty-two registered political party in addition to the eighteen officially registered religious communities and a great number of guests' communities such as Armenian, Kurd, Assyrian and Palestinian communities. In Lebanon, political talk is a daily practice. People discuss, debate, and come to certain conclusions about world's politics; exhibiting an exhaustive historical knowledge, logical events analysis and strong argumentation faculties. This allows them to reveal the political future of the world and to predict the beginning of the third world war in the near future. While a traditional Lebanese morning starts with newspapers and Turkish-Lebanese black coffee, the latter

² Lebanon still suffer an electricity crisis that started with the civil war in 1975 causing a programming of electricity distribution

discussions occur at dinner and lunch tables, at public or private sector offices, mundane salons, housewives gatherings, restaurants, buses, taxis, coffee shops and grocery stores. ‘It was not our war, it was their war’ became a popular saying which can be added to the list of traditional proverbs, used by the Lebanese as excuse for their miseries and as mean of reconciliation after every conflict. A more formal version of the latter phrase can be frequently read in newspapers: “Lebanon is the playground of world’s politics”. These sayings, usually, refer to a series of historical events starting with the sectarian war of Mount Lebanon in 1860 where fighting parties were supported by the United Kingdom and Ottoman Empire from one side, and France from another. During the Lebanese civil war, called in the Lebanese dialect *the Events*³, which broke out in 1975 the parties involved were the communist empire against the Imperialist world. With regards to the recent sequel of events starting in 2005, the parties are the Western camp, the United States and European Union, from one side and the Eastern camp, Russia, China and Iran, from the other.

Contrary to the neo-orientalist idea of Lebanon, which in some cases is adopted by Lebanese, the “opium” of the Lebanese is not religion but politics; they are capable of forgetting their daily human basic needs and struggles, as the high cost of living, electricity, infrastructure and pollution problems in favour of a heated political speech from one side or the other. Their whole day is scheduled around television or radio news diffusion; the media has created a custom-made version of every story to suit their diverse political tastes. Interestingly, the Lebanese political drive is contagious. Even westerners living in Beirut are unable to resist getting actively involved in the political discourse. In the year 2000, a young French theatre director came with his troupe to Beirut to perform “Moliere”⁴’s plays for school children, and ended up producing and touring four political plays about Lebanon. An American trumpeter married to a Lebanese contemporary dancer became an avid activist of women and civic rights in Lebanon. A German artist, in association with Lebanese artists, established a civil war documentation and research centre in one of the most problematic suburb districts of Beirut. Not to mention foreign journalists and reporters, for who were more involved in politics the nature of their job, and who often take sides due to the overall spirit of the place. As a result, the abundant literary books and documents about Lebanon all revolve

³ They perceive it as sequel of events of a set of wars connected in time, since enemies multiplied with time and sub groups were created leading to diverse forms of conflicts.

⁴ A 17th century French comedy play writer, his work is part of Lebanese schools curriculum

around politics, religion, identity, media and conflict. Interestingly, dance, theatre, music, film, cuisine, fashion design and literature seem to rise above all the latter differential topics, creating an interconnecting zone for individuals who seek to skip the conflictual realities surrounding them.

I arrived to Beirut on the 24th of June 2013. My aim was to look at the emotional expression during the dance, within one of the most known semi-professional folk dance companies in the city. The dance group, I had initially planned to conduct my research with, has started in the 1990s, right after the Lebanese civil war ceased. At first, they started in one village in Mount-Lebanon as skilled young individuals who still know how to set up a traditional wedding. Their skills were demanded by the Lebanese society (*ies*), who despite its modernization still wants to maintain the tradition especially during important occasions such as wedding ceremonies and engagement parties. Thus, the company grew up significantly within a few years, which caused a wave of similar groups setting up all over the country.

However, at my arrival to Lebanon, the Lebanese scenery has changed dramatically since I left. A new reality had imposed itself changing the demographic facts that remained, more or less, stable for the last few decades. The Syrian revolution, which turned within a year to a civil war, had pushed Syrians⁵ from all social classes, to seek the Lebanese territory as a refuge, creating a new economical reality in various professional sectors. 'Lebanese authorities estimate that the total number of Syrians currently in their country exceeds one million, over 25 per cent of its population of approximately four million' (ICG: 2013,3). Therefore, the social, economical and political formations were subject to severe transformations. Once in the field, I found that the commercial aspect of the practice had grown up significantly turning the dance into a mere commodity, both on the groups' leaders level and practitioners. The tension generated by a severe competitive environment encouraged me to change my field plan as a whole knowing that whether I decided to keep the initial field or not, my research questions would be subject to modification.

My primary plan was to explore the audible manifestation of emotions occurring during the dance happening. Instead of dance emotions I was faced with a deep frustration on the side of the Lebanese dancers facing the numerous new competitors. It

⁵ In May 2013, 463,000 Syrians refugee were registered or awaiting registration in Lebanon. This number does not include middle and upper class Syrian citizens who moved to Lebanon since 2012.

was clear that the environment was driven by power-relations generated by strong and changeable economical and political factors. Therefore, looking at emotions in relation to the dance movement, and even the dance itself was relatively insignificant comparing to the social and economical stakes. Consequently, I have decided to look for an environment where *Dabkeh* remains the centre of focus. I have chosen, as a new field, a newly formed NGO, working for the promotion of *Dabkeh*, the Lebanese Folk dance and other “traditional” Lebanese items. By traditional, informants seemed to be referring to practices that have been carried on for several generations and that are identified as trademarks of the Lebanese society. I stayed with them for two months from July 1st till the end of August 2013. I thought that it would be more interesting for me to work within a frame that gathered both folk dance and creative activities with non-profitable intentions. I supposed that by working with an organization that did not seek financial profit it would make the field less driven by the economical tension, and power-relations would be less relevant and would allow me to focus on the dance practice itself.

The word “marhabtain” translated into English means “two hellos”; it is one of the Lebanese traditional ways to reciprocate a greeting. *Marhabtain* is a newly formed Non-Governmental Organization that aims primary to promote the Lebanese traditions in Lebanon and abroad, with a strong accentuation of the *Dabkeh*. The second goal of *Marhabtain* is to engage creatively with the traditional dance without endangering its essence. Although, the organization board counts thirteen members, the main and most visible figure is Malek Andary. Malek started folk dancing during his adolescence in *Abadieh*, a village in Mount-Lebanon where he grew up. He moved to Beirut to complete his bachelor degree. In the city, he started training and performing with professional folk dance groups, and undertook a variety of trainings related to dance and theatre. Later, he formed a folk dance group through which he established his choreographic career. He also teaches *Dabkeh* in several educational institutions in Beirut and other Lebanese regions.

That summer, *Marhabtain* undertook four major activities. First, the preparation of *Woman Under the Line*, a new contemporary *Dabkeh* performance, which was supposed to be staged at the beginning of September 2013; second, a joint *Dabkeh* workshop for a week in cooperation with two dancers of *El-Funoun* dance group from Ramallah, who came to Lebanon for the occasion; third, a workshop in Hammana, a

town in Mount-Lebanon. Finally, to support its finances, *Marhabtain* accepted to produce a folk dance show for a private event; the preparation took around ten days and involved dancers from outside the organization.

When I started my fieldwork, *Marhabtain* had already launched a call for participation in an upcoming staged performance for dancers who have an interest in Lebanese dance and music and can commit to a long period of rehearsals. There was no need to mention that the rehearsals would not be paid, since it is well known that in Beirut these kinds of productions do not enjoy funding. Rehearsals were hosted by *Dawar el Shams'* theatre, a cultural centre established in 2005 by "Shams" youth cultural association. The cultural centre is located at the edge of the city and the beginning of the suburbs. The first evening of rehearsals gathered ten volunteer dancers including three members of the organization. The group included female and male dancers aged between 20 and 45 years old. All of them were either university students or have a career in a certain domain. Malek, the founder of the NGO and the choreographer of the piece, was conducting the rehearsal. He started with a warming up hour, starting by floor and respiration exercises, gradually rising to standing positions. The second hour and half were used to explore choreographic sequences. Before leaving the premises, Malek gathered the dancers to talk about future rehearsals timings that he intended to conduct everyday for the next two months, as the performance was scheduled to be on stage on the 1st of September 2013. Dancers' response to the rehearsals schedule made it clear that it was impossible to conduct an everyday rehearsal, since many of them were engaged with other, more lucrative, dance groups, during the summer time, in addition to their daily occupations. Thus, eventually rehearsals were reduced to three evenings per week, which subsequently delayed the opening night of the performance until December 2013. Malek stressed, that day, on the confidentiality the group should maintain in regards to *Marhabtain's* choreographic material. Dancers were introduced to the performance rationale during the third week of rehearsals.

The last week of July, the Palestinian-Lebanese *Dabkeh* workshop started in *Dawar el shams'* theatre, as well. The workshop was a practical and informative exchange of dance knowledge about *Dabkeh* variations in the two countries. A day *Dabkeh* workshop was scheduled during the same week in Hammana, a town in Mount-Lebanon. The workshop took place in Hammana's sports hall and was conducted primary

by Malek, who was assisted by a few members of the organization. Participants were some of the town's residents and others who drove from Beirut for the occasion. The Palestinian dancers joined the workshop as well; in addition to an American who was looking for his Lebanese roots and searching for his grandmother. The town reception of the group was remarkable as well as their acceptance of the "traditional" material that the organization was presenting alongside of the dance. As mentioned earlier, a large majority of the Lebanese society is equally traditional and modern, and thus, traditional items, stories and customs are still known if not even practiced in towns, villages and cities including Beirut. Nevertheless, none of the participants had any objection on the material presented. This could be owed to the "traditional" hospitality and politeness that characterize Lebanese, especially towards outsiders.

The private event's rehearsals took place at the *Dawar El Shams'* theatre, which was almost deserted that summer for the exception of a few puppet plays for kids that took place, primarily, in the afternoons. The private event performance was remunerated; consequently, rehearsals included a large number of Lebanese folk dancers, with the participation of several non-Lebanese dancers.

In addition to my attendance to these activities and my participation in some of them, I have also conducted numerous interviews with folk dancers outside the organization. I have chosen to conduct these interviews to help me in drawing a broader image of folk dancing in the city. One of the interviews I have conducted was with Bassam, whom I have chosen because of his former engagement with *Marhabtain*, his new formation of a Flash-mob *Dabkeh* group, and for his contemporary dance career, that goes simultaneously with his folk dance endeavours. I had been therefore invited to attend one of the rehearsals he was running. Bassam, also, is from a village in Mount-Lebanon. He moved to Beirut to join the drama department at the Lebanese University of Fine Arts. The rehearsal I attended was conducted in a private fitness centre in the eastern suburb of Beirut. The atmosphere in this location was different than the rehearsals of *Marhabtain* for many reasons. Firstly, the Flash mob group is profit orientated and, thus, participation in the rehearsals was larger in number. Second, besides Lebanese from Beirut, Mount-Lebanon and other regional participation, there was a large participation on behalf of Syrian dancers, who were, at that time, driven out of their homeland to Beirut by the force of war. The room was hired for two hours, the rehearsal time limitation created a hyper energetic atmosphere. Thus, the warming up

session was brief and did not include any yoga or breathing exercises. The group, afterwards, was divided into smaller groups, where some individuals were teaching others some of the dances, while others were practicing and improving choreographies they already knew. At the same time, a process of creating or completing new choreographic was undertaken by others. Although Bassam was monitoring the whole process, the division of groups was spontaneous and based on members' skills and knowledge rather than origins, nationality or gender.

