Title
Dancing in the Fringe: Connections Forming An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/92c9590z

Author
Osweiler, Laura

Publication Date
2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Dancing in the Fringe:
Connections Forming *An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance*

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Dance History and Theory

by

Laura Josephine-Hosch Osweiler

June 2011
The Dissertation of Laura Josephine-Hosch Osweiler is approved:

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

Committee Co-Chairperson

Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my Co-Chairs, Sally Ness and Linda Tomko, who tirelessly read through numerous drafts of my dissertation. Your strong guidance helped focus my research and lead me to become a better scholar. I am grateful to Marguerite Waller, Parama Roy, Anthea Kraut, and Derek Burrill for participating on my PhD committees. I would like to acknowledge the Department of Dance at University of California at Riverside for the financial support, scholarships, and teaching opportunities that helped me pursue my studies and research.

Thank you to Amanda Hosch, Fred Hosch, and Maria Talamantes for reading through my dissertation. Your insights and feedback were invaluable.

Special thanks to Anaheec, Claudia, Djahari, Elayssa, Jean, and Tatianna for graciously opening their lives and work to me. I appreciate your trust in me. I am indebted to you all for supporting me not only as a scholar, an artist, but also as a friend. I am also grateful of all my friends who have encouraged me along the way. Thanks to all the EEMED choreographers, performers, staff, and crew who have participated in EEMED over the years.

I am forever indebted to Greg Osweiler. You have supported me in countless ways during my schooling and career in dance. I am grateful for your love and patience. Thank you.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dancing in the Fringe: Connections Forming An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance

by

Laura Josephine-Hosch Osweiler

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Dance History and Theory
University of California, Riverside, June 2011
Dr. Sally A. Ness, Co-Chairperson
Dr. Linda J. Tomko, Co-Chairperson

This dissertation examines the development of experimental Middle Eastern dance in the United States. It focuses on terminology, ideas, and practices presented by six choreographers and their works performed at An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance (EEMED). In order to understand the emergence of experimental Middle Eastern dance, the dissertation analyzes discursive practices of genres and types of relationships choreographers produce between “traditional” and “experimental” Middle Eastern dance.

The data for this dissertation primarily comes from oral history interviews conducted with six core EEMED choreographers. In order to present their original and innovative contributions, the project factors in literature from two groups with which they frequently connect, including dance scholarship covering predominantly the fields of Middle Eastern dance, American modern dance, American post-modern dance, and the
American Middle Eastern dance community. The project not only works to formulate theories that grow out of the core EEMED choreographers’ practices but supports them with scholarly theories, including Judith Butler’s gender construction, Edward Soja’s Thirdspace, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizome, Michel Foucault’s discourse, and Amy Devitt’s, John Frow’s, and Carolyn Miller’s genre construction.

This dissertation demonstrates that through citation and reiteration most traditional Middle Eastern dance genres conceal their construction and solidify over time into stable inner essences, naturalness, and identities. In this process, they push those who do not comply with rules and structures into the margins. However, the core EEMED choreographers expand and empower these margins. Their practices highlight uniqueness and hybridization over repetition and solidification and create fluid movement through porosity borders. By claiming their experimental Middle Eastern dance is a part of Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers expand Middle Eastern dance’s genre repertoire. Thereby, they create a new discourse of Middle Eastern dance.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

- INTRODUCTION TO THE CORE EEMED CHOREOGRAPHERS .......... 2
- INTRODUCTION TO EEMED ............................................................... 7
- INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT ................................................... 14

## METHODOLOGY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
Oral History ................................................................................................. 22
Discursive Practices of Genres ................................................................. 29

## LITERATURE REVIEW
Introduction to the American Middle Eastern Dance Community .......... 34
Introduction to the Dance Scholars ......................................................... 36

## FORM OF THE DISSERTATION.......................................................... 41
CONCLUSION OF THE INTRODUCTION ................................................ 45

## SECTION ONE
CHAPTER TWO, PART ONE

### TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES ....................... 47

- INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE ...................................................... 49

#### ETHNIC DANCE ........................................................................ 50
- Dance Scholars’ Views ................................................................. 51
- American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ............................... 53
- Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views ........................................... 55
- Conclusion to Ethnic Dance ......................................................... 57

#### TRIBAL DANCE ....................................................................... 59
- Dance Scholars’ Views ................................................................. 60
- American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ............................... 62
- Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views ........................................... 63
- Conclusion to Tribal Dance ......................................................... 64

#### FOLK DANCE ......................................................................... 64
- Dance Scholars’ Views ................................................................. 65
- American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ............................... 68
- Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views ........................................... 69
- Conclusion to Folk Dance ......................................................... 72

### RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT PRACTICES ........................................ 72
- Dance Scholars’ Views ................................................................. 73
- American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ............................... 79
- Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views ........................................... 77
- Conclusion to Religious Movement Practices ................................... 82

## CONCLUSION TO PART ONE ......................................................... 83
CHAPTER TWO, PART TWO
TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES ............................................. 88
  STAGED-FOLK DANCE ..................................................................................... 89
    Dance Scholars’ Views ............................................................................. 90
    American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ................................... 93
    Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views .................................................... 95
    Conclusion to Staged-Folk Dance ......................................................... 97
  CLASSICAL DANCE ....................................................................................... 97
    Dance Scholars’ Views ........................................................................... 98
    American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views .................................. 101
    Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views .................................................. 102
    Conclusion to Classical Dance .............................................................. 104
  BELLY DANCE .............................................................................................. 105
    Dance Scholars’ Views ........................................................................... 106
    American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views .................................. 109
    Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views .................................................. 112
    Conclusion to Belly Dance .................................................................... 117
CONCLUSION TO PART TWO .......................................................................... 120
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER ........................................................................... 123

CHAPTER THREE, PART ONE
EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES ................................ 127
  INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE ................................................................. 128
  MODERN DANCE ......................................................................................... 129
    Dance Scholars’ Views ........................................................................... 130
    American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views .................................. 133
    Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views .................................................. 135
    Conclusion to Modern Dance ............................................................... 139
  POST-MODERN DANCE ............................................................................... 140
    Dance Scholars’ Views ........................................................................... 140
    American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views .................................. 144
    Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views .................................................. 147
    Conclusion to Post-Modern Dance ...................................................... 151
CONCLUSION TO PART ONE .......................................................................... 152

CHAPTER THREE, PART TWO
EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES ................................ 155
  INTERPRETIVE DANCE ............................................................................... 156
    Dance Scholars’ Views ........................................................................... 156
    American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views .................................. 157
    Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views .................................................. 159
    Conclusion to Interprettive Dance ....................................................... 161
  THEATRICAL DANCE .................................................................................. 162
    Dance Scholars’ Views ........................................................................... 163
SECTION TWO
CHAPTER FOUR
DEFINING TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE .................................................. 198
  Dance Scholars’ Views ............................................................................................... 199
  American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ...................................................... 203
  Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views ....................................................................... 206
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER .......................................................................................... 221

CHAPTER FIVE
DEFINING EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE ........................................... 223
  Dance Scholars’ Views ............................................................................................... 224
  American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ...................................................... 227
  Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views ....................................................................... 232
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER .......................................................................................... 242

CHAPTER SIX
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE
EASTERN DANCE GENRES ......................................................................................... 244
  Dance Scholars’ Views ............................................................................................... 245
  American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views ...................................................... 253
  Core EEMED Choreographers’ View ......................................................................... 257
CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER .......................................................................................... 273
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces my research into *An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance* (EEMED). Since 2000, EEMED has been a concert site where a number of Los Angeles choreographers have been able to present their experimental Middle Eastern dance works. This chapter begins by introducing the core EEMED choreographers and EEMED. It then continues into a discussion of my central research question: what kinds of relationships do the core EEMED choreographers produce with “traditional” and “experimental” Middle Eastern dance? Such an inquiry brings up other questions: what are traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance? Do EEMED choreographers have to know traditional Middle Eastern dances very well in order to be experimental Middle Eastern dancers? How does EEMED choreographers’ work construct and/or shaped by their connections to traditional Middle Eastern dance?

This introduction also covers the main methodology I use for the dissertation, oral history, and the main area of discourse analysis, discursive practice of genres. I employ them as a means to produce material for the dissertation and to explore the core EEMED choreographers’ terminology, ideas, and practices. In order to present the core EEMED choreographers’ original and innovative contributions, I also factor in data from two groups with which they frequently connect, including the American Middle Eastern dance community and dance scholarship that covers the fields of Middle Eastern dance, American modern dance, and American post-modern dance.
INTRODUCTION TO THE CORE EEMED CHOREOGRAPHERS

The core EEMED choreographers surveyed here, Anaheed, Jean and Claudia of Tandemonium, and Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna of Desert Sin, were chosen for this project because of their long-term participation and, in three cases, their support of EEMED’s initial development. In addition to performing at EEMED, they developed various levels of camaraderie both socially and professionally. This section presents the core EEMED choreographers’ background and sense of identity, areas, which later are examined to understand their viewpoints on and values of traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance.

The birth dates of the core EEMED choreographers span a thirty year age range from 1950 to 1980. Looking at when they started studying Middle Eastern dance and their dance practices one can observe that the older choreographers, Anaheed and Tandemonium, maintain stronger ties to traditional Middle Eastern dance, while the younger ones, Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna, focus on experimental Middle Eastern dance almost exclusively. For example, Anaheed began studying in the early 1970s when Turkish-American belly dance and folk dance were for the most part the only Middle Eastern dance forms actively performed in the United States. Even though she studied with several established Middle Eastern dance teachers – Anaheed specifically mentions Morocco, Bobby (Ibrahim) Farrah, Serena Wilson, Aisha Ali, Feiruz, Jenaeni, and Abdollah Nazemi – in a number of dance genres, including Persian, Armenian, and Arab folk dances, Anaheed continues to perform and to teach the style of her primary teacher Diane Weber.
Both Jean and Claudia became interested in studying Persian and Uzbek classical and folk dance as members of the Avaz International Dance Theatre, which was founded by Anthony Shay in 1977. Initially, Jean joined as a singer and then became a dancer in 1990, while Claudia joined in 1987 as a dancer. In fact, Jean and Claudia met in an Egyptian belly dance class taught by Carolyn Krueger who was Assistant Director in the Oriental section of Avaz. Jean and Claudia proceeded to learn Persian and Uzbek dance from numerous teachers, including Ixchel Dimetral-Maerker, Laurel Victoria Gray, Robyn Friend, Viloyat Akilova, Kizlarkhon Dustmukhamedova, and Qadir Muminov, as well as study several Arab folk dances. After a split occurred in Avaz, Jean and Claudia decided to form Tandemonium in 1992. Although they produce experimental Middle Eastern dance, Jean and Claudia still predominantly perform and study what they label Silk Road dance, which Claudia defines as “starting in western China and going all the way through to Istanbul” (Tandemonium 19).