My interview with Zei was significant because her dual implication in both folk dance and contemporary dance in the city. Zei is a dancer and choreographer, who have been very active for more than ten years in the folk dance environment in Beirut. However, Zei identifies herself primary as contemporary dancer and choreographer, in addition to her occupation as film and dance teacher at the Lebanese German University. Zei describes *Dabkeh* as 'strong, reel and earth down; words [she] wouldn't use in describing other types of dancing (26th of July 2013). She states, also, that while dancing *Dabkeh*, she 'feels it a lot more than she feels other kind of dance, because *Dabkeh* can not be acted, it is either felt or not' (26th of July 2013), nevertheless, she affirms that if she was to create a *Dabkeh* performance, she would try to create something different. She would call only "girls" for audition and her selection would be diverse in terms of physical appearances, training backgrounds, age ranges. Her aim would be to implement improvisation into the creative process. In short, she would use *Dabkeh* to affirm and project her views on herself and her environment, while departing from the performers realities, concerns and aspirations (26th of July 2013). She would attempt then, to use "tradition" in "untraditional", deliberate and reflective manner.

Chapter 2 - Between Ethnography & Literature: Methodological Prospects & Limitations

i. The field and I

The relationship I had with my field was complex and perplex. As I was for a long period of my life very implicated and active in the general field of dance in Beirut, I had prior contacts, relationships and even memories of performances, travels and rehearsals with many dancers I have worked with during my fieldwork. When my interest was diverted from the field of emotions for the lack of it, I thought it might be interesting to look at the formation of the Lebanese agency in the field of Beirut folk dance and strategies and tactics deployed in the interrelationship of Lebanese dancers and groups. Nonetheless, in my attempt to accomplish this task on my return to Europe, I found myself struggling intensely to find an appropriate language for my ethnographic descriptions. I realized that the relationship I had with my collaborators in the field and the history I shared with them, made my position as “insider” hard to handle in my writings. Surprisingly, the distancing process in the field was not difficult to acquire as I initially expected. I was prepared to build construct my new position of a researcher by being less involved in the practice one hand, and by stating explicitly the task I was there to accomplish to my collaborators. Nonetheless, it did not occur to me, at any moment, that the distancing process could be handled on my behalf by my collaborators. Their initial attitudes towards me were, thus, perplexing. Some of them were already prepared to draw my new “persona”. During the early interviews I had with Malek I could notice that he was attempting to construct a clearer idea about my studies in the attempt to conceptualize an appropriate image of himself in relation to my motivations. The distance between the two of us and, consequently, between the organization members and myself was already established forming an emotional and relational gap. Nonetheless, while this distance was restricting in the field, it was irrelevant during my writing up. No matter how distant I was during my fieldwork period and to which extent I was “objective” in my writing up, I remained an insider who is capable of reading between the lines, of identifying what was not explicitly said. I realized that the people I worked with would perceive my analysis as a judgment and an evaluation. An outsider would have had a better stance in writing about the relational complexity created by the need of surviving a severe reality in the field of dance and art in Beirut. Consequently, I have decided to go back to my point of departure and to focus

solely on the dance, on what it does reveal and communicate through its enactment in the field. The literature review explored in the next Chapter will show the lack of research on the Lebanese *Dabkeh*, which makes this decision valuable and necessary.

ii. Literature review

Except for a PhD thesis in 2011 by ethnomusicologist Alia Toumi on *Dabkeh* in rural Lebanon, specifically in the valley and the north entitled *The Dabka, music and dance of Lebanon*⁶, little research has been done on *Dabkeh* in Lebanon. Professor of Anthropology, Paul Tabar has written *The Cultural and Affective Logic of the Dabki: A Study of a Lebanese Folkloric Dance in Australia (2005)*, a paper on the *Dabkeh* among the Lebanese community in Australia; nevertheless, the diaspora context is completely different from the local Lebanese context, since, the way *Dabkeh* is enacted in Australia rests on the discourse of the State cultural policy of multiculturalism. Thus, *Dabkeh* is used there to affirm the Lebanese identity among other communities, which is not the case in the local Lebanese context. Furthermore, *Dabkeh* among Palestinians, whether in the Palestinian territory or in the diaspora, was the subject of several extensive texts. Nicholas Rowe and Elke Kaschl, scholars who have conducted research in the Palestinian territories and Israel, have written extensively on the *Dabkeh* as a national symbol and its political appropriation on behalf of the Palestinian and the Zionist. Anthropologist Mauro Van Aken has also produced a work on the enactment of *Dabkeh* by Palestinian refugees in the Jordan valley. However, as mentioned previously, *Dabkeh* is also practiced by Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese in a wide variety of ways. Nonetheless, the struggle of the Palestinians and their current colonization of territories seem to attract scholars more to the politics of representation of the Palestinian *Dabkeh*. Going against this tendency this paper aim is to clarify the *Dabkeh* practice in Lebanon, which is, currently, enacted on a different level away from the politics of identity and the struggle over ownership. In this regard American researcher Christopher Stone's book "*Popular Culture and Nationalism, the Fairouz & Rahbani nation*" is one of the rare English contributions to the Rahbani and Fairouz, pillar founders of what came to be known as *Lebanese Dabkeh*. This paper will make use of some of the translated research materials exhibited in this book in the reviewing of *Dabkeh* history in Lebanon. The postcolonial approach employed by Stone in his reading of the Rahbani's theatre will be debated in Chapter Six. To complete the

⁶ Translator from French by the writer

historical account this investigation will rely on newspapers' articles, web pages and ethnographic material collected in the field. After discussing the methodology employed in my fieldwork and justifying the material chosen for analysis, this chapter will highlight the theoretical frameworks used in the examination of the field findings.

iii. Methodology

My close implication in the field elaborated in the previous Chapter had led me to take the decision, prior to my fieldtrip, to observe more and to participate less, since I before, was bodily immersed in the practice in a many ways. My stand as an observer gave me a better insight on how the dance is being played, composed and recreated. Besides participatory observation, I have used video recordings, field notes and sound recordings. After the field I have organized and selected my material in relation to my research questions.

a. Video Recordings

I have decided to divide the selected video materials into four main categories according to the type of events I have attended:

➤ Rehearsals:

These videos were recorded at the theatre premises featuring the group's rehearsals for *Woman under the line*, the upcoming contemporary *Dabkeh* performance. This category displays the creative process through which the traditional vocabulary of the dance was transformed to suit the choreographer conception of the piece. Some of these materials will be used in Chapter Three, Four, Five and Seven.

➤ Joint *Dabkeh* Workshop

This section illustrates *Dabkeh* differences in terms of form, representational dimensions and modalities of transmission between the Palestinian territories ensemble and the Lebanese NGO. Although Lebanon and Palestine are perceived as neighbouring countries, the political reality of the region during the last 60 years created a huge gap between the two. Although this category shed light on the dramatically different ways the formation of Nation-States affected the *Dabkeh* practice in the region, nonetheless it does not serve the intentions of this exploration. Thus, it was preferable to put it aside for future use.

➤ A Lebanese Town *Dabkeh* Workshop

This part contains two out of a three hours' workshop in a Lebanese town of Mount-Lebanon. It features dance teaching, verbal explanations and demonstration of the dance types, music, costumes and accessories. Its relevance resides in the way the knowledge about the dance and the tradition are articulated and provided, and the reception of that knowledge by the workshop participants. These materials will be deployed in Chapters Four, Five, and Seven.

➤ Corporate Event preparations

These videos, like the first two, were taken in the theatre within the laps of two weeks rehearsal for an expensive wedding 45 minutes dance show. The dance show required 5 different types of dances from the Arab world; Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Iraqi and Egyptian. Participants were the NGO members, the volunteers, number of dancers from divers other groups in the field of folk dance and a band of musicians, all led by Malek, the NGO leader. Unlike the contemporary dance performance, the corporate dancers were paid with relatively high rates. The relevance of this segment resides in one additional representation of the dance, demonstrating how the dance takes different shapes according to the situation. Some of these materials will be used in Chapter Three and Four.

b. Field Notes

Since I was preparing myself to a topic that involves emotions, I had equipped myself with two notebooks from the beginning. The first notebook accompanied me all the time. I have put in it all my impressions regarding what surrounded me; people, conversations, important key moment in the process of dance teaching or creating. It was a tremendous help to me in the process of finding and organizing my material. In addition, I used it as a recording device when recording was unwelcome. The latter allowed me to add one additional category to the video recordings events' categories, which is the social dance school class. I have attended two classes, a collective and a private one to one class given to a young man who wanted to exhibit his improvisational dance capacity at his engagement ceremony. The second notebook was supposed to be the reflexive notebook to which I was going to go every evening in order to reflect on the emotional expression of dance that I ended up never finding. Instead the notebook served as my personal catharsis in the field.

Being an insider to the city and to my field made me subject to various kinds of emotions. The predominant emotions I have experienced in the field were multiple variations of frustration. First, the frustration shared by the city inhabitants that derived from the political oppressive reality that made the city insecure and vulnerable. A second kind of frustration derived from my field itself, which I rather refrain from mentioning. Consequently, being able to release my tension on paper everyday was very useful in the process of distancing myself and building my researcher stance. These two field notes were very valuable in the process of writing-up, since it was through their content that eventually became clear to me that the use of written language is equally an effective tool and a restricting one as well.

c. Sound Interviews

Interviews were also divided into two main categories: first all the interviews I have conducted with Malek, the initiator and founder of the NGO, viewing his central role in my field and members of the NGO; second, interviews I have conducted outside the NGO with other individual dancers currently active in the fields of folk dance and Dance Theatre⁷.

iv. *Theoretical scope*

The analysis of the selected material will benefit from methodologies deriving from Ethnochoreology, Sociology, Anthropology and Performance Studies, navigating also through historical, cultural and economic premises. Starting with Rudolf Laban's conceptual tools of analysing dance, this investigation will move to social theorist, Anthony Giddens's conceptions of structure and agency (1983), from which it will further move to a reconsideration of concepts of interculturalism, cosmopolitanism and hybridity that, I argue, are not modern phenomena. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" (1983) as well as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's concepts of "the invention tradition" (1983) will underline the course of the further contextual analysis of the dance. The theory of false necessity by social theorist Roberto Unger (1987) will support Giddens's theory in Chapter Six and Seven.

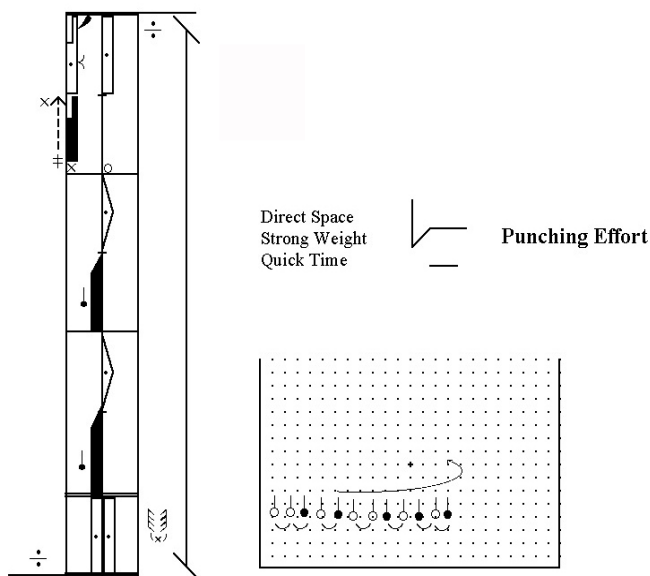
⁷ By Dance Theater I am referring to performances that blend contemporary dance forms with dramatic elements.

Chapter 3 - *Dalouna* Movement Analysis

The example chosen for this movement analysis will be the main phrase of most common and familiar variation of the Lebanese *Dabkeh*, called *Dalouna*. The attempt will be to compare the popular phrase of the dance to three different enactments of it witnessed in the field, in terms of steps and effort.

To identify a Lebanese *Dalouna* three main features are required: First, a song stating the word “*Dalouna*”, second, six beats rhythm and, third is to feature a basic sequence of steps. The only consistent element of the three is the music, which remains basically the same as for the lyrics and the dance; they constantly change a part of the basic lyrics verse and sequence of steps. The basic and most popular sequence of steps is the following:

a. *Dalouna* in a social setting



The notation⁸ above features the first phrase of the *Dalouna* in a social setting⁹. Dancers (both male and female) perform two crossing steps with the left leg to the right and end the segment with a small kick with the left leg before punching the floor with the same leg. They keep on repeating the same phrase applying slight modifications to its

⁸ Since dancers perform the choreography with slight differences. I took Malek performance as reference, except the first social setting video (a) where I took the woman in black dress as reference and the commercial event video (a.3) where I took the first man to the right as reference.

⁹ First segment of the video edit, attached to this paper, entitled as “a. Social Setting”

execution each time.

According to Rudolf Laban's concept of effort, three elements qualify the type of effort that characterize a movement:

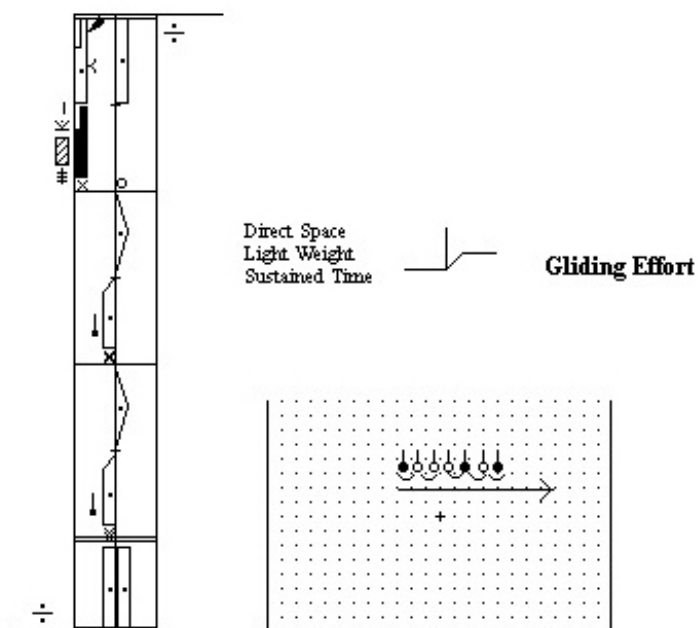
1- Space: The way an individual uses his personal space or "kinesphere". The extreme polarities of space exploration effort are direct and indirect. In another term, if the individual directs his movement towards precise points or he wanders his space in an indirect way. The video examined dancers who tend to direct their movements; therefore the space can be qualified as direct.

2- Weight: The manner an individual deals with the weight of his body during the movement. It can be in a contained, light way or pressing, strong way. *Dabkeh* execution, in general, requires a drop of weight as for the video where dancers exhibit a strong weight effort.

3- Time: Or the pace employed during a movement execution. It can be either quick or the sustained. Dancers in the video accelerate their pace gradually while dancing. Therefore, the time can be qualified as quick.

The combination of the three effort qualities generates a general effort movement type (Davies, 2006). In the case of the video exhibited, which shows a common way of dancing the *Dalouna* in social settings, the effort employed by the dancers can be seen as a **Punching Effort** according to Laban effort diagram.

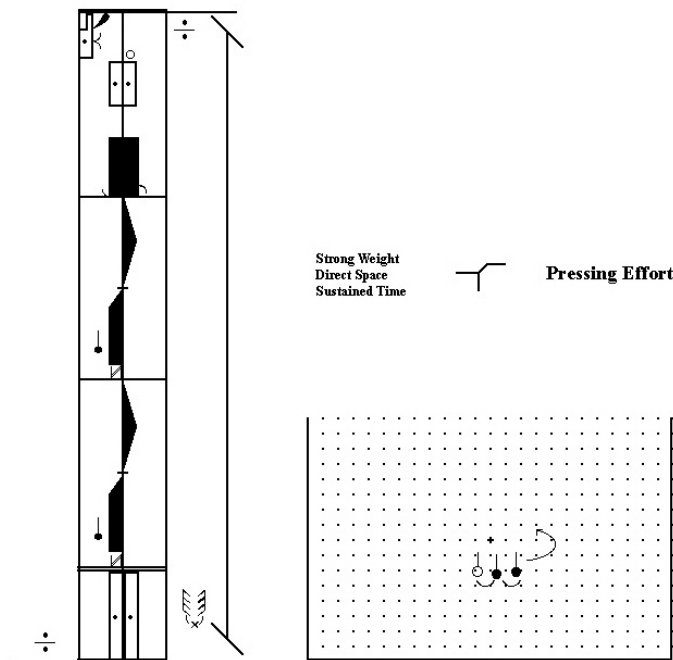
a.1 *Dalouna* in the contemporary performance rehearsals (10/07/2013)



The notation above refers to the first phrase of the *Dalouna* in a choreography executed during a rehearsal for the contemporary *dabkeh* performance. Although the four first steps resemble to the ones in notation (a) differences in execution remain clear. The steps taken are smaller and performed in middle level instead of low level. The third part shows a complete different leg gesture where the kick is replaced by a bend and stretch of the foot while the floor stamping at the end of the phrase remains.

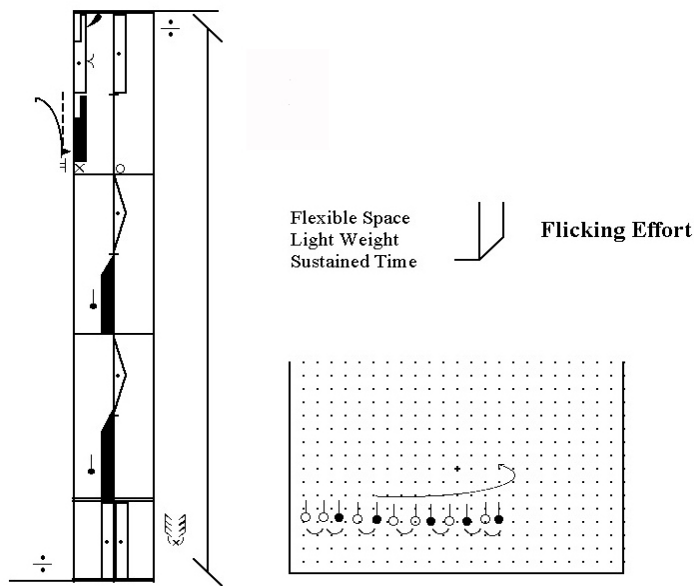
The effort movement quality in this version of the dance has transformed into a **Gliding Effort** due to the lightweight deployed by the dancers and the sustained time.

a.2 *Dalouna* in the Workshop demonstration (24/07/2013)



The notated version above represents an illustration of the first phrase of the *Dalouna* exhibited at the end of the workshop given in the Lebanese town. In this version the first two measures are very big and performed in a very low level. Whilst the last leg gestures in measure three are replaced by a slide and slight jump to collect the wide-open legs together while maintaining the floor stamping at the end.

The effort movement in this case is **Pressing Effort**.

a.3 *Dalouna* in the Commercial Event rehearsal (13/08/2013)

The version above is a notation of the first phrase of the *Dalouna* as choreographed and featured in the commercial event's rehearsal. The first two motifs resemble to a big extent to the social event version. A lower leg small but quick rotation, however, replaces the kicking lower leg gesture. The last floor punch remains the same as for the social context version.

This version featured a **Flicking Effort** since the dancer used their weight in a light way and their space seemed to be more loose than direct.

Observations

The movement analysis suggests that a same dance performed by the same people has differed greatly, in terms of steps, shape and effort, within the period of a month according to variety of situations.

The social version of the *Dalouna* exhibits a punching effort that requires an intentional and engaged movement on behalf of the performer.

The choreographed staged version features some western elements (flex/ stretched foot) displaying a disciplinary effort. Additionally, the Gliding effort invested in this version displays a slow, smooth and continuous motion on behalf of the group. In comparison with the social variation, the version reveals a continuous flow and controlled energy.

The pressing effort provided by the performers in the town's demonstration reflects a deep relation to the ground, an amplified, large and controlled movement. Being rooted seems to carry a specific significance in the town context. In contrast with the first version, this version demonstrates a denser and concentrate performance.

On the other hand, in the flicking effort shown during the rehearsal for the commercial event, dancers exhibit a lose connection to each other and an inconstant flow interrupted by small, sudden contact with ground. Juxtaposing this performance to the social one we can deduce that what was intentional in the social setting became loose and aimless.

This comparative analysis shows that one and the same *Dabkeh* phrase is performed in a variety of modes. Each version of the *Dalouna* will divert from the other, for the rest of the dance length. In the social setting variation the *Dalouna* maintain the circle or semi-circle configuration, a repetition of the main step for the length of the music while featuring a solo improvisation by one of the dancers, who will spring out of the line to exhibit his improvisation skills in the middle of the space. In the variation conceived for the contemporary dance piece, steps are be performed upside down and the position of performers disperses on the stage. The configuration of the town's demonstration varies widely throughout the dance presenting a line, semicircle, dispersed positions, a solo and a duo performance; it also features wide jumps in the air. The commercial event configuration displays semicircles, two facing lines, and small groups. In all the latter versions a wide array of steps, hands positions, and bodily postures are displayed.

To inspect how these varieties come to occur, a closer look will be given in the next chapter at the structure of the dance and the extent to which it enable individual dancers' expression.

Chapter 4 - *Dabkeh, a flexible interplay of Structure and agency*

A great appreciation goes to those who made a difference without being supported by anyone, those who relied on their own abilities and competences to make their achievements possible. Many thanks to them, because without those initiatives many opportunities would have been missing. We live in country where obstacles are abundant. When someone takes an initiative to create something, makes sacrifices to achieve it and does their best to keep standing “on their feet” in this very unsupportive environment, well, Chapeau-bas! (Ahlam, interview July 16th, 2013)

If the individual “actor” is distinguished and valued among Beirut dancers, it is, nonetheless, in relation to the “structure” described as chaotic, arbitrary and cruel, yet, dominant. Bassam Abou Diab, a *Dabkeh* dancer, *Dabkeh* Flash mob group founder, and a contemporary performer, who was also a performer with *Marhabtain*, when describing “*not connected*”, a solo contemporary performance he conceptualized and staged in 2011, asserted:

I wanted to expose the dilemma of the individual who is not able to control his own daily life. He wakes up in the morning and goes out not knowing in which direction life will drag that day. Because exterior events are more powerful than his own will to control his own daily plan. For instance, if he had planned an important meeting that day and an angry citizen decided to shut down a main street to manifest his objection to the government, or for an unpredictable reason the traffic jam was greater than usual, his failure to reach on time might, not only, affect his day but also his whole career. We try to draw path for our lives but we discover that life drives us always to different directions. It is like our whole existence; when we come to life we don't decide to be born in this specific place, among this specific group of people, we don't choose our names, our customs, etc. and, yet all these facts that we did not choose control our life, even when we decide to change them, they are still there informing our decisions. In sum, we are trapped in, let's call it, a system, an order, a chaotic order but still an order (August 1st 2013)

In the attempt to discern the interplay of agency and the structure in the field of folk dance in Beirut as these two interview excerpts suggest, this chapter will rely on social theorist Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration. The following argument will depart from Giddens' concept of “duality of structure”, which proposes that structure and human agency are mutually constructed. Giddens proposes that ‘Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures. In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being opposed, in fact presuppose each other’ (Sewell, 1992: 4). This analysis will attempt to

understand the interrelation of agency and structure in the Beirutine dance context, both on the level of *dabkeh* performativity and *dabkeh* community.