Tatianna, Djahari, and Elayssa took similar routes with their studies in Middle Eastern dance. They started at a time when many forms of belly dance and American Tribal Style (ATS) were emerging. Both Tatianna and Djahari began Middle Eastern dance classes, shortly after college, with Elayssa’s mother, Jenza – Tatianna in 1994 and Djahari in 1996. As a third-generation American Middle Eastern dancer, Elayssa’s early Middle Eastern dance training came from her mother and grandmother. However, about the same time Tatianna and Djahari became involved with Middle Eastern dance, Elayssa started to focus seriously on the dance. She studied with Jenaeni and her daughter Ansuya and participated in their dance company, Yaleil, for about three years. Tatianna and
Djahari also trained with Ansuya and a number of teachers, including Anaheed and Kamaal.  

Djahari, Tatianna, and Elayssa were all members of Jenza’s Desert Bloom dance company. When Jenza and Elayssa left Los Angeles to attend college, Djahari took over the company. In 1999, she renamed the company Desert Sin and turned it into an experimental Middle Eastern dance company. Tatianna and Djahari also share experiences in performing in Nazemi’s Pars National Ballet Company and Anaheed’s Perfumes of Araby. Once back in Los Angeles in 2001, Elayssa joined Desert Sin and performed for three years with Nazemi’s Pars National Ballet Company. Since the mid-2000s, Tatianna, Djahari, and Elayssa primarily perform experimental Middle Eastern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers are members of the American Middle Eastern dance community. However, the choreographers who focus on traditional Middle Eastern dance tend to participate more in the community than those who focus on experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, Anaheed is perhaps the most active of the core EEMED choreographers. She has directed the Perfumes of Araby dance company since 1979 when she took it over from Webber and has been teaching belly dance since 1984. Anaheed also produces many events throughout the year.  

Jean and Claudia are also active in the American Middle Eastern dance community by performing regularly and by occasionally teaching a workshop on Persian or Uzbek classical dance. Of the Desert Sin dancers, Elayssa is the most active in the American Middle Eastern dance community performing and teaching occasionally, while Tatianna and Djahari rarely participate.
However, the Desert Sin members are the most active of the core EEMED choreographers in the experimental Middle Eastern dance genre. Not only does the dance company exclusively perform this style of dance, while the Perfumes of Araby and Tandemonium also perform traditional Middle Eastern dance, Desert Sin also produce their own full-length shows.\textsuperscript{12}

All of the core EEMED choreographers studied a variety of dance forms outside of Middle Eastern dance, including ballet, modern dance, jazz, tap, Hawaiian, Tahitian, West African, Bharata Natyam, Polish, and Balkan dance.\textsuperscript{13} Their diverse background shows their propensity to explore various avenues and demonstrates what other dance forms they draw on for their experimental Middle Eastern dances. Part of the core EEMED choreographers’ opportunities to experience and learn about other cultures and their dances comes from the fact that they all live in Los Angeles, an urban center with a hugely diverse population. In fact most of them either grew up in the area or in California, with the exception of Tatianna who moved to Los Angeles when she was fourteen. In addition, all of the core EEMED choreographers claim a strong identification as American. Even Claudia, who was born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, states she is a “U.S. citizen” (Tandemonium 6). For the most part, the core EEMED choreographers claim being American is having freedom and choice to do what one wants – ideologies, which can be found in their reasoning for creating experimental Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers are also influenced by the fact that they all possess a mixed family heritage. Incidentally, none of them comes from a Middle Eastern heritage. Instead, they are predominantly of European descent with some few additions.\textsuperscript{14}
The core EEMED choreographers share other identifying characteristics as well. For example, they happen to be women. Being a woman is not a requirement for participating in the dissertation or in EEMED. However, the dissertation’s scope does reflect that women are the majority in EEMED and the American-Middle Eastern dance community.\(^{15}\) The ways by which they express their concepts of gender and sexual orientation in their experimental Middle Eastern dance is an area for future research. The core EEMED choreographers also claim to practice a variety of religious and/or spiritual practices, none of which are the ones that they grew up with. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers predominantly declare either a personal spirituality or a non-mainstream practice.\(^{16}\) The impact of their spiritual ideas on their experimental Middle Eastern dance is further explored in the section on “Religious Movements Practices.”

The core EEMED choreographers’ economic classes range from lower to upper-middle class, although they embrace different ideas of what middle class means with respect to the issue of purchasing power.\(^ {17}\) However, regardless of their class standing, all the core EEMED choreographers primarily support themselves with non-dance jobs.\(^ {18}\) Their need to work outside of dance not only implies the difficulty of being able to support themselves from Middle Eastern dance alone, but it also shows that they do not rely on the dance for money. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers frequently use non-dance incomes to support their dance endeavors. In addition, all of the core EEMED choreographers hold at least a Bachelor degree, with the exception of Elayssa who spent a year at Sonoma State University.\(^ {19}\)
INTRODUCTION TO EEMED

This dissertation focuses on an annual production called An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance (EEMED). The concert was conceived in the winter of 1999 with the encouragement and participation of many of the core EEMED choreographers, including myself, Anaheed, Djahari, and Tatianna, and one additional dancer, Marguerite. The first show took place in the fall of 2000 in Los Angeles. EEMED is a collection of vignettes with an average of twelve dances per show, each of which offers a different view on experimental Middle Eastern dance. The choreographers are mainly from the Los Angeles area with a few coming from other cities, such as San Diego and San Francisco in California, Phoenix in Arizona, and Salem in Massachusetts. The show plays a multi-night run and since 2004, it has continued through two-weekends.

At the time EEMED started, the greater Los Angeles area was home to one of the largest and stylistically varied populations of professional Middle Eastern dancers in the United States, but there were almost no venues in which innovative dancers could perform experimental Middle Eastern dances. Entering into the black box theater was a logical step for the core EEMED choreographers since they were already playing with experimental Middle Eastern dance in traditional Middle Eastern dance settings.

EEMED is produced in black box theaters in Santa Monica, Venice, and North Hollywood. They contain between 60 and 99 seats and an average stage size of 25 by 25 feet. EEMED’s stage is formal with its boxlike stage framed by a black backdrop, walls, and wings. The venue presents the core EEMED choreographers with a consistent
open fixed space. Generally, the theater includes a back curtain, which may or may not include crossover space and often side curtains. A wing always hangs on each side. The lighting grid and trees are visible to the audience.

EEMED differs from many American Middle Eastern dance festivals and showcases in a variety of ways. For example, EEMED does not limit the length of the dances. In addition, unlike most American Middle Eastern dance shows where dancers often show up right before they perform, sometimes without even seeing their dance space, EEMED offers choreographers preparation time in the theater. For instance, they receive a set rehearsal time the week leading up to the first show in which choreographers work on their spacing, and as Jean adds, “think about entrances and exits” (Tandemonium 111). The EEMED choreographers also participate in a dress rehearsal in which they experience how the show will run both on and off stage.

The core EEMED choreographers receive time and support of a crew to alter the space. Only on occasion do the core EEMED choreographers use large set pieces, since the limited dimensions of the stage precludes EEMED choreographers from adding too many items to an already small space. In addition, the theaters do not include a fly system to bring in drops or set pieces as seen in many ballets and stage spectacles or a cyclorama as larger theaters frequently do. However, the core EEMED choreographers figure out economical ways to create environments on stage through lighting design, special effects – such as fog and video – and laying and/or hanging fabric.

The core EEMED choreographers emphasize the importance to them of the lighting design capabilities at EEMED. In fact, they note EEMED is still one of the only,
if not the only, venue in which choreographers give input on and have access to lighting design. The American Middle Eastern dance community has not developed in conjunction with stage lighting technology or design, and therefore, dancers hold almost no control over its limited application. In fact, in most contexts, such as restaurants or homes, dancers perform in whatever light is available. Although rare, nightclubs may include fast moving and changing colored intelligent lights or washes. Tandemonium recalls the use of florescent lights at most American Middle Eastern dance festivals, which are utilized because the space is already equipped with them. The few theater shows in the community display a general wash, and on rare occasions, a spotlight or a cyclorama. In fact, Claudia recalls while performing with staged-folk dance companies, “[t]hey never changed the lighting. The lights were up. The lights were down. That was about it” (Tandemonium 151). Claudia’s statement emphasizes the fact that even in theaters Middle Eastern dancers do not have the opportunity to craft lighting design for their dances.

EEMED makes use of the traditional American theater dance lights that already exist in the black box theaters, such as the lighting grid over the stage as well as any additional equipment provided by the theater. However, due to the small size of the black box theaters and their limited financial resources, the lighting equipment that the EEMED choreographers and lighting designers find at EEMED’s venues are not on the cutting edge of lighting technology or even adequate for some of the dances. As a result, I, in my capacity as producer, rent two or four lighting trees (except at Two Roads Theatre, which was too small but there was still some side lighting); lighting designers,
specifically Simon Cleveland and Luis Salazar, employ gobos to create lighting patterns; and EEMED choreographers bring in their own special lighting equipment such as strobe lights, black lights, and film projectors.

Choreographer Jean, in her interview for this study, voices EEMED’s venue is “the best of both worlds” because it opens up numerous possibilities for choreographers’ expressions and relationship with audiences. Her statement reflects that at EEMED she performs on a formal stage with the accoutrements of larger theaters but that she also “can get up close and personal with [the audience] as much as you want” (Tandemonium 71). The core EEMED choreographers easily break the fourth wall by entering the audience’s space since it exists as a common performance practice by traditional Middle Eastern dancers’ performances, especially by belly dancers. The interaction not only enlarges the performance space for the choreographers, but also brings audiences into the action and creates the element of the unexpected. By entering the audience’s space the core EEMED choreographers continue traditional Middle Eastern dance conventions and break away from those of traditional American theater dance. However, the core EEMED choreographers frequently continue theater dance’s conventions of maintaining the distance set up between audiences and performers in order to explore and to expand “new” possibilities of expression in Middle Eastern dance beyond that of happiness and joy, for instance, found in Middle Eastern staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance.

Since 2002, EEMED has used an audition process – a procedure rarely found in the American Middle Eastern dance community.29 Often the core EEMED
choreographers do not follow the complete audition process, which consists of presenting
a video of the dance up for consideration, a written description, and a biography. The
lenient audition requirements for them come from years of working with me as the
producer and my trust in their level of work. Regardless of how much of a given
choreography the core EEMED choreographers initially present, they all converse with
me and frequently other core EEMED choreographers about their dances.