When the issue of ‘agency’ is brought into light in social sciences, it is generally opposed to structure. And, since it is not very likely that agency can introduce change to the structure that supposedly constructed him, agency remains an ineffective player in the social system. It is in order to counter this reduction of agency that I refer to Anthony Giddens’s theory and the view of William Sewell that informs it.

i. Agents and agency

Giddens refers to agents as ‘intentional, skilled, knowledgeable and enabled’ (1985), This conception of human agents as "knowledgeable" and "enabled" implies that agents are capable of putting their structurally formed capacities to work in creative or innovative ways (Sewell, 1994:4). Nonetheless, Giddens’ definition of agency also entails an occurrence of “events”.

Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place... Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently (Giddens, 1985:9)

This implies that the capacity of “agency” is not self-initiated but rather stimulated by exterior occurrence. In other words, agency does not act unless it is intrigued; thus, agency’s daily life is monotonous until something, outside of it, disturbs its linearity.

Cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner also discusses the relationship that ties agency to structure, and objects that the ‘theoretical apparatus is often directed towards showing the ways in which the (apparent) subject is actually an ideological effect, a discursively constructed position that cannot recognize its own constructedness’ (Ortner, 1996:7). Faced with this emphasis, within the social sciences, on the way the subject is constructed, Ortner attempts to empower “agency” by highlighting the “intentional” characteristic of the subject. ‘Intentionality is meant to include a wide range of states, both cognitive and emotional, and at various levels of consciousness, that are directed forward toward some end [purpose]’ (Ortner, 2006:132). She, further, distinguishes agency’s intentional actions from “routine practices”, which convey a lower degree of “awareness”. Nevertheless, Ortner’s representation keeps agency on the bottom of a hierarchical binary with structure. Thus, agency’s enactment seems to be

mobilized only as a resistance action towards an oppressive and/or imposed “structure”. This conception of agency can be also debatable since a “capable” agency can play an efficient role in resisting as in empowering a “structure” and its relationship to structure is not necessary hierarchic.

Sewell, on the other hand, suggests that ‘agency [...] is the actor's capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas [rules] other than those that initially constituted the array’ (1994:19). He stresses the fact that agency exists only within structures, nevertheless, it is not viewed as ‘opposed to, but as constituent of structure’ (1994:20). Although, Sewell, also, limits agency’s potential to the ability of shifting the constitutive elements of one “structure” to another, this definition remains the most plausible in relation to the materiel in question in this chapter.

They interplay between structure and agency during the dance happens on level of agency, as defined by Sewell and the second level of structure identified above.

ii. Structure and agency in the field

According to my field observations and to the material collected in the Hammana workshop, the constitutive elements of various kinds of *Dabkeh* are the chain configuration, the use of percussive music instruments, basic rhythms and basic step phrases. When the dance loses two or more of these elements, the acclamation of the dance as *Dabkeh* becomes questionable. Thus, what can be perceived as “structure”, in terms of non-variable elements over time, is a combination of two or more components perceived by dancers as essential. Since the structure of the dance relies on a combination of elements, it can be said that the dance structure is already malleable and adaptable. As described in the Oxford Encyclopaedia of Dance, *Dabkeh* ‘has many steps and patterns... they offer the leader, who also sets the patterns for the entire line, a scope for improvisation [...] the leader signals changes of dance patterns and the tempo for the musicians’ (2005). Thus, the group and the leader play fundamental roles in the dance formation. Nonetheless, it is not unusual for a group to dance without a “leader” and it is also common for a “leader” to perform in solo. In a study conducted in rural areas ethnomusicologist Alia Toumi observes that in *Akar El-Atika*, a village in north Lebanon, *Dabkeh* ‘reveals a constant physical and spiritual improvisation of two individuals. It does not focus on a single leader making his own movements and serving

as guide or acrobatic magnetism for the others, but rather on an internal dialogue between two or three leaders of the chain and continuous alternation between all the dancers'¹⁰ (2011:228). It is important to note that the term "leader" is a functional title and does not refer to a specific individual, meaning that any dancer can be the "leader" at any moment of the event. This is not to say that there are no "best dancers" within a community, nevertheless, the "best dancer" status does not suggest that the individual holding the label should be at all times the "leader" of the dance. However, as the leader may improvise from the repository of movements he acquired as social collective knowledge, he is also capable of introducing new elements to the movement, whether these elements are creatively conceived or borrowed from an external encounter. By leading the line to follow his initiative, he is introducing new elements to the dance. The leader can get inspired by individuals who spring out of the line, whether in solo or in duo; the product of their communication or improvisation can be copied by the leader and recycled back to the line. Mohamed Solh, one of Toumi's informants in the *Bekaa* region, 'believes that *dabka* called *biddāwiyya* covers ten or even a dozen variations in the valley region' (2011:50). This is to say that even when identified by a specific name, *Dabkeh* dances are of a variable, mutable structure, always enacted by agents. Thus, *Dabkeh* performed in social and rural settings, illustrates that the interplay between agents and structure is fluid and contributes to the perpetual construction of the dance.

On the other hand, in cities where the choreographed staged performances 'remain a cornerstone of the *dabka* definition' (Toumi, 2011:197), the leader, as individual, loses his function in favour of the choreographer. The structure of the staged *Dabkeh* differs from the social variation on many levels; firstly, chain configurations throughout the dance are maintained only partially, and the configuration varies in shape between straight lines, diagonal lines, circles, semi circles etc. Secondly, improvisations are limited to certain individuals and are limited in time. Thirdly, the structure seems to be more rigid since is conceived and rehearsed in advance. Nevertheless, the interplay between agency and structure shifts to a more conceptual domain. For instance, in 2000, Philip Aractangi, a film director, produced and directed a film called "*Al Bosta*", the Bus, which featured a school folk dance group reunited in pre-civil war context. This film featured what had later become known as "*techno-Dabkeh*", remixing traditional melodies with techno music and speeding up the dance movements introducing military

¹⁰ translated from French by the writer

and street combat moves and interpretation rather than the conventional chivalrous style. In some scenes, the dance was performed in military costumes. Appropriated by youngsters, “techno-*Dabkeh*”, as concept not as choreography, entered the repertoire of Lebanese *Dabkeh* along with its military outfit. In this case, the interchange between the structure and agency occurred on two levels: the initiative of the director, as agent, to infiltrate foreign elements into the structure and the acceptance of this intervention by local agents.

In *Woman under the Line*, the contemporary *Dabkeh* performance Malek attempts to challenge norms of behaviour of his own social environment. He does so by bringing on the stage the fear of the local “Other”, which he perceives as an exported virus embedded in traditional local communities distorting their self-perception. He is aiming to communicate through a familiar bodily vocabulary an unconventional textual meaning proper to the Lebanese context. Although, he precisely indicates that the fear is generated by external factors, he, nevertheless, does not aim to resist this imposition. He rather points to the way local communities deal with the imposed reality; he questions, thus, “traditional” behaviours. To illustrate, this on the level of movement, out of what he perceives as the reaction of people to the fear that inhabits them, he choreographs the *Dalouna*, the most popular *Dabkeh* dance, with dancers’ torso bent and their heads touching, as a bodily metaphor of the ostrich reaction to fear. Thus, he uses traditional items such as costumes, music instruments, props and the dance to highlight local social problems. The end product aims not only to interrogate but also to communicate an urge for change.

The interplay between structure and agency indicates that the *Dabkeh* is a flexible movement system. The constant intervention of agency into its structure makes it a practice in constant making, perpetually created and recreated. Furthermore, if innovation is ‘any new combination of means of production’ (Schumpeter, 1934 cited in Olivier de Sardan, 2005:90), *Dabkeh*, thus, offers a space for innovation and change. The next chapter will elaborate on the construction of Lebanese agency to display the elements deployed in the constant reinvention of the dance.

Chapter 5 - Heterogeneous Lebanon and the Value of Hybridity

i. An Intercultural Scene

Malek, who incorporates a mixture of dance techniques including contemporary dance technique, yoga and gymnastic exercises in the warming-up sessions he conducts before every rehearsal, may be perceived as an example of introducing hybridity in the local bodily expression. Even if he does not aim to homogenize dancers' expression, his mixture of techniques, nonetheless affects their performativity. During my fieldwork I spent a day with another *Dabkeh* group more that is commercially inclined. The *Dabkeh* flash-mob group included a significant number of Syrian dancers, due to the on going Syrian war. Syrian dancers' *Dabkeh* style is distinguished from the Lebanese one, yet it has also been modified through time. At the current time, two sources of influences on the dance can be identified. On the one hand, the Lebanese Caracalla dance theatre established in 1970s included Syrian dancers who afterwards formed dance groups in Syria creating a new stylistic dance movement. On the other hand, the establishment of the higher institute of performing arts in Damascus in the 1990s that hired ex-Soviet dance teachers formed a new generation of folk dancers, who passed their knowledge on to their direct environment. During the rehearsal I attended that summer with the flash-mob *Dabkeh* group I came to notice that the collaboration between Syrian and Lebanese dancers, who each have a vast variation of dance knowledge, was, once again, leading to 'modifications of knowledge or techniques' (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:105). This encounter was giving 'rise to unexpected forms and unpredictable effects [...] the end product of a graft does not resemble any of its initial elements, and the graft itself [was] unique and surprising (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:106). What was happening with the Syrian dancers could have happened with Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, and Palestinians who came as refugees to Lebanon throughout its history. Therefore, the space of innovation that *Dabkeh* offers could have been incorporated equally by local and transnational agency.

The division between rural and urban cultures in Lebanon is not rigid. Due to the small distances Lebanese maintain strong ties to their town and villages. Members of the NGO along with the volunteer dancers, I worked with, are from diverse religious and regional backgrounds; among the volunteers there was also a Palestinian, born in Lebanon and a Lebanese-Armenian. The risk of applying the term "intercultural" group to *Marhabtain* is its novelty in that it implies that diverse cultures in Beirut were

“originally” socially divided and recently came to interact, which is an inaccurate representation of the Beirutine reality. However with the lack of an adequate alternative, the term “interculturalism” will be employed to indicate the perpetual interaction of multi-confessional Lebanese from different social backgrounds in Beirut. Subsequently, the question arises: can the product of intercultural encounters be legitimate without losing its “traditional” label?

As dance scholar Andrée Grau asserts ‘no society has ever been monocultural (2008:236), which is particularly the case for Lebanon. This chapter will emphasize the composite elements that came to construct the identity of individuals living in Lebanon. It will argue, further, that the concept of “hybridity”, which describes cultural products that derive from diverse cultural encounters, is not itself a modern phenomenon. Moreover, it maintains that ‘homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical [authentic] traditions, [and] 'organic' ethnic communities’ (Bhabha, 1994:5), are modern conceptions formulated in favour of the nation-state building.

Multiculturalism, interculturalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are concepts conceived in relation to modernity and globalization. Multiculturalism is used to describe ‘people who participate in different cultural systems [...] living side by side’ (Grau, 2008:236). Intercultural exchange is employed to portray people from different cultural backgrounds living in interaction. Transnationalism is applied to designate phenomena hovering through nations. Cosmopolitanism, finally, is not defined as “citizens of the world” but rather in the way Ulf Hannerz expresses it, as the ‘orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other [which] entails an intellectual and esthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity’ (1996:103). Although these terms were envisioned and employed recently, in terms of meaning none of these concepts is a 20th century social phenomenon. They were, instead, put into use to distinguish minority groups without disturbing the “myth” of a homogeneous national identity. For instance, in Britain, ‘the term multiculturalism has come to be used primarily in connection with demands on behalf of black and other minority groups for separate and equal representation in college curriculums and extra-academic cultural programs and events. It has also assumed more general connotations as an ideological stance towards participation by such minorities in national "cultures" and societies, and the changing nature of national

and transnational cultures themselves' (Turner, 1993:411). Furthermore, the attribution of these terms to the current era bears in it the same colonial assumption that in modern history, in opposition to ancient history, there was never a civilization worth referring to in terms of State apparatus models and cultural development, other than the Western civilization. Prior to the advent of Western modernity, the world was constituted of ethnically "pure" tribes, geographically separated and immersed in the dark ages. In a variety of cases, nationalist movements that emerged after the colonial empires illustrated the latter conception since they 'explicitly juxtaposed 'modernity' to 'antiquity'' (Anderson, 2006: 68). The following section will attempt to highlight the fact that the Lebanese territory was for a long historical period, heterogeneous, cosmopolitan and intercultural. Thus, hybridity observed in the *Dabkeh* after the birth of the republic can be perceived as continuation of an intellectual rational, not as an absolute invention.

ii. A Historical Interculturalism

"Our ancestors were Christians when Europe was still pagan and they spoke Arabic long before Islam", I said once to a coreligionist with a little bit of bragging. He replied cruelly: Your formula is correct, hold on to it! It will make on our graves a beautiful epitaph""¹¹ (Maalouf, 2012:558)

Lebanon was under the Arab-Islamic rule for six hundred years starting 660 AD until the 1250 AD. Nonetheless, the population of Mount-Lebanon was mixed even before the advent of Islam. 'Arab tribes and clans [...] had been established locally [...] before Islam, some among them possibly from as early as the third century AD. Wherever these tribes settled, they must have merged with older elements who have been there since antiquity' (Salibi, 2003: 143). During what is known in the West as the Islamic Golden age, some communities living in geographical Lebanon 'adopted the new religion [Islam] in one of its several heterodox forms' (Salibi, 2003: 143). This epoch experienced the growth of the city, as an urbanised centre; cities such as Alexandria in Egypt, Fez in Morocco, Baghdad in Iraq, Damascus in Syria, Granada in Spain, Samarkand in Uzbekistan were a conglomeration of ethnic, religious and linguistic human fabric, and were hubs of intellectual and scientific interactions, gathering knowledge from Phoenician, Greek, Egyptian, Indian, Persian and Chinese civilizations (Gregorian, 2003). 'Scholars travelled to teach or share ideas. Furthermore, the Arabic language became a unifying factor. Translations from Greek, Latin, and

¹¹ Translated from French by the writer

Chinese into Arabic were innumerable, thus removing language barriers for scholars... Libraries were established in Cairo, Aleppo, Baghdad, and urban centres in Iran, central Asia, and Spain, while bookshops with thousands of titles opened in several cities. Finally, The House of Wisdom, an academic institution serving as a university, was established in Baghdad in 1004 C.E.' (Falagas, Zarkadoulia and Samonis, 2006: 1581-1582). British historian William Dalrymple asserts that 'translations from the Arabic... filled European libraries with a richness of learning impossible even to imagine a century earlier' (2005: ix). This is a further illustration of the European discourse of supremacy that embodies an evolutionary narrative making it "impossible" for a European-educated "to imagine" any other civilization that is neither ancient nor "modern". These scholarly encounters indicate cosmopolitanism, at least on the scholarly level. Furthermore, it suggests that even in the Middle Ages, "purity", whether on racial, communitarian or cultural level, was already highly improbable. In *Al Muqaddimah*, or the Introduction, Ibn khaldun a fourteenth century, historian, politician and sociologist asserts that

'The only meaning of belonging to one or another group is that one is subject to its laws and conditions, as if one had come into close contact with it. In the course of time, the original descent is almost forgotten. Those who knew about it have passed away, and it is no longer known to most people. Family lines in this manner continually changed from one tribal group to another, and some people developed close contact with others (of a different descent). This happened both in pre-Islamic and in Islamic times, and between both Arabs and non-Arabs' (Ibn Khaldun, 1969:100)

Geographical Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire for another four hundred years. Although the Ottoman period was not, particularly, acknowledged for its scholarly production nevertheless, it was distinguished in terms of cultural exchange, which was also due to its geographical extension and its administrative structure. Many daily practices, habits and costumes were shared through North Africa, Balkan, the Near East and Greece, embodying what is known today as transnational phenomena. During this period, 'writers [Lebanese local chroniclers] certainly made note of different villages, regions, religions, and cities, the cultural and geographic integrity and the interconnectedness of the Ottoman world was never for a moment denied' (Makdissi, 2000:41). In addition, a vast emigration movement took place in late nineteenth century from Mount-Lebanon to the Americas, where 'encounters with other cultures and variegated historical circumstances shaped the answers to questions about the identity of the emigrant individual and the community. In matters of family, gender, and class,

emigration made some accepted norms appear irrelevant at best, thus provoking a search for new and possibly more relevant ways of life. How far individuals or groups walked away from their past varied considerably, and not all walked in the same direction' (Khater, 2001:188). Some of these emigrants came back to their own villages contributing heavily to the construction the middle-class modern Lebanese identity by 'mixing and matching "modernity" and "tradition" to suit their particular desires, needs, and circumstances' (Khater, 2001:180). At the same time, American, British, French, and according to some texts German and Italian influences started to be felt in Beirut through missionaries and trade. These impacts increased the elements of cultural and intellectual fusion. The French mandate, as a colonial physical existence, did not take over Lebanon until the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1920, to last for only twenty-five years.

Ussama Makdisi, a Lebanese historian, argues that the religious discourse, in Mount-Lebanon, was prompted during the Ottoman modernization period. The colonial political system served as a model in the attempt to integrate western modernity into the old empire, thus the Ottomans 'emphasized sectarian identity as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims' (Makdissi, 2000:2), Makdisi asserts further that

Sectarianism [...] emerged when the old regime of Mount Lebanon, which was dominated by an elite hierarchy in which secular rank rather than religious affiliation defined politics, was discredited in the mid-nineteenth century. The collapse of the old regime opened up the space for a new form of politics and representation based on a language of religious equality (Makdissi, 2000:6).

Communities began then to be "imagined" as small religious units endangered by their neighbouring "Other".

During the same period, Beirut rose as the major intellectual port city on the Mediterranean Eastern coast in relation to its peers' port cities of the Ottoman-Lebanon. Besides being a trade hub, 'Beirut... by the 1870s had assumed centre stage in the writings of its literati. Pride of place was given not only to antiquity *per se*, but to Beirut's extant architecture and to what it became during the Ottoman centuries: a mixed society enriched by urban diversity' (Hanssen, 2006:1). Although *Al Nahda*, the cultural awakening, which took place in Beirut at that time, was 'a product of the European Enlightenment and the ideals of the French revolution, as well as of

technological progress' (Kassir, 2010: 168), it was nevertheless, neither a product of colonialism nor an effect of imposition. Samir Kassir, a Lebanese journalist and professor of history and political sciences, named three founding figures of the Lebanese awakening movement: Ahmed Faris Al-Shid'iaq (1800-1887) who

After sixty years of wandering between Cairo, Malta, Paris, London, Tunis and Istanbul, [...] regained his native land only in death [...] Lexicographer and author of monumental dictionary; a lover of Arabic who was eager to make it loved by as many readers as possible and who introduced a great many neologisms into the language; a Christian who translated the Bible for the benefits of Arab protestants; a pioneering novelist who published an unashamedly erotic autobiography; an advocate of education for women and inventor of an Arab version of socialism (*al-Ishtiraākiyya*); a supporter of Ottomanism and, above all, a convert to Islam (2010:164).

Ibrahim al-Yaziji (1800-1871), a grammarian and teacher, has 'published studies in music, medicine, painting and astronomy' (2010: 165) among other innovative endeavours in relation to Arabic language, and Butrus Al Bustani (1819-1883), known as the Master, 'pioneer of the Arab Syrian nationalism... grammarian, lexicographer, and educator... journalist' (2010:166) and the founder of the first secular secondary school in the region 'with a comprehensive curriculum that, in addition to offering training in ancient and modern languages (Greek, Latin, Arabic, Turkish, French, and English), was meant to embody the spirit of good will and cooperation' (2010:167). The first theatre, in Beirut, was established by 'Marun Naqqash, a merchant who has acquired a passion for the stage in the course of his travels in Italy' (Kassir, 2010:163) and still carries his name till date. This highlights further the concept of "Individuality", as the capacity of individuals to change the established orders, viewed by Lebanese as a social value. Cultural influences on these individuals varied in types, means and in sources: trade and travel, strong connections with major Arab Ottoman cities and Istanbul, the American protestant and Jesuits missions, European Enlightenment, Marxist thoughts etc. The formation of the *Nahda* intellectualism, in Beirut, was a matter of "exploring, analysing and synthetizing" an intellectual method that was neither new nor alien to Arabs familiar with the rational of Arab-Islamic cultural era. In addition, it resulted from reciprocal movements and travels and not one-sided exterior intervention. Therefore, the affirmation of a "composite" identity, as simultaneously traditional and modern, Muslim and Christian, Arab and Western, was clear, not only in the Lebanese literary and scholarly texts, but also in their social actions. This affirmation of "multiple" could be read as a manifestation of resistance to the process of

segregation that took place at the time.

Hence, Lebanon and the Middle Eastern region had never ceased being intercultural and diverse. Homogeneous, monolingual and isolated communities may have never been prevalent or even relevant phenomena of the geographical area. On the other hand, multiculturalism, interculturalism and even hybridity of race and culture seemed to be unproblematic traits of these regions until the advent of Western “modernity”. Dichotomies of the Cartesian reasoning were to contribute further to the refusal of the “in between” as a geographical and cultural space. Consequently, hybridity, as a cultural product of two or more cultural components, has ‘been viewed as manifestations of fragmentation and degeneration, thereby suffering in comparison to the supposedly fully formed, reified, historically sanctioned expressions of a colonial or “westernized” elite’ (Baron and Cara, 2003:5).

However, the rise of the nation-state after almost a century of division required a representation of a homogenized identity. These “imagined” religious units had to be, once again, “re-imagined” as unified. Since ‘the idea of the nation is usually tied to conceptions of history and tradition’ (Hannerz, 1992:49), thus, ‘traditions’ that had to be invented, were not formulated as a reaction to ‘the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of the social life within it as unchanging and invariant’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983:2). But rather they seem to have been articulated in order to fix a selective history serving as a deep pillar of an “imagined” unified national identity in the popular imagination. The Lebanese diversity was not suitable for such a conception, which led to an agonizing birth of the Nation.

This chapter has shed light on the fluidity of exchange and the cosmopolitan tendency that constructed the Lebanese “composite subjects” through their territorial and migratory history. The next chapter will illustrate how the attempt to construct a national dance has failed to create a “pure” and “authentic” identity. Which was primarily due to the heterogeneous fabric of the land, and to the impact of a multiculturally layered and cosmopolitan “agents” on the construction of the cultural identity of the State. It will assert further that a structuralist, post-colonial or nationalist reading of the theatrical *Dabkeh* constructed after the birth of the Nation State might lead to a simplistic understanding of the dance representation.

Chapter 6 - Homogeneity and Authenticity, Lost Causes in the Building of the Republic

[The Lebanese experiment] is laudable to have made a place for every community instead of giving all the power to just one of them and condemning the rest to submit or disappear. It is laudable to have worked out a system of subtle checks and balances that has allowed liberties to develop and the arts to flourish in a region where most other countries have a single religion, a single ideology, a single party or a single language, and where those who don't have the good fortune to be born on the right side of the communal barrier have no alternative but submission, exile or death (Maalouf, 2000:145)

As a result of the late Ottoman modernization process and the French mandate, the birth of the republic resulted in

a convention [...] handed on from the period of the French mandate that the President of the Republic should be a Christian (and normally a Maronite), the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and that other Cabinet Ministers should be not only heads of Departments of State but also representatives of the principal other religious sects which make up the Lebanese 'emulsion'. The Constitution itself requires that the allocation of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and of posts in the administration, shall pay due regard to equity as between the sects (G.E.K, 1957:261).