EEMED is advertised in several ways. For example, flyers and postcards are
handed out at Middle Eastern dance events in California. The black and white ads give
very little description beyond date, location, price, reservation information, and performer
names. In 2002, a warning statement was added to the flyer. In 2003, Elayssa began
designing the EEMED flyers with a collage of dancers for its primary image, and in
2004, she created a colored postcard. Ads are also placed in programs of other
American Middle Eastern dance events. Additionally, details are printed in the calendar
section of the American Middle Eastern dance community’s magazines. Press releases
are sent out to numerous newspapers in the Los Angeles area and previews are generally
published in LA Times and LA Weekly. As a result, EEMED has been LA Weekly’s
“Dance Pick of the Week” (2005) and recommendation for “Dancing for the DNC.
Things to do in L.A. when you’re delegating (or not)” (2000), the front page article of
The Argonaut (2004), and a favorite of City’s Beat “Seven Days in L.A” (2003). In
addition, several reviews (Jareeda, Gilded Serpent, Cymbal, The Chronicles, Zaghareet!,
and Belly Dance) have been published about the show and its videos as well as a half-
hour feature in 2004 on Belly Dance TV (BDTV). EEMED also advertises on the web.
For example, it is posted on online calendar sites geared towards Middle Eastern dancers. In 2003, Ana Berna, of Rox-a-lot Entertainment, designed EEMED’s website. In 2004, I created a discussion group for EEMED as well as a general one for Experimental Middle Eastern/Belly Dance on tribe.net. In 2006, I set up a MySpace group, in 2009 a MySpace for EEMED, and in 2011 a Facebook page.

EEMED distributes a program. For the first four years, the program stated only choreographer, performer, and dance company, dance titles, descriptions of the dance, music credits, and if needed, additional credits for music engineering, costume design, and prop construction. In 2001, the program began including a list of crew and staff and their titles. The program was redesigned and included advertisements to help defray printing costs in 2004. In 2005, it also contained information about the history of EEMED. In 2006, programs began to include headshots and biographies of the dancers and crew that had been, and still are, placed on the lobby walls.

The black box theater exists as an economically viable venue for EEMED since it is more affordable than bigger theaters with union crews. Its size also financially accommodates a multi-night run. Since 2003, tickets have been sold for $25. For the first several years of EEMED, theater rental, advertising, and miscellaneous items for the show, were paid out of my personal account. EEMED has since become more independent as the proceeds from ticket and video sales go back into funding the concert. Most of the participants donate their time while some of the stage crew are paid small salaries.
Like many concerts in the American Middle Eastern dance community, the core EEMED choreographers pay for anything they personally need for EEMED, such as costumes, makeup, props, special equipment (special lights, fog machines, and video projector), and/or studio rentals. They support their endeavors at EEMED with money made from performing elsewhere or non-dance jobs. Sometimes the core EEMED choreographers receive delayed financial incentives from people who saw them perform at EEMED, such as new students and paid dance performances. Anaheed, Tandemonium, and Tatianna also declare they get publicity that comes in the form of recognition by peers in the community and/or reviews in community magazines. The core EEMED choreographers participate in EEMED primarily because they receive personal satisfaction. During the interviews, they noted EEMED offers them more control and choice over their environment than any of the other American Middle Eastern dance venues.

As the creator and producer of EEMED, I do most of the production work. I choose where the show is held, where to advertise, and which dance pieces are in it. I also listen to some of the core EEMED choreographers’ input and opinion about many of the audition tapes and which dances should be accepted into the concert. Since 2007, volunteers have assisted in some of the pre-production work. Also, volunteers participate during the concert as stage crew, stage manager, lighting designer, lighting technician, sound technician, sound engineer, and lobby staff. Over the years, EEMED has employed several lighting designers. Starting in 2005, the lighting staff included a lighting technician who runs the lights during the show. At EEMED, the lighting designer
comes into the process when the dance is in its final rehearsal stage. Over the years, the working relationship among the lighting designer, the core EEMED choreographers, and me has grown. For example, the lighting designer and I have more meetings, and since 2005, I have scheduled a run through of the dances the Sunday before entering the theater in order for the choreographers and lighting designer to talk further about spacing, costumes, light color, where and when they need darkness and/or strong lights, and music cues for specific lighting changes.

**INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT**

This section gives a theoretical introduction into the ways in which traditional Middle Eastern dance works and forms a fringe space for those who do not comply with its rules. It will then discuss how EEMED serves as an emerging tradition-in-the-fringe, in which American Middle Eastern dancers expose traditional Middle Eastern dance’s inner workings and develop their own space. In sum, I intend to show that the relationship between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance is not oppositional but deeply intertwined. The two are literally dancing within each other and expanding the concept of Middle Eastern dance in general.

Traditional Middle Eastern dance is not necessarily *a priori* to experimental Middle Eastern dance, because as a process, one can be found within the other. However, for the most part, the core EEMED choreographers perceive traditional Middle Eastern dance as “prior” to experimental Middle Eastern dance since they entered their Middle Eastern dance practice through a “traditional” dance form. Many writers surveyed in the
dissertation also locate traditional dance in such a hierarchical position. What the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers whom I discuss, and the core EEMED choreographers whom I interview, construct with their tradition is a fringe comprising that which is different and those who do not comply with its rules and structures. What the core EEMED choreographers accomplish is a habitation of the fringes. They initially did so as a reaction to and out of frustration with traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, through action and choreography, the core EEMED choreographers construct a new space that is no longer the negative space of tradition. Instead, they inhabit the margin of traditional Middle Eastern dance and turn it into a new center.

In order to investigate the ways in which traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance interact with each other, I need to question how “tradition” generally works to maintain itself. For my theoretical base, I look towards Judith Butler’s idea of gender formation. Over the course of two books, Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993), Butler demonstrates that gender, sex, and “matter” are created through repeated performativ acts that over time through citation and reiteration become part of the “sedimentation process” (Butler 1990, 33) in which gender conceals its construction and solidifies over time into stable inner essences, naturalness, and identities. Participants maintain concepts about gender, sex, and matter through teachings and practices, which mix with their embodiment and performance. Participants may or may not be willing to continue specific gender performances or easily change their gender. Nor does Butler think one chooses her or his gender since individual acts occur within
social contexts. She notes that society often punishes those who do not agree to perform to gender expectations. At the same time, Butler finds power in repetition and citation as they bring in room for deviation, mutation, and instability in the gender system and produce new spaces.47

By applying Butler’s theory of gender to Middle Eastern dance, I take into account that people highly value traditional dances. Through practice, repetition, and teaching, dances over time solidify into coherent forms. As the dissertation will show, many practitioners and those writers surveyed hide, and at times deny, traditional Middle Eastern dance’s interactions with other groups and resulting hybrid formations. Even those genres, about which some debate as to whether they are traditional or not, are still seen as strongly defined. The dissertation will demonstrate that once a genre is developed and well defined, even if new, it is difficult for practitioners to change its distinctive image. If practitioners require great changes in a genre, then they tend to produce a new one.

Traditional Middle Eastern dance works to maintain itself by putting those who do not participate into the margin or fringe of society in a manner similar to Butler’s description of gender constructions. Traditionalists often present “the fringe” as a negative space where they can lower the status of those who do not conform and/or transgress social boundaries. In order to resist the potential threat, many traditional Middle Eastern dancers try to prevent those in the fringe, like the core EEMED choreographers, from influencing tradition. For example, they publicly deny in
community forums the core EEMED choreographers’ legitimacy and association with Middle Eastern dance.

Edward Soja’s ideas in Thirdspace (1996) offer ways to think about the expansion of American Middle Eastern dance via the practice of the core EEMED choreographers. In the spirit of Henri Lefebvre who in The Production of Space (1991) insisted on a third term in order to break apart binary systems, Soja focuses on center and periphery and claims that Thir dspace is not in-between the two, “some additive combination of them” (Soja 33), or thesis/antithesis/synthesis. Instead, the binary “is subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives…” (Soja 5). In other words, Thirdspace develops complex and dynamic formations, which contains many positions, decisions, and outcomes.

Soja applies Thirdspace to both modernist and postmodernist cultural politics of difference and identity, which is also a helpful endeavor for this dissertation. He proposes that in modernist cultural politics the center creates the periphery and those on the periphery hold two choices: work to be like the center or form counter-hegemonic politics. In either case, the hierarchical binary struggle between dominant and subordinate remains intact. Instead, Soja looks to the writings of bell hooks as an example of Thirdspace postmodernist cultural politics because she chooses marginality. According to Soja, on the margin hooks develops a place where she “disorders, disrupts, and transgresses the center-periphery relationship itself” (Soja 84) because she claims the periphery as her center, periphery-as-center. In the periphery, hooks participates in a
space for the marginalized to gather and connect. For Soja, hooks’ postmodern resistance does not end modern politics but looks to deconstruct it for new types of resistance and identity.

It is important to point out that although the core EEMED choreographers can be read as being forced into the fringe by social constraints or as not being able to move into American Middle Eastern dance mainstream society, these choreographers actively and intentionally situate themselves in the fringe of tradition. Their choice to move comes not from a rejection of traditional Middle Eastern dance but from a frustration with it. The core EEMED choreographers often feel constricted and unable to express all that they would like to within the frameworks, structures, and expectations of traditional Middle Eastern dance.

By utilizing and placing value on disconnection and transformation in the fringes of tradition, the core EEMED choreographers develop fissures into a new space, and therefore, expand American Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers re-evaluate the fringe by invigorating it with agency and choice. The fringe exists no longer as a place of banishment, passivity, opposition, or rejected attributes but as a positive space of freedom. In the fringe, the core EEMED choreographers produce agencies that are not determined or regulated by all of tradition’s concepts and rules. In turn, the core EEMED choreographers develop fringe space in order to stand up to those who want to use the fringe as a site for lowering their social status. Although they do feel some social pressures from tradition, the core EEMED choreographers are not controlled by it. In the fringe they connect to ideas and dances that are not a part of traditional Middle Eastern
dance. The core EEMED choreographers produce a flexible and fluid genre, which is difficult to define, and therefore, to regulate by traditionalists.