According to Kraidy, media anthropologist, 'Maronites adhere to religious teachings that developed in the fourth and fifth centuries around Saint Maron, spiritual leader of a group of monks in the valley of the Orontes River in present day Syria [...] At Maron's death around 410 A.D., his followers institutionalized his doctrine, and effectively started the Maronite confession, which became a branch of Catholicism' (Kraidy, 2005:116). Most modern Nation States narrations assume an ethnic or religious demographic majority conveying within its borders other minorities. The Lebanese republic was one of the rare cases, if not the only, to be constitutionally built on the equal representation of diverse minorities. Consequently, narrating diverse histories was a challenging and extremely problematic task. Several individual writers and artists contributed to the construction of a Lebanese identity; among them were the Rahbani Brothers, who managed to compile the diverse Lebanese identitarian attitudes in a symbolic theatrical narrative. It is from this narrative that the *Lebanese Dabkeh* has derived.

In the beginning of 1950s, Assi and Mansour Rahbani, along with the female vocalist, Fairouz, established the tradition of operetta and the three of them became the national symbol of the Lebanese State. At first, their operettas were based on

rearrangements of traditional cultural items, such as stories, melodies and poetry. Later, their work ceased to be rooted in tradition and started to rely on artistic creation. After several productions, the team succeeded in dominating the artistic Lebanese scene and extended their activities to the Arab world. ‘Consequently, not only is the Rahbani name familiar throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, but it has also dominated the theatre and music scenes in these regions for over fifty years; to Arabic speakers, the Rahbani name is as familiar as that of Shakespeare’ (Khoury, 53: 2008). Due to the touring and video recording and television diffusion of their musicals, dances featured in their work have forged a traditional Lebanese dance in the collective imaginary of Lebanese, Middle Eastern and Arab audiences. It is important to note at this point that in form, the Rahbani's line dance meets the description of the typical state folk dance ensembles of the twentieth century in terms of unified, coherent and crystallized movements, colourful costumes, dancers' athletic abilities and cheerful attitude (Shay, 1999). However, in content and in context, their theatre deviated on two fundamental levels. Firstly, their work was neither funded nor monitored by the state, or an institution that represented the state. When their first play featured at Baalbek Festival, the first and most prestigious cultural event in Lebanon funded by the private sector but reflecting the President's ideology at the time of its establishment in 1956, ‘none of the ladies of the committee [*the festival committee was composed of only women*] knew what was going to be in the show’ (Zogheib in Stone, 2008a:40). Secondly, the predominant theme of their work was not that of the “happy village” that characterize most of the state ensembles' themes elsewhere (Shay, 1999) but, rather, the divided village that shall be reunited in order to achieve “happiness”. Although, the theme emerged in their second production, after the events of 1958, a political crisis that occurred as a rebellion against the pro-Western president Camille Chamoun, it was, however, still a pre-war context. In a pre-civil war historical context, the theme seems to portray a social preoccupation rather than to propagate a preconceived state ideology. Their Lebanon was a future ‘imaginative’ state that has, yet, to be achieved. Therefore, their ‘invented tradition’ was forged in the ‘imagined’ past but it sought its realization in the future. Moreover, although their first production was associated with Baalbek festival and its committee, Stone, early in his book, announces that ‘the signifying power of the Rahbani Brothers and Fairouz eventually breaks free, both literally and metaphorically, from Baalbek, and eclipses both site and Festival in terms of representational productivity’ (2008a: 41). In other words, Stone fills the gap between

the conception of ‘modern dance companies’, where according to dance scholar Anthony Shay ‘choreographies are created through a specific individual's aesthetic imagination, often representing that individual artist's emotional states, aesthetic interests, personal life experiences, and philosophical out-look’ (1999:54) and that of state ensembles where ‘the characters of the founder-artistic directors and choreographers are often more muted’ to favour ‘the “people’s art”, the pure spirit of the aesthetic expression of a specific ethnic group of people’ (1999:55). The Rahbani built their imaginative world through their personal familial memories, that of their father’s, grandmother’s village (Stone, 2008a: 37,60,65,76,77). Thus, what the Rahbani meant to the Lebanese was both the deliberate individual creativity and the “art of people”. This is especially so, because they originated from a modest rural background and worked as municipality officers¹² before they started working at the radio station, where their artistic career started in 1950; hence, they were “the people”. However, a prominent figure in the construction of the *Dabkeh* in their first operettas, was Wadea Jarrar,

born into a wealthy land-owning family in northern Palestine in the 1920s and exposed to the local peasant dabkeh through interactions with her father’s farm workers [she went later to study] physical education at the Bergman Osterburg Trust in England, where she gained a more thorough education in European folk and ballroom dance forms ... Exiled with her family from Palestine in 1948, she subsequently worked at the University of Beirut (Rowe, 2011:372).

Jarrar and her husband conducted ‘research into the rural folkdances of Lebanon and their incorporation of movements from these dances into productions for university folkdance competition’ (Rowe, 2011:372). They were chosen by the Chamoun presidential family, responsible of Baalbek festival, in 1956 ‘to go to the Moiseyev School and the Bolshoi in Russia for further training in European approaches to the staging of folkdance’ (Rowe, 2011:372). Wadea had a strong impact on generations of Lebanese students who came from all Lebanese regions to study at the Lebanese University in Beirut. Testimonies from older generation of individuals in my field, who knew or heard of Wadea in their youth, illustrate that the impact Wadea had left was not restricted to her profession as choreographer and teacher but also to her persona as an accomplished female figure. She was, among other female figures, a source of inspiration for young women eager, at the time, to liberate themselves from the sway of

¹²The municipality officer character is omnipresent in their work

their patriarchal society. During my interview with him in the field, Fahed El Abdallah, with whom I have performed for ten years, spoke about Wadea Jarrar with a great deal of respect and gratitude. He also referred to a Lebano-Armenian dancer and choreographer called Kigham, about whom I failed to find any written reference. As mentioned earlier Wadea did not remain a choreographer with the Rahbanis for a long time. They were very soon to engage Lebanese choreographers in their work.

Two dance groups emerged from the Rahbani musical empire in the 1970s, Caracalla Dance Theatre and Fahed El Abdallah folk Dance Ensemble in 1978. Abdel Halim Caracalla was a dancer and later a choreographer in the Rahbani theatre. In the late 1960s, Caracalla left for London where he undertook dance studies that encompassed Graham modern dance technique. He came back to Lebanon and founded the first dance company in Lebanon and the Arab world in 1970. Thus, he moved away from the Rahbani “school” and ‘fused Western contemporary and traditional Middle Eastern dance’ (Craine and Mackrell, 2014), becoming the first and only dance theatre in the Near East, obtaining the title of “Bejart of the Orient”, while Fahed El Abdallah maintained the Rahbani dance traditions in terms of folkloric form and borrowed elements.

Abdel-Halim Caracalla started gaining international acclaim in 1978, three years after the breakout of the civil war in Lebanon, where the company was based and operating. That year, the company toured with “*The Black Tents*”, a dance-play that features the rural life and traditions of Bekaa, or the valley of Lebanon. As with the Lebanon of the Mount featured in Rahbani’s work, where villages are composed of ‘red-tiled, stonewalled and old arch-replete houses’ (Stone; 2008a: 76), Caracalla’s village was inspired from his own, that of the valley with its historical desert black tents. Although, he continued, at the beginning, to portray the simple old days of rural Lebanon, his work would, soon, turn to celebrate the glorious ancient times with *Elissa, Queen of Carthage* (1996), *Andalusia, the Lost Glory* (1997) and *Two Thousand and One Nights* (2001). Caracalla’s thematic can be easily viewed, compared and analysed from nationalist and orientalist perspectives. Nonetheless, the fact that in the late 60s, Caracalla left to England to undertake a Graham contemporary technique training, could make it also possible to look at his work as a part of the Western modern dance movement, flourishing in Europe in the 60s and the 70s. Besides featuring tradition and reviving ancient myths appropriated to the geographical region, Caracalla adapted two

Shakespearian plays, *Midsummer Nights Dream* (1990) and *Much Ado About Nothing* (1999). He always managed to end the performances with a long sequence of Dabkeh. The Caracalla dance “style” consisted of a modern technique shaped by oriental movements, such as stretched and strong female arm gestures combined with the freer wrist and hand gestures generating a fluid flow of movement. The verticality of the dancers’ body aimed at generating a proud attitude without diminishing the waist, pelvis and hip sinuosity. The same applies to male movements, which displayed stretched leg movements alternating with heavy “pliés” producing a chauvinist attitude, accompanied by a wide, open and leading chest. Hence, Caracalla did not stick to the Moiseyev model and did not copy what he learned in England. He, instead, modelled a movement that he perceived as more representative of the region or its stereotype. However, blending the art of the east with that of the west was not a genuine feature of Caracalla’s work. The blend started with the Rahbani folklorization endeavours and was considered to be a distinctive element of their work. The genuine work Caracalla achieved on the Lebanese and Arab scene is the “dance” itself. His company, which developed during wartime, was the first dance company in Lebanon and the Middle East and remained the only one for more than twenty years.

Being the first and only in a milieu that views dance as shameful activity, his company was the ultimate hope for Lebanese and Arab individuals who aspired for a dance career. The company succeeded in gaining the approval of the conservative Middle-eastern audience by featuring the dance, whether folk or hybrid, as a local “high art”. Thus, dance that is not “Rahban-esque”, that is folkloric, or “Caracalla-esque”, that is Arab modern, remained dishonourable or mediocre undertaking.

According to the social theorist and politician, Roberto Unger, we, as social agents and researchers, are trapped in the constraint of the institutional and imaginative contexts that we, first, created. Which limit our freedom to act, rethink and reshape these contexts (Unger, 2001). My argument is that the Lebanese social agents are, to a certain extent, free of such constraint in regards to its direct context Lebanon due to the weakness of its institutional formation. Nevertheless, he is not immune to the constraints dominating the world surround him.

Stone argues that the Rahbani Brothers were serving the French supported, Christian elite’s idea of Lebanon in the 1950s, by diffusing a ‘narrow Lebanon analogous to the Christian Mt-Lebanon village’ (2008a: 2). Yet, he states, later on, that

at the first meeting of the Brothers with Baalbek Festival committee, which is, to Stone, an institution-like organism; the ladies of the committee ‘did not have a clear idea as to what they wanted to present there’ (Zoghaib 1993, cited in Stone 2008ba: 30). He continues further to state that the ‘tension (between Rahbani and the committee) was [...] an issue of potential conflicting visions [...] to the version of Lebanon that would be presented there (2008a: 31). Thus, since the beginning of the collaboration between the institution-like and the social agents, the institution seemed to lack of “vision”, which allowed the Brothers a certain freedom of representation, leading them eventually to present a ‘Christian Lebanese Mt Lebanon’ that was, to them as individuals, the Lebanon they knew the most, as Christians from the Mount. Moreover, in a later work of Stone, entitled “Fayruz, the Rahbani Brothers, Jerusalem, and the Lebaninian song”, Stone comes to the conclusion that the Rahbani project ‘can [...] be seen as having been informed by their heartfelt work for Palestine, not the other way around’ (2008b: 164). Politically and theoretically speaking, these propositions are paradoxical, since the two political projects that led Lebanon to fifteen years of civil war were, on one hand, the westernized Christian nationalist project, known to be hostile to Palestinian and to be supported by the capitalist West. On the other hand, the Pan-Arabism project, a movement, first, initiated in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria by both Muslim and Christian Arabs against the Ottomans during the 19th century and supported during the sixties and seventies by the communist East, that considered Lebanon as part of the Arab world and Palestine as common cause. Thus, if the Rahbani project was a nationalist state project, why, then, did it diffuse antagonist’s political views of Lebanon? A plausible answer to this question could be as proposed earlier that, the brothers didn’t not intend to promote a ‘narrow Christian Lebanon’, instead they, as individual artists, were simply inspired by their own lives and environment. Which was neither to contradict their personal affiliation with Arabism, nor to restrain their sympathy towards the Palestinian cause.