Dancing in the fringe intertwines with the concept of connecting and disconnecting, which I draw from the core EEMED choreographers’ practice and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizome theory. In their “Introduction: Rhizome” from A Thousand Plateaus (1987), Deleuze and Guattari examine the ways in which things and relations interact through a rhizomatic approach. However, they do not claim the rhizome to be “The Answer,” but rather a theoretical move away from (but not discounting) binary structures and hierarchies, which are so pervasive in American and European cultures. Deleuze and Guattari present the rhizome as a system of flows that can connect and disconnect in infinite and unpredictable ways. These flows are in a continuous process and can either maintain a course or change by interacting with other flows. Deleuze and Guattari write, “[a] rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). Theoretically, the rhizome is not about reproduction but about becoming. It is the middle, not the beginning or the end.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss two common power systems, “root-trees” and “radicle/fascicular root,” which differ from each other on the bases of “link dipole” and “unit dipoles,” respectively. However, according to Deleuze and Guattari, these two systems do not break from dualism, but instead, contain hierarchical centers of origin that pre-exist the individual. They claim, “[e]ven if the links themselves proliferate, as in the radicle system, one can never get beyond the One-Two, and fake multiplicities” (Deleuze
Deleuze and Guattari also distinguish the arborescent system from the rhizome, which “is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system” (Deleuze and Guattari 21) that produces multiplicities. Nevertheless, Deleuze and Guattari assert that the two systems are not in opposition to each other since “[t]here are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots” (Deleuze and Guattari 20). What they see has happened is that trees have been given more value and power than rhizomes, a situation, which Deleuze and Guattari are working to change.

Although Deleuze and Guattari produce an idealized vision of the rhizome they also take into account that organizations can come in and “reconstitute a subject” (Deleuze and Guattari 9) based on lines of articulation that connect and unify. Thus, rhizomes can be used to establish rigid hierarchies and center-periphery relations. In fact, centers develop where connecters overlap in a compressed space to form assemblages. “[L]ines of flight or deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 21) also exist and can come out of, away from, and disrupt assemblages.

Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome allows for an exploration of the ways in which the core EEMED choreographers connect and disconnect from experimental Middle Eastern dance. One can see their lines of flight from traditional Middle Eastern dance, which itself contains a collection of lines that developed a hierarchal center-periphery relation. In the center, traditional Middle Eastern choreographers keep repeating certain connections, while the core EEMED choreographers, in their fringe, keep focusing on making new ones.
While dancing in the fringe, the core EEMED choreographers experience the freedom and the ability to experiment with various connections. They disconnect from traditional Middle Eastern dance and connect further with other dance cultures and American non-dance culture. Each choreographer develops her own approach and makes decisions about which element she wants to employ. Thus, each assemblage, each dance, is unique in how and where it produces connections and disconnections. While experimental Middle Eastern dance as a “genre” and EEMED as a show are developing their own territory, they also contain “lines of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 504) that undermine them and open them up to connect with other assemblages.

**METHODOLOGY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

This dissertation relies upon the methodology of oral history and the analysis of discursive practice of genres in order to study and investigate the core EEMED choreographers’ own theories of practice. Oral history and the analysis of discursive practice of genres present opportunities for individual perspectives to be voiced and negotiated in the text and also to be accumulated into a group perspective. The core EEMED choreographers are not dance writers, and therefore, the only way to learn about them is through analyzing their dances, observing their choreographic processes, or interviews. At this time, I focus on the latter. The examination of the discursive practice of genres creates not only an entry into the material produced by the interviews, but also a way to place the core EEMED choreographers’ positions into larger contexts, such as the American Middle Eastern dance community and dance scholarship.
Oral History

I primarily used oral history’s interview process to obtain information directly from the core EEMED choreographers about their definitions, processes, and actions, which one cannot get from observations, experience, or analyzing written texts or dances. Specifically, I gathered information about the core EEMED choreographers’ background, terminology, and experimental Middle Eastern dance choreographic processes. In addition, their different interpretations of experimental Middle Eastern dance fostered more nuanced and complex analysis than mine alone could provide. In turn, I promote their agency by presenting their voices in the dissertation’s text. This section will begin first with a discussion of the logistics of the interviews and then will present some theoretical considerations brought up by oral historians.

In order to prepare the core EEMED choreographers for the interviews and to offer them a preview of the topics I wanted to cover, I sent each of them a questionnaire (See Appendix A) before their interviews began. The questionnaire contained a principal series of questions that everyone received and a secondary series of questions geared towards a choreographer’s specific dances. I also started each session with follow up questions, which allowed for clarification and/or additional information on important areas. Although not a requirement, both Djahari and Claudia wrote some of their answers on the questionnaire and gave me a copy. In addition to the questions, the interview process also included their commentary while watching raw, distant-angle footage of specific EEMED dances.
I organized the questions into several categories. For instance, “General Background” inquired about the core EEMED choreographers’ personal non-dance identity and history. The section, “Dance Background,” asked them about the types of dance they learn, perform, and/or teach in order to permit the core EEMED choreographers to implement their own terminology and to describe and classify Middle Eastern dance. The questions in the “General Application of Traditional and Experimental Middle Eastern Dance” section investigated the core EEMED choreographers’ use and definition of traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance, their creation and performance processes, their position on the relationship between tradition and experimental dance work, and their view of experimental Middle Eastern dance becoming a “tradition.” The section about “Choreographic Process and Structures” inquired about the core EEMED choreographers’ choreographic process, meanings of specific dances, and their overall experimental Middle Eastern dance style. The questions in the section “EEMED” examined the ways in which the core EEMED choreographers think about and define EEMED, their personal history with the show, if and how they consider EEMED to be different from other Middle Eastern dance shows, and how the physical space of the theater impacts their dance and vision. The last set of questions, “The Fringe,” explored the core EEMED choreographers’ concepts and ideas about the fringe.

Generally, I interviewed the core EEMED choreographers separately, except for Jean and Claudia of Tandemonium who I interviewed together because they co-created all of their EEMED dances and did not present any solo work. The interviews were
conducted at the interviewer's home in Los Angeles between May 2005 and December 2006 – Anaheed (May 23, June 5, August 5, August 25, 2005), Djahari (August 30, September 15, November 22, December 8, 2005), Tandemonium (October 11, October 18, November 8, November 29, December 13, 2005), Tatianna (December 20, December 30, 2005, and January 5, 2006), and Elayssa (March 7, October 20, December 3, December 14, 2006). Each individual set of interviews took between a two- and ten-month period to complete depending upon schedules and the time it took for the interviewer to transcribe the previous interview session. The interviews required between three and five sessions, with four being the average, and each session lasted two to three hours.

I videotaped the interviews in order to obtain a visual record of core EEMED choreographers’ speech and movement and to record their commentary while watching EEMED dance footage. The interviewee sat directly in front of the camera unless she was to the side watching the television, while I sat behind the camera to the side. Although the camera brings a stressful factor into the process, I worked to prevent and to alleviate awkwardness by having the interviewee talk to me and not necessarily directly into the camera. I used a mini-DVD camera, which required the disc to be changed every half hour, and therefore, allowed for the interviewee to take breaks if needed.

Oral historians Alessandro Portelli, in The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories (1991), Valerie Yow, in “So I like them too much?” (1997), Ronald Grele, in Envelopes of Sound (1985), and Eva McMahan, in Elite Oral History Discourse (1989), factor in a number of considerations when examining the relationship between
interviewee and interviewer, which I incorporate into my discussion of the dissertation’s oral history methodology. For example, Portelli, Yow, Grele, and McMahan contend interviewer and interviewee are both active participants in the interview process and the result of which is a unique historical document. Both sides assert their own agendas by monitoring responses and assessing interactions in order to produce desired goals. For example, McMahan observes that the interviewer for the most part directs topics and questions, while the interviewee controls the answering or not of questions. As a way to understand these power interactions and to produce good quality interviews, all of the oral historians surveyed here promote the necessity for interviewers to listen and understand an interviewee’s cultural values. They also stress the obligation for interviewers to be aware of their position towards the subject matter and to reflect upon the ways in which they manipulate methodology, research, and data.

Oral history’s methodology of the interview process is useful in this dissertation’s endeavor not only because it investigates historical actions and events, but also meanings and individual explanations. However, although this dissertation relies upon many of oral history’s methods, it bypasses its strong purpose of investigating events, and in particular, what people at a specific time think about the past. I am interested in the core EEMED choreographers’ interpretation of their genre usage, choreographic experiences, and dance rather than the “truthfulness” of their facts.

Since I am deeply entrenched in the area of experimental Middle Eastern dance as a practitioner, producer of EEMED, and friend of the interviewees, I need to contend with the difficulty of producing scholarly writing that critiques and contextualizes their
work but at the same time is responsible to my sources. Yow, Grele, and, Portelli note that part of the balance comes from interviewers listening to what the interviewee finds important so they can learn from them. Even though the core EEMED choreographers and I share a common interest, I am aware that we do not necessarily share the same background and/or goals. I work to understand the core EEMED choreographers’ positions and points by putting my personal ideas and convictions aside and striving to listen to my informants and the materials they present.

As a means to offset some of the power dynamics of the interview process, I asked my pre-set questions in an open-ended manner. I also offered interviewees opportunities to generate material by commenting on the videos as they watched and by making sure there was time for them to discuss what they deemed important. At the end of their last session, I asked each of them if they had any questions for me in order to facilitate an opportunity for an exchange of ideas. However, I saved this conversation for the end as a way to keep my personal ideas from directly influencing their own. The information gathered from the interviews expanded and deepened my own perspective of the ways the core EEMED choreographers differ from one another.

The interviews for this dissertation build upon an already existing tradition of discussion, analysis, and critique between the interviewer and interviewee. For example, during EEMED’s audition process, the core EEMED choreographers and I engage in a series of written and face-to-face conversations that draws into the choreographic process self-reflection, explanation, and analysis. Part of the oral history project is also to ask questions and bring things to light, especially when the interviewer asks the interviewees
to remember and/or justify ideas they had not analyzed before. The interviews foster richer communication beyond our usual discussions of specific pieces, extending to areas, such as dance background, personal missions for the show, and career goals.

Since the interviewees and I had a working friendship, familiarity, and trust established prior to the interviews, I felt they were quite candid and open with their answers. I did not get the sense they were trying to present the kind of answers that I wanted to hear because many of their ideas were different from my own. On rare occasions, I had the opportunity to introduce a different interpretation into the interview record without calling into question their competence. For example, Tatianna and Tandemonium claimed that some dances were too traditional or not Middle Eastern dance respectively, and therefore, not experimental Middle Eastern dance. In these cases, I noted that I understood their differing position, but also explained why the dances were in EEMED.

The only times I sensed that the core EEMED choreographers were working to please me came in the form of always trying to answer the questions. For example, a choreographer may answer by stating she did not know the answer, while most of the time she would keep talking until she produced one. There were only a few moments of obstacles during the interviews. For instance, on one occasion I understood that an interviewee was holding back information on a topic she considered private and did not want made public. In addition, on rare occasions interviewees left out a detail because I already knew it. At these times, I prompted the interviewee about the missing information.
Portelli claims that the interview process may influence the ways in which the interviewees think about themselves. In fact, at the end, several of the core EEMED choreographers reflected upon the interview process and what they had learned. For example, Jean and Claudia acknowledged that they learned a lot about each other and Elayssa realized that she focuses on personal and emotional topics and has “not concerned myself with global politics” (Elayssa 174). Perhaps the most prominent change during the course of the interviews was Djahari’s conversion to using the term experimental Middle Eastern dance to label her work. Djahari realized that she had not been employing the term but would do so because experimental Middle Eastern dance is an accurate description of her dance and is growing in recognition in the Middle Eastern dance community.

In this dissertation I strive to find balance between writing a text that is based upon listening and allowing the core EEMED choreographer to speak in a manner that is positive but not self-congratulatory. I work to accomplish my goal by taking on the role of interpreter. Before this project, I already held such a position by writing EEMED press releases. However, the dissertation takes my role a step further by contextualizing what they say in relation to other discourses, such as those of dance scholarship and the American Middle Eastern dance community and by drawing on genre theories to examine and understand their statements.

The core EEMED choreographers trust me to interpret and utilize their voices in the dissertation. Only Djahari during the interviews voiced her apprehension of the interpretive aspect of the project, because, she notes, “I’ve seen things get turned around
before” (Djahari 187). However, she also gave her support. An area about which I remain concerned is the predicament that when their ideas and speech are written down and printed people will think of them as fact and static. The permanence of the written word may leave the core EEMED choreographers feeling less room to change their positions in the future. However, knowing these women, as producers of experimental dance, I believe they will continue to strongly voice their ideas, changed or not.

**Discursive Practices of Genres**

Since the interviews produced a vast amount of information, I decided to focus on terminology as an entry point into how the core EEMED choreographers construct, individually and as a group, traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance. In fact, they present an opportunity to examine the formation of a new genre. I draw on the work of Amy Devitt’s *Writing Genres* (2008), John Frow’s *Genre* (2006), and Carolyn Miller’s “Genre as Social Action” (1994) in order to analyze the core EEMED choreographers’ statements. Genre theory is helpful in this dissertation since there has been a move from investigating genres in literature to those employed by various groups of people as social action. In fact, Devitt following Miller states “that genre is action, that genre is typified action, that typification comes from recurring conditions, and that those conditions involve a social context” (Devitt 13). In addition, genre theorists explore the relationships between text and genre, text and social action, situation and genre, and individual and group.
I also draw on Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) in which he discusses how discourse propagates and continues a subject through naming, formation and dispersion of rules, and people participating in systems like institutions and economics. Foucault also explores the instability of discourse by showing it is made up of continuities and discontinuities, the outside is part of the inside, and its ruptures can lead to the formation of new discourses. As I will show through my text, Middle Eastern dance acts like a discourse. Its rules of dance are dispersed and stabilized by a far-reaching community and that within the Middle Eastern dance processes, continuity is emphasized and discontinuity deemphasized. I will present these two as working to produce and destabilize each other. However, within the process of interaction is a rupture, a new discourse within Middle Eastern dance, experimental Middle Eastern dance, which places discontinuity at its forefront.

By examining the language that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed here employ, one can understand the ways in which it helps develop genres. I look at how they define terms on their own and in relation to other genres in order to consider whether a genre is well defined or not, is a norm or not, and/or is in a hierarchical relation with other genres. The dance scholars whom I surveyed implement many of these genres and/or investigate their history, to which the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers are attuned. However, as with the case of fusion dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers do not always receive their cues from dance scholars. In fact, since writers and dancers did not always use the
term “fusion” as part of a noun but rather as an adjective, they may indicate the formation of a new genre. The genres articulated by the American Middle Eastern dance writers show the environment in which the core EEMED choreographers have been producing dance before and since EEMED. In addition, the investigation demonstrates that the core EEMED choreographers are in the fringe of the American Middle Eastern dance community.

In the dissertation I examine the ways in which the core EEMED choreographers organize dances within the category of Middle Eastern dance. However, before starting my investigation, I need to first examine how the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers define and apply the terms “style” and “genre.” It is followed by a discussion of the ways I use the terms “style,” “genre,” and “umbrella” in order to produce a framework.

Genre is a term that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed in this dissertation do not readily define. Selma Jeanne Cohen, in her entry “Genres of Western Theatrical Dance” for The International Encyclopedia of Dance (1998), offers a rare example. On the “stylistic” personal level, Cohen notes that choreographers change a genre’s elements, but continue enough of them for their dance to still be classified as that genre. However, she does not present a case demonstrating the ways in which style influences genre.

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed more often use the term “style” rather than “genre.” In fact, except for Cohen noted above, they employ it as their term for both individual and
group levels. However, some differences in usage exist among the writers surveyed. For example, Susan Foster, in *Reading Dancing* (1986), uses the term style for both individuals and groups, but focuses mainly on individual choreographers. The American Middle Eastern dance writers such as Shira, in her on-line essay, “Styles of Belly Dance in the United States” (2008), and Sharon Moore, in her on-line essay, “The Elusive Definition of Tribal Bellydance” (2008), note more than two categories of dance. For instance, Shira describes four increasing levels of dance categories – personal, a style, a collection of styles, and Middle Eastern dance, which encompasses them all. Moore also discusses the last three levels of dance categories, with the final one being belly dance. The core EEMED choreographers lean towards the usage of the term style, but on occasion, Tatianna, Anaheed, and Tandemonium exchange it for the term genre. Regardless of the terminology, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dancers, and the core EEMED choreographers present and/or define genre and style as characteristics and elements that they can use to identify a choreographer, a dance form, and/or a collection of dances at a specific time. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers also consider style/genre to be recognizable by an audience and labeled as such.

The categories that I focus on in the dissertation – folk dance, ethnic dance, tribal dance, religious movement ceremonies, classical dance, staged-folk dance, belly dance, modern dance, post-modern dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, alternative dance, and experimental dance – are not the only categories employed by the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers addressed
in the dissertation. For example, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers frequently use a name to designate a location, such as Egyptian dance and Turkish dance or even American Restaurant. Dance scholars and American Middle Eastern dance writers also organize dances based upon function, such as combat dances and religious dances and/or form, such as solo improvisational dances, group improvisational dances, chain dances, and line dances.

In my interview questions with the core EEMED choreographers, I used the term “style” to name forms within Middle Eastern dance. Although I had given them written interview questions before we met, they were the first ones to mention the term “style” during their interviews, and it reflects their own daily practice. However, in this dissertation I make distinction between various levels of categories. For instance, I employ the term “style” in reference to a choreographer’s personal conventions and characteristics, but my usage does not preclude a choreographer from undertaking a single and/or stable style. Additionally, I employ “genre” as a term that encompasses the general and common qualities of a group of dances. I also utilize the term “umbrella” as a category that includes several genres. In this dissertation, I consider “experimental Middle Eastern dance” and “traditional Middle Eastern dance” to be umbrella terms, since the core EEMED choreographers acknowledge them up as containing a variety of genres. Both of them come underneath the largest heading, “Middle Eastern dance.”
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the American Middle Eastern Dance Community

The American Middle Eastern dance community, which this dissertation refers to, is made up of teachers, performers, students, vendors, musicians, producers, photographers, videographers, and audience enthusiasts with a wide array of ancestral backgrounds. Practitioners may range from the occasional student to the full time professional. In addition, the American Middle Eastern dance community performs numerous Middle Eastern dance genres from the Middle East and the United States. Connections and networks in the community develop through people participating in classes, workshops, festivals, concerts, social internet networks, social organizations, reading magazines, books, websites, and watching videos.

This dissertation pulls from American Middle Eastern dance community sources, including magazines, on-line articles, books, and websites. Many of the articles offer ethnographic descriptions, which include information about movement, costume, and some cultural context, interviews, personal accounts and experiences, biographies, dance tips, and reviews of events, music, and DVDs. Since the late 2000s, more articles on strengthening exercises have appeared. However, little written information circulates about improvisational and/or choreographic processes or strategies.

American Middle Eastern dance community magazines regularly publish interviews, such as Barbara Sellers-Young of Kajira Djoumahna (2008), Carolina Varga Dinicu of Mahmoud Reda (2003), and Desirée of Frédérique David (2008), which are surveyed in the dissertation. They include both question and answers and frequently
cover topics such as a dancer’s dance background, inspiration, influential teachers, teaching advice, and/or description of her/his dance form. The American Middle Eastern dance interviewer offers almost no interpretation of the data beyond some editing and organizing the material. However, the interviews offer a platform for dancers to speak. They are also great primary sources and can be read as examples of standpoints lying outside of academic discourse.

While interviewers promote the practitioners’ voice, writers of ethnographies, dance descriptions, and travel accounts, such as Barbara Siegel (1982 and 1983), Shakira (2007), Karol Harding (2004, 2007, 2008a, and 2008b), Robyn Friend (1996, 1999, 2007a, and 2007b), Carolina Dinicu (2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007, and 2008), and Erin Crouch (2007) tend to quiet their informants. In fact, they almost never use interviews as a method to gather data, but instead, rely upon participation and observation. However, when American Middle Eastern dance writers do include a few quotes, as Barbara Siegel does in “Tunisian Images: Learning the Dance” (1983), they present interesting insight into the ways practitioners negotiate tradition and innovation. Unfortunately, even though many of these writers have been involved with Middle Eastern dance for many years and know a great deal about it, very few possess academic training in dance studies. The American Middle Eastern dance writers generally do not comment upon their methodology or how it creates certain types of data. In addition, for the most part, they do not contextualize their results within larger discourses.

Occasionally, American Middle Eastern dance writers discuss the state of a dance with respect to the issue of genre. For example, Sharon Moore (2008), Shira (2008b),
Kajira Djoumahna (2000 and 2008), Robyn Friend (2007b), and Soher Azar (2008) focus on categorizing and defining various forms of dance in order to educate the American Middle Eastern dance community and perhaps the American public about the different types of Middle Eastern dance. Others, such as Kajira Djoumahna (2000), Ibrahim Farrah (1977), and Donna Carlton (1995) discuss belly dance through investigations into its etymology. Very rarely do the American Middle Eastern dance writers whom I surveyed in the dissertation openly discuss the relationship between tradition and experimentation, as Alexandra King does in “Tradition vs Fusion” (2006) and Afra Al-Kahira in “What Follows is my Personal Vision of what ‘Experimental’ or ‘Dance Theatre’ Means to me in Relation to Middle Eastern Dance” (2005). Instead, one needs to examine texts for their discourse about genres.