Hence, if social agents have, already, a certain freedom, it is important that the theoretical scope, from which we attempt to understand the mechanisms of their social enactments, set them free from ‘fixed divisions and hierarchies within humanity and... rigid rankings of subjective experience’ (Unger, 2001:13). Looking at the Lebanese mosaic from the lens of social class, ethnic, religious divisions, will, probably, cause a fall into the trap of contradictions that shapes the society itself and will lead to more puzzling questions rather than explanations.

The breakthrough of the civil war in Lebanon is one major *event*, among other minor ones, in the history of modern Lebanon. On the concept of *event*, or conflict, Foucault asserts ‘that structuralism formed the most systematic effort to evacuate the concept of the event, not only from ethnology but from a whole series of other sciences and in the extreme case from history’ (1980:114). Here is another reason why the ‘deep-structure’ theory, as Unger names it, seem to be less suitable in a context such as Lebanon. However, if the occurred conflict came to completely disable the Lebanese loose ‘institutional structure’, the ‘imaginative structure’ was to be disturbed.

According to Unger it is important to consider that the ‘structure-disturbing and structure-inventing activity is not itself governed by a system of lawlike constraints and tendencies, certainly not by the evolutionary logic or relentless practical imperatives’ (2001:4). Caracalla was not the only artistic case that broke with the Rahbani tradition, among others, was Ziad Rahbani, the son of the Assi and Fairouz, pillar founders of the “green and beautiful imagined Lebanon”. Ziad’s theater, music and songs did not only break with his parents’ world, but acted, in form, as ‘antagonistic’ to it. ‘Ziad’s plays and songs, however, are heteroglossic reflections of Lebanon’s fractured ethnic and class landscape, as enacted by the different accents of his actors’ (Kraidy, 2003: 284). His representation of the Lebanon as diverse environment that ‘may not be viable as a country’ (Kraidy, 2003: 285) in a sarcastic fashion, can be viewed as illustration of the daily lived civil war in contrast to the “imagined future Lebanon” his parents created.

Thus, the ‘imaginative structure’ built by the Rahbani Brothers was shook, disturbed and re-invented during the war in, at least, two extremely different ways. Moreover, the chaotic, absurd, unstable environment of civil war and the total absent of institutionalism, which, in many cases, is expected to freeze if not deteriorate the productivity in all vital sectors, did not seem to have effected the cultural productivity in the Lebanese context. This is to say that, questioning, rethinking, resisting and remaking social settings are not, necessarily, bound by a system that leads to fatal monotypic change.

More importantly, it is to be questioned whether a post-colonialist scope of theory is adequate to the Lebanese case. Since, although Lebanon was influenced by its cultural surrounding, especially the nationalist movement in Egypt; it is, however, doubtful that the social effects caused by twenty years of French mandate is comparable to hundred years of colonization elsewhere and certainly not comparable to four

hundred years of Ottoman rule. In this case, it could be more relevant to build a post-Ottoman theory to reinforce the post-colonialist one and to add some post-communist thinking in order to be able to draw an understanding of the dynamics that shape the Lebanese social life. Since the mentioned systems of dominations do not share much in common as for the strategies, policies, tactics deployed in the course of their sway. Above all, it is very crucial not to systemically consider individuals' realizations as informed by mono-ideological systems or institutions. Although, their growth provided them with certain power over their social context, they remained social agents, who relied primary on their motivation in resisting, making and remaking their versions of Lebanon over time.

Most importantly, the transmission of these “schools” of *Dabkeh* dancing did not happen on the level of repertoires but on the level of styles. Thus, there are no fixed dances in Lebanon that constitute a repertoire, in the way it is produced in Russia, Turkey and Palestine, but rather a style that is constantly enacted and reproduced through improvisation or choreography. Another very important reality that resulted from the dance flourishing during the civil war is the higher position it acquired in relation to politics and political debates. Although, politics is in the core of Lebanese's everyday lives, *Dabkeh* has remained above political negotiations, debates and discourses. It continues to offer a space of interaction and deliberation rather than differentiation or protest.

Therefore, claiming *Dabkeh* “authenticity” does not seem probable due firstly, to the flexibility of the dance formation that allows constant innovation into its structure through agents' enactment, advanced in Chapter Three and Four; Secondly, due to subjects' willingness to embrace different “others” incorporating and highlighting multiplicity, shown in chapter Five; and Thirdly, due to the role of individual actors' views and aspirations in the process of dance construction that accompanied the state building. All of which resulted in an affirmation of “hybridity” rather than “authenticity” as an aesthetic value. Therefore, since historical Lebanon did never claim purity of race or culture and did never cease to metamorphose, why should its “tradition” claim then being “authentic” and “unchangeable”?

Chapter 7 – Novelty and Safeguarding in the Field

i. Tradition Speaking Contemporary

Individuals, dwelling in particular worlds, live with their own cartographic illusions of fixed forms and social rules. Because the frame is always part of the event, there can be no direct perception of the contribution of each action to the realization of the form (Hastrup, 2005,145).

Women Under the Line's rehearsals were a predominant activity of Marhabtain during the duration of my fieldwork. Although the piece was scheduled to be staged in the beginning of September 2013, this was not possible due to the dancers other commitments, which led to the reduction of the rehearsals schedule. Thus, when I left the field, the performance was still in progress and I did not have the chance to watch the outcome, which was performed in December 2013. Instead of a dance studio, *Marhabtain* was offered to conduct its rehearsals in a theatre space. It was interesting to observe from a distance the team crossing, back and forth, the theatrical space, jumping from the stage to the audience space or climbing from the audience space to the platform. Communicating with each other through the virtual spatial division. I have memories of these interactions, but my recollections of these moments are haunted by a strong mixture of emotional states: amusement, joy, anxiety, anger and fright. The observer position made me realize the quietness and veneration the space can generate. Even when dancers joked and laughed, the sound was spread as a whisper, as if the magnitude of the location were absorbing the superfluous noise. When they were working, the awe regained its depth.

The fact that participants in these sessions were willingly there, despite the lack of financial outcome and material incentives, had shaped these encounters with a peaceful and engaged atmosphere. Discipline, in the sense of controlled environment, was not a condition or an obligation. Dancers would show up late, due to other important engagements, yet they would sneak into the dressing room, change their outfit in silence and slip among their fellow mates and engage as if they were there all along. Time was a precious asset and was treated as such. Unlike many of my folk dance groups' experiences, dancers did not seem to undertake collective social activities outside the rehearsals time, nevertheless, during the try-outs the group gaze was strongly felt and their day to day meetings had created a sense of friendly intimacy and mutual esteem.

The contradiction between the underground, isolated and quiet rehearsal space and the hectic, noisy and anxious streets situated just outside the theatre main entrance was flabbergasting. Dancers' commitment and self-discipline were certainly opposite to the way they had to behave a few minutes prior to their arrival. This quick and proficient shift of state of mind conveys within it an affirmation that the theatrical space was above their daily life anxieties, concerns, affairs and certainly above other, more transcendent, politics of identity. As stated in Chapter 5, dancers were from diverse age ranges, confessional and communitarian backgrounds, yet their interaction was fluid, peaceful and warm, unlike the heated political scene, noticeable on the streets and through media diffusion.

Most dancers had repeatedly invoked Caracalla's name at one point or another in their discussions and during interviews. As stated in the previous chapter, Rahbani's dance had informed the definition of the Lebanese Dabkeh, however, Caracalla's complex and sophisticated performances still play an inspirational role in the imaginary of young dancers. Although Malek was, also, deeply marked by Caracalla's productions, he was, however, seeking a different approach in his choreographies. He had obviously no interest in the entertaining dimension of the dance, in the creation of his piece and was more interested in communicating a social concern. The interesting dimension of *Women Under the Line* is that "tradition" is questioning itself, its norms, values and customs. Unlike many other contemporary-traditional dance performances "tradition" is not portrayed as a subaltern victim that needs to be spoken for, defended and affirmed. In *Women Under the Line* it is not modernity that reflects and evaluates the "traditional" norms: it is "tradition" that becomes enabled, autonomous and reflective. The play does not suggest "traditional" ways of life to vanish in favour of modernity. On the contrary, Malek aims to empower the "tradition" by discrediting what is not, in his opinion, valuable to maintain. He wishes to divert the communitarian energy from less relevant social foci to more relevant ones.

By using "traditional" vocabulary and twisting its movements, Malek, alienates the familiar, the 'habitual ways of seeing things [...] and then demand(s) an explanation of their newly discovered unfamiliarity' (Roach, 2002: 39). By deconstructing "traditional" movement Malek was not 'crafting a movement aesthetic that was contemporary' (Chatterjea, 2010:8), he was attempting to illustrate a distorted image of the "traditional self", which derives from the habit of holding to norms that are no

longer socially useful. This habitual continuity of norms leads, also, into a loss of perspective, disabling communities' capacity in evaluating its social priorities¹³. The chorographic piece is conceived with a black humour approach to a bitter local reality. Malek's conception was informed by his adjacent environment and the reaction of this surrounding to the latest political events Lebanon was undergoing.

According to dance anthropologist Susanne Reed

Dance as an expression and practice of relations of power and protest, resistance and complicity, has been the subject of a number of historical and ethnographic analyses in recent years [...] particularly in the areas of ethnicity, national identity, gender and, less commonly, class (1998:505)

Dance as protest seems in many cases to be enacted against an oppressive, controlling "other" whilst seeking power from "tradition" as a legitimizing source for self-affirmation. In other words, dance political discourse relies heavily on a binary of "self" and "other". It functions either on differentiation and empowering the "self" in relation to the "other" or in blurring the boundaries that separate and alienate the "other" from the "self". This is predominantly the case in the choreographies that deploy both the "traditional" and the "modern" or "contemporary" forms.

The following illustrations do not intend to compare the achievement of highly established companies that dealt with traditional, modern and contemporary dance movements to the young attempt of the Lebanese group. It, rather, aims to contrast the differences in perspective between the Lebanese young choreographic approach to their social and political environment and other viewpoints.

Akram Khan, a British-Bangladeshi artist, whose 'choreography combines classical Indian Kathak with Western contemporary dance techniques' (Norridge, 2010: 415) is a case in point. On Khan's work, British scholar Zoe Norridge asserts that

Khan draws attention to his aesthetic practices through the use of doubling and mimicry on stage and his conscious foregrounding of notions of embodiment: of being noticeably a foreigner in Bangladesh, of artistically becoming Krishna. In making such practices visible he builds audience trust in, if nothing else, the complicated transience of cultural identity (Norridge, 2010: 427).

On the other hand, Indian-British contemporary choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh, who is trained in Bharatanatyam, classical Indian dance, is less preoccupied

¹³ The part is based on a interview with Malek, where I have been frequently asked to stop the audio recording and to refrain from disclosing specific social example he was referring to illustrate his point of view

with individual expressivity and more concerned with the innovation and change of the classical form itself (O'Shea, 2007). She discusses the historical hybridity of the Bharatanatyam classical form, while evoking, in her work, the past to enable the change in the present. Yet, she 'identifies her work as "contemporary British dance" rather than a cross-cultural form' (O'Shea, 2007:67). When asked again she states that 'if her work reflects any kind of identity, it is a transnational, urban affiliation, not an Indian one' (O'Shea, 2007:67).