**Introduction to the Dance Scholars**

In this dissertation, I utilize dance scholars’ texts in order to contextualize the core EEMED choreographers. I draw from several fields, including Middle Eastern dance, American modern dance, American post-modern dance, British post-modern dance, British New Dance, Indian dance, and Indonesian dance. In most cases, I focus on texts that deal with a specific genre. In addition, scholars addressing Middle Eastern dance and American modern and post-modern dance offer insight into cultural traits to which the core EEMED choreographers sometimes connect and develop. Another point of the dissertation includes bringing the core EEMED choreographers into dance scholarship and to demonstrate that they possess valid and interesting points of view. Even though I
analyze and interpret their interviews and work, the dissertation text opens new space in which they can speak and dance.

This dissertation works to address the legacy in dance scholarship of the seen but not heard Middle Eastern dancer, which one can trace to Orientalist writers, such as Gustave Flaubert, Edward Lane, and Eustace Reynolds-Ball. In the Orientalist context, dancers were constructed as sexualized and silenced subjects for whom Europeans spoke. Dance Perspectives (1961) published perhaps the first two contemporary dance scholarship articles that are not travel or journal writings but are situated within late Orientalist discourse. For example, Morroe Berger, in “The Arab Danse Du Ventre,” continues the male Orientalist viewing of Arab women as mysterious and sexual while positioning himself as a male voyeur. Russell Meriwether Hughes (La Meri), in “Learning the Danse Du Ventre,” undertakes a female Orientalist approach, presents generalities about the dance, and includes descriptions of her own difficult experiences learning the dance.

Many of the scholars of Middle Eastern dance surveyed in this dissertation continue to leave out the voices of practitioners. By doing so, they create distance between their readers and their informants, one in which the writer controls. For example, Amnon Shiloah (1995), Lois al Faruqi (1976-77, 1978), Metin And (1959 and 1963-1964), and entries found in The International Encyclopedia of Dance (1998) list, categorize, and describe various dances but offer very little analysis, context, or practitioners’ viewpoints. Shiloah, al Faruqi, and And are not the only ones to label dances and ignore practitioners’ terms. For example, dance ethnographies, including
those by Susan Bauer (2006) and Najwa Adra (2001 and 2005) may present different perspectives on a topic, but the only sources cited are those by dance scholars.

In several cases, the dance scholar is also a practitioner of the dance being discussed. However, such a dual role does not guarantee that other practitioners’ voices will be heard. For example, Farida Fahmy, a co-creator of the Reda Troupe, in her thesis “The Creative Development of Mahmoud Reda” (1987), rarely addresses thoughts by the other three main co-creators. Instead, Fahmy relies upon her own experiences for information, which she states using the third person. Anthony Shay, also a practitioner, on occasion writes of his experiences in the first person. However, he rarely presents other practitioners’ viewpoints or even other viewpoints. For instance, in *Choreophobia* (1999), Shay examines through observation and participations the ambiguous position improvisational dance holds in Iranian culture. Although he conducted a few interviews, Shay does not factor the people’s positions into the discussion of the main topic of how and when dancers transgress social dance conventions. Instead, he includes his observations of audience reactions towards the dancers. When Shay addresses practitioners’ voice, they contribute interesting and complex ideas to his texts. For example, in *Choreographic Politics* (2002), Shay notes some in Turkey consider the Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble’s repertoire to be traditional even though he does not. Unfortunately, Shay does not unpack or expand upon the difference positions.

Several dance scholars conduct research that includes informants’ names and viewpoints in order to present positive images of dance. For example, Susan Kenyon, in “Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan” (1995), offers a rare example of a
scholar of Middle Eastern dance who listens to and records her informants’ perspectives. She uses the information to help her understand the ability of the zar to continue as a tradition that can also accommodate outsiders and social change. Unfortunately, other scholars of Middle Eastern dance undermine the dancers by discounting and crushing their social actions with academic theories. For example, in “Moroccan Female Performers Defining the Social Body” (1994), Deborah Kapchan examines the position of shikhat in Moroccan society. Although she observes some changing attitudes for more respect of shikhat, at the end of her article, Kapchan asserts that the image is being appropriated and exploited for national purposes in such a way that she places shikhat back into a powerless position. Karin van Nieuwkerk, in ‘A Trade like any Other’ (1995), offers a similar position with regard to female Egyptian dancers. Nieuwkerk conducts interviews in which she gathers information about the ways various classes in Egypt view professional female dancers. She concludes,

> Taking the lower- and lower-middle-class view rather than that of the upper and upper-middle class as decisive, taking experience-near rather than experience-distance discourse as central, and taking behavior rather than text as focal, the conclusion can be drawn that entertainment is not a dishonorable profession. (Nieuwkerk 183)

However, in spite of her comment, Nieuwkerk immediately writes, “[y]et at the same time I concluded that for women entertainment is a dishonorable profession,” which she says is based upon “gender as a social and cultural construction” (Nieuwkerk 183). Nieuwkerk undermines the position of those she spoke with by claiming “the female body is sexual, seductive, shameful, and one-dimensional” (Nieuwkerk 185). Apparently, the female body is the same for all Egyptian women, even dancers who take on “male
behaviors,” such as drinking, smoking, cursing, and fighting, in order to “try to neutralize and negate their femininity” (Nieuwkerk 184).

I employ a number of other dance scholarly texts in order to supplement those by scholars of Middle Eastern dance. Those by Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2006), Janet O’Shea (2006), Mark Franko (1995), and John Percival (1971) are helpful because they offer examples of dance scholars using interviews in conjunction with observation, dance analysis, and written texts, including those written by choreographers, historical documents, and other scholars’ research in order to present and to explore different viewpoints on a specific topic. I use other dance scholars’ texts because they present definitions of specific genres. In some cases, scholars, such as Joann Kealiinohomoku (2001), Roger Copeland (1985), and LeeEllen Friedland (1998) examine the history and meaning of a specific term in American dance scholarship, while Mark Franko (1995), Susan Manning (1988), Judith Mackrell (1991), and Joann Kealiinohomoku work to redefine a term. Additionally, O’Shea and Hughes-Freeland examine the ways in which people can construct and use a genre in order to promote socio-political positions. However, when it comes to dance scholars defining tradition and experimentation, they are not always so forthcoming with their definitions, and therefore, one needs to examine how they employ the term to obtain definitions.

While the dance scholars examine and discuss fairly established dance genres, a few who analyze “fusion” dance offer insight into the formation of a genre while it is still a process. For example, Indian dance scholars Joan Erdman (1987), Janet O’Shea (1998), and Valarie Briginshaw (2001) present complex images of Indian dance or Bharata
Natyam as it crosses national and historical boundaries. They examine either what keeps the genre identifiable as Bharata Natyam/Indian dance even with modifications or how something new is emerging out of tradition. Establishing research in Middle Eastern dance studies with a similar approach would help show the historical interconnections of traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance in the United States.

FORM OF THE DISSERTATION

Drawing on how the core EEMED choreographers discuss their dance, this dissertation divides Middle Eastern dance into traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance. In order to understand the complex and nuanced relationship between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance, I analyze the ways in which individual and group levels of genres inform each other. In Sections One and Two, each chapter begins with scholarly writers’ definitions and/or applications of terms. It then proceeds to include examples of how writers in the American Middle Eastern dance community employ them. After analyzing these writers, the chapter brings in the core EEMED choreographers’ positions and places them into a dialogue with the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers. By investigating and finding where the three groups’ understanding converge and diverge, I can locate the core EEMED choreographers’ perspectives in wider dance contexts.

Section One studies specific genres that generally fall under the heading of either traditional or experimental Middle Eastern dance. I separate the first chapter, “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” into two parts. Part One examines four strong traditional
Middle Eastern “dance” genres – ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices – which are longstanding dance scholarship categories that refer to people who supposedly practice traditional lifestyles. These dances are identified as amateur, local, and participatory forms. Spiritual movement practices share these traits, but are performed for spiritual enlightenment or healing rather than celebration. Part Two of “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres” investigates genres that people may or may not include within the traditional Middle Eastern dance category – staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance. Their status as “traditional” is often put into question by writers and dancers because they are “newer” than those addressed in Part One. All three “genres” are generally classified as professional presentational forms that often represent a nation-state.

Chapter Two, “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” is also in two parts and addresses where the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers begin to diverge. For example, Part One explores modern dance and post-modern dance, which dance scholars of American dance often label as experimental dance. The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers also present modern dance and post-modern dance in such a manner, but they also use the terms as adjectives to label/describe Middle Eastern dances that developed in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.

Part Two examines interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance; names with which the core EEMED choreographers frequently label their experimental Middle Eastern dance. Although the dance scholars view interpretive
dance as a genre, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the EEMED choreographers perceive it as a genre in their own way. That is, the dancer is experimenting with representing symbols, characters, and narratives – all non-traditional Middle Eastern dance elements. The dance scholars surveyed do not recognize fusion dance and alternative dance as genres. In addition, they generally view fusion dance as a process and theatrical dance as an umbrella term that can encompass many specific dance forms. The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers employ the terms interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance in fluid ways. For example, sometimes the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the EEMED choreographers use them to label a process. At other times, they call their personal and/or another person’s style with one or another genre term. Additionally, the core EEMED choreographers may turn a genre into an umbrella term and place other genres within it. For instance, the setting and purpose of EEMED encompasses the various experimental Middle Eastern dance genres the core EEMED choreographers perform during the show into the umbrella of “theatrical” experimental Middle Eastern dance.

Section Two analyzes traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance as umbrella terms. For instance, Chapter Three, “Defining Traditional Middle Eastern Dance,” examines the different parameters people construct in order to label dance and/or genre a traditional dance. It also questions how much variation a person allows a traditional dance to sustain. Chapter Four, “Defining Experimental Middle Eastern Dance,” takes a similar approach to the previous chapter. It looks at the negotiation
between an ideology that states experimental Middle Eastern dance does not contain any parameters and the reality that many practitioners create them over time. In addition, the chapter examines the core EEMED choreographers’ degrees of experimentation. Chapter Five, “The Relationship between Traditional and Experimental Middle Eastern Dance,” examines how dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers directly discuss the relationship between the two. The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers also demonstrate the ways in which they open up the parameters of American Middle Eastern dance in general.

Section Three contains the conclusion. Chapter Six, “Discursive Practices of Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” begins by finishing the examination of traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance genres by re-introducing ideas presented in this “Introduction.” It investigates the formation of experimental Middle Eastern dance “genre” through genre theories presented by Amy Devitt, John Frow, and Carolyn Miller. The chapter then continues to discuss the formation of experimental Middle Eastern dance fringe with Edward Soja’s Thirdspace and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizome. The chapter ends with, “Future Research,” which notes the examination into the core EEMED choreographers’ developments of the relationships between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance can be continued by analyzing the dance and choreographic processes of their EEMED dances.
CONCLUSION OF THE INTRODUCTION

EEMED is part of my world, which I help co-create through both practice and research. My deep connection and involvement with it affects my research. In fact, my theoretical position is already informed by my practitioner position, and therefore, my theoretical position is conducive to my listening to the core EEMED choreographers and examining experimental Middle Eastern dance for knowledge rather than superimposing academic structures or my personal ideas. Even if a topic, such as the relationship between tradition and experimentation, is not as important to the core EEMED choreographers, as it is to me, it is still an area that they all negotiate in interesting and informative ways. My multiple positions also place me in an activist stance that directly connects the dissertation to the goals of EEMED and its practitioners. My closeness to the project may not let me understand ideological connections, which an outsider may. All projects include lacks, absences, silences, things left out, and unknowns. However, my position allows me to make connections that an outsider may not.

This chapter presents my theory of how the core EEMED choreographers view traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance together. I introduced EEMED and the core EEMED choreographers and worked to formulate a theory that grows out of EEMED’s practice. Its performers actively and intentionally dance in the fringe in order to present various commentaries and perspectives about the dance. From its flexible and flowing fringe space, the core EEMED choreographers literally dance with traditional Middle Eastern dance. From the core EEMED choreographers’ perspective, their dance is not one in which they are in opposition to or are enemies with traditional Middle Eastern
dance. Nor are they in unison. No one is leading the other. On EEMED’s fringe, traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance come together in an improvisational performance. Each can choose to respond to the other by connecting to a number of elements, such as movements, costuming, music, structures, and images. They also hold the ability to ignore one another. As a result, the core EEMED choreographers are able to create an emerging dance form of experimentation and tradition-in-the-fringe.
SECTION ONE
CHAPTER TWO, PART ONE
TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES

“Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres” focuses on terms the core EEMED choreographers employed to discuss traditional Middle Eastern dance during their interviews. Although traditional Middle Eastern dance is not their only foundation for producing experimental Middle Eastern dance, it is an important starting place. The chapter is by no means a comprehensive survey of these genres. Due to the open-ended interview method, not every core EEMED choreographer commented on every term. As a result, an uneven amount of material exists. Nevertheless, the interviewees present so much information there is plenty to explore and their “silence” or “lack” displays another aspect of how they view traditional Middle Eastern dance.

In this chapter, I investigate the core EEMED choreographers’ definitions, descriptions, and/or applications of the categories, which in turn develop a working vocabulary for the remainder of the dissertation. The information will be used later to explore the broader implications of traditional dance as a category and how experimental Middle Eastern dance and traditional Middle Eastern dance interact. By understanding traditional dance components in the core EEMED choreographers’ background and discourse, one can examine how they employ them in their experimental work.

“Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres” is divided into two parts. Part One includes analysis of the terms ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious
movement practices. I call these four genres “strong” traditional Middle Eastern “dances” in order to label what the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed here frequently describe as old, established, continuous practices with little or no change. They also generally define them as amateur, local, rural, and participatory forms. The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers sometime observe changes in a strong traditional Middle Eastern dance, but they do not go as far as disrupting its traditional status. In fact in several cases, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers cover up and/or ignore modifications in order to promote a continuation of traditional ideals and cultural identities.

Part Two covers three fluid traditional Middle Eastern dance genres, including staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance. The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers frequently describe these genres as performed by professional dancers in local, national, and international presentational venues. The genres in Part Two overlap with some traditional concepts and practices presented in Part One. However, debates exist about whether staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance are traditional Middle Eastern dance or not because of the amount of change they contain. Some of the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers assert that staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance are not traditional Middle Eastern dance because they are
too new and are traceable to a strong traditional dance. Others expand the definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance to include the “newer,” but established genres.

**INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE**

Part One focuses on ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices because of their recognition and long term use by the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers. They do not employ the genre terms equally or to the same degree. For example, tribal dance is the least popular category and is frequently included under the umbrella term of ethnic dance or folk dance. In addition, no set standard term exists for what I label religious movement practices. The lack of a stable genre term is due to low visibility of religious movement practices in the American Middle Eastern dance community as well as varying religious attitudes towards “dance.” I include it within a chapter on traditional Middle Eastern dance with the caveat that many practitioners do not refer to religious movement practices as dance. I chose to follow the position presented by practitioners and teachers I learned from as well as those of Anthony Shay (1999) and Adrienne Kaeppler (1997) who note not all structured movements may be categorized as dance. However, because the core EEMED choreographers are not performing or re-creating religious movement practices and do not refer to their own works as non-dance or religious movement practices when analyzing their pieces, I employ the term dance for their more spiritual works.
ETHNIC DANCE

One would expect the core EEMED choreographers to follow the American Middle Eastern dance community’s standard usage of the term ethnic dance – a strong tradition, which at its source is non-Western and local. In fact, several EEMED choreographers do. They participate in the historical usage of ethnic dance by Euro-American dancers, dance scholars, and dance critics as an umbrella term to mean non-Western traditional dance that exists in a secondary position behind ballet and modern dance. However, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers differentiate ethnic dances from other Middle Eastern dance genres, primarily belly dance and classical dance, thereby moving it away to some extent from its general usage as an umbrella term for non-Western dance.

A few of the core EEMED choreographers acknowledge change at an ethnic dance’s source, which enables them to present ethnic communities as alive and transformative without discrediting ethnic continuity. Their position differs from the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers who focus on groups performing other people’s ethnic dance in contexts beyond its “origin.” The modifications in ethnic dance not only indicate it can change, but raise the question: where does ethnicity lie in respect to the dance? How is it continued when no longer performed by its original ethnic group or birthplace? For the most part, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers contend a specific ethnic group’s identity continues through the identification of the dance’s movement, costume, and music. The fact that ethnic dance
does not need to be practiced by its original ethnic developers adds a layer of detachment from its culture.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Joann Kealiinohomoku, in “An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance” (1969-1970), and in her follow-up article, “Angst over Ethnic Dance” (1990), and David Gere, in his “Introduction” to *Looking Out* (1995), discuss the history and broad implications of the term ethnic dance in American dance. They acknowledge that as late as the 1990s, dancers, dance scholars, and dance critics still use ethnic dance as an umbrella term to encompass non-Western dance and to distinguish it specifically from Western ballet and modern dance. Their critique of the East/West division comes in part from the fact that ethnic dance contains a history of association with, as Kealiinohomoku states, “old-fashion terms [such] as ‘heathen,’ ‘pagan,’ ‘savage,’ or the more recent term, ‘exotic’” (Kealiinohomoku 2001, 41). In addition, Kealiinohomoku and Gere observe that some dancers, dance scholars, and dance critics relinquish the “negative” term by substituting others, such as World Dance, International Dance, and Culturally Diverse Arts. However, Kealiinohomoku and Gere also notice the usage of these terms has not stopped the polarization of us/them or the general categorization of non-Western dance. In order to solve the dilemma, Kealiinohomoku, in her later article, calls for an end of categories and for the utilization of a dance’s proper name.

In her earlier article, Kealiinohomoku attempts to dismantle the placement of ethnic dance as the non-Western dance label and in the fringe of Western dance by
claiming all dances, including ballet, are ethnic dance. She accomplishes her goal by looking for its source. As “a dance form developed by Caucasians who speak Indo-European languages and who share a common European tradition” (Kealiinohomoku 2001, 40) ballet fulfills her concept that ethnicity ties a group together through “common genetic, linguistic, and cultural ties, with special emphasis on cultural tradition” (Kealiinohomoku 2001, 39). In addition, Kealiinohomoku asserts that ethnic dance as a traditional dance is not static. For example, she acknowledges that dancers in many countries (and from many different ethnic groups) practice ballet but that it still exists as “a borrowed and alien form” (Kealiinohomoku 200, 40). However, Kealiinohomoku discounts change and variety in order to promote continuity of original ethnicity. Granted, ballet’s migration beyond Europe does not erase the fact that it came from an ethnic group(s), but Kealiinohomoku disregards aspects that various ethnic groups, including non-Europeans, have added to its identity and made it their own.

The difficulty with using ethnic dance to label now internationally performed dances such as ballet continues in Kealiinohomoku’s second article in which she brings up a number of important, although mostly unanswered, inquires stemming from designating where ethnicity lies in dance and what kind of ethnicity is continued in a dance. She asks whether ethnicity is in the dancer, the dance, or the performing context. By labeling all dances as ethnic dance, Kealiinohomoku acknowledges original ethnicity remains in spite of international practice and development. According to Kealiinohomoku in her first article, outsiders will always be outsiders to someone else’s tradition despite years and perhaps even generations of practice.
Avner Bahat and Naomi Bahat-Ratzon, in their entry on “Israel: Ethnic Dance” in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (1998), present an example of the ways in which scholars of Middle Eastern dance employ the term ethnic dance. They use it in a standard way, as an umbrella term that includes everything but Israeli ballet and modern dance. However, Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon also place traditional and contemporary forms within ethnic dance. What makes the dances surveyed in Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon’s article ethnic dance, regardless of where they came from (Israel, Middle East, Europe, or Russia), whether they are new or old (preserved, re-invented, adopted, or innovated), or where they are performed (home, outside, or stage), is their practice and performance by a specific group that Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon recognize as being made up of various ethnicities historically linked and producing a contemporary national identity. Israelis construct an ethnic tradition that is not only continuous, but also accommodates change, difference, and variety. While Kealiinohomoku perceives ballet as an ethnic dance started by one group and now practiced by many different ethnic groups, Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon perceive numerous ethnic groups are coming together to create an ethnic dance tradition.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

Robyn Friend’s articles on Iranian dance are good examples of how the American Middle Eastern dance community presents ethnic dance. In “Presenting Ethnic Dance on the Stage” (1999), Friend defines ethnic dances as those which come out of small local settings, such as “the village, tribe, or family home” (Friend 1999, 10) and are
practiced by an ethnic group. In “Dance in Iran,” Friend states ethnic groups employ “cultural identifiers” (Friend 2007b), including dance, dress, and language to separate themselves from other groups. In the case of Iranian dance, Friend definitely differentiates ethnic and national identity. She observes those ethnic groups in Iran, including Turkic, Armenian, and Arabic, which are neither Persian nor Iranian, and those groups “near the Iranian borders may exhibit more practices in common with non-Iranian neighbors than with other groups within Iran” (Friend 2007b). In fact, ethnic ties are so strong and diverse in Iran, Friend concludes, “[t]here can be, therefore, no notion of an ‘Iranian national dance’…” (Friend 2007b). Her position is also impacted by the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, banned dance and music.