Both Khan and Jeyasingh seem to work through "tradition" to negotiate a multiple belonging and a compound self in a world that insists on negating the "composite" identity. A world that

Presupposes that "deep down inside" everyone there is just one affiliation that really matters, a kind of "fundamental truth" about each individual, an "essence" determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter. As if the rest; all the rest a person's whole journey through time as a free agent; the beliefs he acquires in the course of that journey; his own individual tastes, sensibilities and affinities; in short his life itself counted for nothing (Maalouf, 2000:2)

In *Women Under the Line*, traditional movement does not reflect an empowering history or a historical identity marker. Better said, "tradition" is not viewed as historical artefact but as an actual daily present. The present "tradition" does not seem to be concerned in justifying, negotiating, affirming or questioning an "authentic self" and a "composite other", or the opposite. Living in a country that decrees a representation of the multiple through learning in a school that divides its curriculum into two parallel and equal canons, one Arabic conceived and taught in Arabic language, the other Western envisioned and taught in either English or French, the Lebanese subject grows up bi-culturally formatted. 'Sweepingly identified as "the West" and "the Arabs," these two discourses functioned not as a dichotomy, but rather as dialogical counterpoints [...]' (Kraidy, 2005:127). The "self" is, therefore, perceived and conceded, to different degrees, as uniformly "Arab" and Western", "traditional" and "modern", "conservative" and "cosmopolitan".

Meanwhile, the memory of the fifteen years of civil war is a haunting ghost that keeps on lingering on Lebanese 'intentional, skilled, knowledgeable and enabled' (Giddens, 1994) social actors' present. Although, there is a national admission that a Western and Eastern intervention of malicious higher powers has played a role in initiating and nourishing their internal conflict, nonetheless, Malek's views are focused

on the unaware “self” and “other” that allowed this interference to succeed. Thus, it is the “traditional, fearing, communitarian self” which can be mirrored or overlapped by a local “traditional, fearing, communitarian other”, that has to be challenged, rethought, and reconsidered, and not an “oppressive, exterior, wicked other”. *Women Under the Line* examines a “tradition” that ceased to be questioned. A tradition that has transformed into a crystallized, idealistic and flawless past that modern individuality needs to retrieve, safeguard and revive.

Nevertheless, *Marhabtain*’s interest in questioning “tradition” does not negate its values and principles; thus, a significant part of the NGO’s activities is dedicated for collecting and preserving *Dabkeh* material.

ii. Shall we safeguard?

We can no longer – or should not aim to – defend traditions in the traditional way, because this produces fundamentalism.... Defending tradition in the traditional way means asserting its ritual truth – its separateness and specialness whereas moral and cultural communication are the only grounds on which cosmopolitanism can stand (Giddens cited in Bakka, 2001:2)

The aim of this section is, therefore, to examine critically the question of the safeguarding of Lebanese dance by looking at the preservation endeavours that *Marhabtain* is undertaking even while it produces the contemporary work discussed above. Focussing on the project of collecting and archiving *Dabkeh* material, the section looks critically on how it is being implemented and at whether or not such an activity proves to be needed in the Lebanese context. It takes hereby into consideration the 2003 UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and the international discourse surrounding concepts of “tradition” and “heritage”.

As stated previously, with the absence of State culture policies, support and funding Lebanese individuals rely on their motivation, initiative and creativity in generating a dynamic cultural sector and constructing a Lebanese national sense of common identity and pride in the fields of theatre and dance. *Marhabtain* is a newly configured NGO and does not enjoy any consistent financial support from any local or foreign source, for the time being. Thus, the effort provided to achieve its projects relies primarily on the personal interest and voluntarism of its most dedicated individual members. None of them have any prior experience or professional training in relation to

intangible cultural heritage preservation and sustainability. Therefore, the projects' implementation is a result of their own understanding of what is "heritage" and how best to preserve and promote it.

Due to its rich history, the Near Eastern region or the *Levant*, including Lebanon, is abundant with intangible cultural heritage as with its tangible kind. However, the intangible heritage is highly neglected for a variety of reasons, primary political and economical. With the exception of the Palestinian territories and Egypt, dance among the intangible items appears to be on the bottom list of any national interest in the region. Thus, there have been no measures taken to document, categorize and classify the diverse dances which resulted in a lack of historical records, making it difficult for Western or Western trained researchers to accomplish a comprehensive account of the field since the main source of information was that of informants at the time of their presence. As a result, it has been easier to identify the *Dabkeh* as a dance rather than a category, thus, reducing a rich and diverse repertoire of dances to one single dance. In Lebanon, many individuals, organizations, and private institutions are undertaking serious measures to preserve and restore cultural heritage in the field of books, manuscripts, images, historical and political documents, and film. Though, *Marhabtain*, today, may be offering the first initiative towards documenting and safeguarding dance material, such an effort is a challenging endeavour that bears merits and inconveniences.

During my fieldwork period, the effort of collecting and archiving "folk dance" seemed to be focused on the stage performances that took place after Lebanese independence mainly the Rahbanis and Caracalla theatrical productions. This is due to the fact that the Lebanese, whether urban or rural, dancer or non-dancer, view their work as the legitimate, acclaimed Lebanese dance tradition. This was noted during the workshop given by the organization at Hamana, town of Mount-Lebanon, where locals seemed to surrender completely to the city trained dancers knowledge and skills, and to attribute a special consideration for a female member of the town, who was once a dancer in the Rahbani Theatre.

Choosing to focus on collecting the material produced after the rise of the Nation State seems to be relevant and valid since before that time 'there was no such thing as "Lebanon's Dabka"' (Stone, 2008a: 65), or a *Dabkeh* form attributed solely to the Lebanese territory. As established in Chapter Five, certain practices labelled

“traditional” ‘normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983:1), in the favour of a unifying national narrative. Therefore, *Marhabtain*’s choice to safeguard *Dabkeh* in its theatrical form supports a national discourse, since the form was the product of the established “modern” state and, hence, can be perceived as “authentic” in relation to the Lebanese identity formulated upon Independence. The choice of practice seems also suitable as well in relation to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. As the theatrical form of the *Dabkeh* has been in a variety of ways ‘transmitted from generation to generation, [...] constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity’ (2003:2).

However, although the material in question seems to be valuable for the maintenance of a unified sense of Lebanese identity, it is nonetheless problematic. The Rahbanis, as well as Caracalla perceive themselves as independent artists since they were never hired as the State’s commissioners; thus, their work has to be protected by intellectual property rights. Therefore, the right to collect and archive this material as national heritage will be impossible without the consensual submission of their productions to the State or the public.

Marhabtain can opt for another strategy ‘to maintain the Lebanese moral values of the heritage [including the dance] and prevent their extinction’ (*Marhabtain*, 2013:1), a strategy that follows the approach used in many European states today, which consists of collecting, documenting and classifying the diversity of *Dabkeh* versions existing in rural Lebanon, its cities and suburbs. However this approach may cause two major complications. Firstly, it may affect the flexibility of *Dabkeh*, a fundamental characteristic of the dance discerned in Chapters Three and Four. Establishing a repertoire of various dances will create a process of rigidification and may give rise claims after a certain period of time of these as “original”, “deep-structured” dances. Although it might be easier for researchers to refer to a textual dance that has an invariant, unchanging structure, nevertheless, an essential quality of *Dabkeh* could be jeopardized. This rigidification might also endanger the improvisational side of the dance and its openness to change. Secondly, by categorizing, naming and creating a history of ownerships, dance may enter the political speech of differences. Through his

extensive professional experience as a dance researcher, Egil Bakka distinguishes three types of attitudes adopted by traditional dance enthusiasts in relation to traditional dance movements: the heir attitude, the user attitude and the researcher attitude (Bakka, 1992). He asserts further that conflicts, although slight in depth, occur between the three attitudes over issues of ownership and authority (Bakka, 1992). In Lebanon today, *Dabkeh* dances are identified upon three different criteria. Firstly, according to the shape of the movement, such as *Askarieh*, as for military march, since the general movement is perceived as such, or *Arja*, where the predominant movement resembles a limping movement. Secondly, according to a village or community name, either because it was observed in that specific village, or because an individual who originated from that particular village transmitted or created the variation, like *Bedawiyya* attributed to the Bedouins or '*al-Tirawiyya* named after a village called Tarraya' (Toumi, 2011: 49). Thirdly, according to its music score, for example, *Dalouna*, *Ghazayel*, *Mani*, or to a musical instrument such as *Mijwiz*. Nonetheless, Toumi states that it is possible that several variations could be given the same name and a single variation could be given several names. She distinguishes two types of manifestation of these *Dabkeh* variations, a stage display and social expression. Nonetheless, Toumi did not mention any competition between regions, villages, towns or cities, within which she conducted her research, over *Dabkeh* variations. This suggests a fluidity of exchange and a lack of ownership and authenticity discourses. On the contrary, she indicated that new variations appear frequently and innovation is considered as a process not as an intrusion (Toumi, 2011). Thus, till date, *Dabkeh* is still danced by all the Lebanese despite their region, religion, origin, and political affiliation. It remains an act of collective celebration. Conducting a project that focuses on distinguishing variations within the Lebanese territories may lead to rise of ownership and authenticity discourses, from which potential tensions may arise, contributing to a further fragmentation of Lebanese society.

The third possible option *Marhabtain* can adopt is to approach *Dabkeh* as transnational practice. In this manner the research could be conducted in relation and with the collaboration of Levant Nation States. This attitude may limit any potential division within the Lebanese territory, by focusing on the identification of similarities and differences across nations.

Although taking the initiative of collecting and safeguarding a form of intangible

cultural heritage without the financial support of the State may appear to be a challenging and demanding endeavour, nonetheless, not being bound or directed by a national cultural policy seems to be equally a privilege that the Lebanese individuals enjoy. Nevertheless, it is crucial for *Marhabtain* to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the domain of intangible cultural heritage and its political dimensions to be able to take adequate decisions according to the political situation of Lebanon and the region.

With the current wave of religious fundamentalism that crosses the Middle East, preserving the “cosmopolitan” aspect of the dance seem to be, by far, more valuable than creating or highlighting an “authentic” regional, communitarian or nationalist “dance tradition”.

Conclusion

This dissertation has attempted to distinguish and highlight the specificities of the *Lebanese Dabkeh*, through the way it is handled within Marhabtain, a Local NGO that puts at the heart of its missions the innovation and preservation of dance. The research took into consideration, however, the performance of *Dabkeh* by other Beirutine dancers and the manifestation of the dance in rural areas of Lebanon. Individuality seems to play a major role in introducing innovation that accompanies the traditional form that is perpetually changed in a variety of ways. The hybrid character of dance does not appear to be an after effect of globalization but a continuation of a historical tendency that value meetings, exchange and change. This tendency resists the setting of rigid boundaries between the “self” and the “other” in the domain of arts. Thus, the diverse communitarian fabric of the city seems to merge into new forms of expression at every encounter.

The anxiety of the global world resides in the “fear” of losing a meaningful sense of locality in favour of a new, “shallow”, normalizing sense of the global. This fear drove many to intensify and hold onto “old traditions” ensuring, thus, that the present and the future would not sweep away their culturally rich and meaningful specificities. However, a fifteen-year civil war has taught many Lebanese that, despite every good intention, marking identity differences could never lead to beneficial outcomes. If some fear the merger and transformation into a one homogeneous whole, what others fear the most is losing the legitimacy of the blend. For them, marking identity differences is an anticipation of an unavoidable upcoming disaster. Therefore, it could be better for those Lebanese to preserve, safeguard and celebrate the *Lebanese Dabkeh* with its hybridity, creativity and constant innovation.

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