In “Presenting Ethnic Dance on the Stage,” Friend indicates alterations can occur in ethnic dance. However, she only presents one change made by practitioners. Friend identifies that since the early twentieth century, Qashqa’i men frequently do not wear their “traditional” costumes, but instead, jeans and t-shirts. Most of the modifications Friend notes come from her reconstruction (Los Angeles, 1989) of the Qashqa’i wedding dances she saw in 1975. With her performance, she demonstrates that ethnic dance can be removed from its practitioners and performed in large, public settings, such as the proscenium theater. Friend still considers her version ethnic dance because of the cultural identifiers she continues through movement, music, and costume. Although Friend notes the reasons and changes she made to the dance in order “to improve the dancer’s appearance on stage…” (Friend 1999, 11), she disregards the men’s contemporary and
Westernized outfits, because she explains, “the spectacle of the women’s costumes” (Friend 1999, 13) would overshadow the men’s. One could also assert that the jeans and t-shirts are not ethnic cultural identifiers of the Qashqa’i. Friend overlooks practitioners’ changes in favor of presenting her version of a unified and cohesive traditional ethnic dance.

Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

In some cases, the core EEMED choreographers accept the standard meaning of ethnic dance, and therefore, distinguish it from Western dance forms. For example, Elayssa notes Abdollah Nazemi’s dance style is a fusion of two genres – “ballet and ethnic dance” (Elayssa 18). Djahari states that she took ethnic dance classes in college, including West African and Bharata Natyam that were different from ballet, modern, and tap, which she took growing up. Even Jean and Claudia, who are the only core EEMED choreographers to locate an ethnic dance in the United States – Tehrani dance in Los Angeles – do so in a non-Western diaspora community. However, Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna also break down the East/West division by differentiating ethnic dance from other Middle Eastern dance genres, in particular various forms of belly dance. In addition, Tatianna distinguishes ethnic dance from Persian and Gypsy and Elayssa from American Tribal Style (ATS).

Similarly to Friend, Elayssa, Tatianna, and Tandemonium spend most of their discussions differentiating ethnic dance from folk dance based upon a division of local and national settings. In their view, ethnic refers to a specific group that may live within a
nation-state. Tatianna says, “[ethnic dance] is more specific to an area, to a dialect, to a cultural identity” (Tatianna 24), such as ghawazee\textsuperscript{70} and bandari,\textsuperscript{71} and Claudia notes that ethnic groups, such as Uzbeks and Tajiks,\textsuperscript{72} can live in different countries. Elayssa contends it is “done in the home – a leisurely style based on leisurely gathering” (Elayssa 23).

The core EEMED choreographers hold slightly different views about the relationship between traditional and ethnic dance. Djahari and Elayssa place ethnic dance within the traditional dance umbrella while Tandemonium and Tatianna note the two are different but intertwined. Tandemonium and Tatianna connect ethnic dance to a continuity of an ethnic identity, but also acknowledge the role of change. For example, Tatianna states, “I would associate ethnic dance more with something that has time, ancient, [or] years” (Tatianna 22), while tradition is “what somebody would expect…. the standard, the norm” (Tatianna 23).\textsuperscript{73} Nevertheless, Tatianna links the two in her discussion of their roles in today’s society. She comments that ethnic dance’s purpose is “to help remember ritual, holidays, family stories, [and] the way to remember your heritage; another way to talk about what your culture is [and] where you came from” (Tatianna 25), while the role of traditional dance is “to keep some of those ethnic bases but bring them more into modern times” (Tatiana 25) and into the expected and the norm. Ethnic dance refers to the past but tradition keeps it alive and fluid.

Tandemonium, as Jean notes, thinks “of ethnic as referring to modern-day dances” (Tandemonium 43). However, Claudia does not perceive ethnic dances, such as Tehrani dance in Los Angeles, as traditional Middle Eastern dance. She states that
traditional Persian dance with the addition of disco has “been incorporated into this modern thing” (Tandemonium 44). However, Jean and Claudia later refer to ethnic dance as a traditional dance when they compare it to experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, while discussing their former term for their experimental Middle Eastern dance, “Twisted Ethnic,” Claudia claims that their dances were “based on traditional ethnic dance. We’re pulling from specific regions and specific ethnic groups” (Tandemonium 48, italics mine). Their addition of “twisted” also indicates that Tandemonium was struggling with the image of ethnic dance in the American Middle Eastern dance community as a traditional dance. Jean and Claudia had to qualify it to communicate that they are not performing traditional ethnic dance, but a new and/or different version.

**Conclusion to Ethnic Dance**

As this section showed, ethnic dance is a broad-reaching term found in several fields, from dance scholarship, to popular culture, and to the American Middle Eastern dance community. Kealiinohomoku works to (re-)connect Western dance with its ethnicity, and therefore, moves ethnic dance’s fringe status into the center of Western dance. Her position is different from that of the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers who for the most part continue in standard fashion and place ethnic dance within non-Western dance. However, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers also differentiate ethnic dance from belly dance and classical dance and locate ethnic dance within local groups.
In addition, for several of them, ethnic dance is a primary form, and therefore, the center of their dance studies.

Wherever the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers locate ethnic dance, they continually deal with its relationship to the past by looking for an original ethnic source. Sometimes, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers examine original practitioners’ performance of their ethnic dance. At other times, they offer examples in which the dance’s ethnicity is not the same as the performers’. Frequently, the American Middle Eastern dancers want to represent specific ethnic groups and work to maintain their dances as close as they can to the original through presenting strong identity markers in music, movement, and costume. American Middle Eastern dancers also may discount changes by original practitioners so they can present their version of what a traditional Middle Eastern dance should look like.

American Middle Eastern dancers also justify their own modifications because they are presenting ethnic dance in a new location often for a new audience.

Kealiinohomoku and Friend assert that ethnicity resides in a dance and its identification with an original ethnic group, and not always with its participants or contexts. If ethnicity is a main identifier of a dance form, then the core EEMED choreographers and many American Middle Eastern dancers who are of non-Middle Eastern descent will always being borrowing ethnic dances from the Middle Eastern and will always be outsiders. Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon offer a different perspective in their observations of recent developments in Israeli ethnic dance. They assert that one ethnic
group can co-opt other ethnic groups’ dance into their sense of ethnic identity. Such actions permit the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers to acknowledge a dance’s original ethnicity, but also make it their own.

If all dances are ethnic dance because they possess roots in ethnic groups then experimental Middle Eastern dance is an ethnic dance. However, one needs to distinguish the experimental Middle Eastern dance that the core EEMED choreographers produce from its Middle Eastern ethnic roots, because its “original” developers are not creating it. As an emerging dance form, experimental Middle Eastern dance is coming out of a mainly Caucasian, American, middle-class, educated, urban group of women who share a late-twentieth-century Euro-American tradition that is open to a fusion of cultural traditions. However, one can discard it as an ethnic dance since the core EEMED choreographers do not share the same genetics or even grow up together. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers do not label themselves as sharing an ethnic identity.

**TRIBAL DANCE**

The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers use the term tribal dance in two ways – to refer to tribal dance in the Middle East or as shorthand for American Tribal Style (ATS) and its splinter forms. In the past fifteen years, use of the second definition increased considerably. Nevertheless, this section focuses on tribal dance in the Middle East, because when the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers use the term, they maintain strong traditional dance discourse and
standard presentations – performed by local amateur dancers in a participatory manner that promotes and continues a specific group’s identities acknowledging very little, if any, change. In addition, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers distinguish tribal dance from classical dance and belly dance.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Najwa Adra, in “Dance: A Visual Marker of Qabili Identity in Highland Yemen” (2001), touches upon but does not analyze the changing identity of the Qaba’il. For example, she discusses her choice of the term tribal as a label for this specific group in a rural community in al-Ahjur, Yemen. Only in a footnote Adra notes that the historical association by Americans and Europeans of the term tribal with the primitive and that she does not employ it in this manner. Adra justifies her usage because tribal “is a direct translation of the Arabic Qabila and Qabili…. the term in the Arab context denotes a regionally recognized social group with clearly defined parameters” (Adra 2001, 175-176). However, Adra later notes, by the mid-1980s, many Qaba’il started using the term fellahin (often translated as farmer or peasant). In fact, she writes, “[t]his term [fellahin] which is most often used on television for Yemen’s rural population, does not imply a tribal honor code” (Adra 2001, 204). Even though many Qaba’il no longer refer to themselves as such, Adra generally ignores the new identifying label and only hints at the tension between tribe and nation identity in order to maintain and promote what she thinks should be upheld – the long-standing labels of Qaba’il as tribal.
Adra continues to show the difficulty of trying to locate a shifting tribal identity. For instance, she observes *Qaba’il* have used a particular dance, *bara’*, as an identification marker. However, it is also performed by religious elite, which demonstrates that a tribal marker can be employed by other groups, and therefore, brings up the issue of where tribal identity lies. Unfortunately, Adra does not discuss the implication or reasoning behind why the religious elite would perform *bara’*. In addition, Adra finds *bara’* as a tribal marker has decreased in importance, which she implies is due to the rise in nationalism. In fact, Adra notes the Yemen government presents choreographed versions of *bara’* on television and at national celebrations in order to “to represent Yemeni nationalism” (Adra 2001, 194). In the national performances, she observes, “[r]egional particularism in words of songs or steps in *bara’* are modified towards greater uniformity” (Adra 2001, 210), and therefore, towards a national identity.

Not only do non-tribal groups perform tribal dances, but Adra also notes the *Qaba’il* perform a non-tribal dance – *lu’b*. In fact, she labels *bara’* and *lu’b* traditional dances, but they hold different functions for the *Qaba’il*. For example, until recently, Adra recounts that the *Qaba’il* have perceived and promoted *bara’* as an unchanging traditional dance. However, she observes that they have made a few modifications. Adra remarks in one village, which she does not name, dancers added new steps “from other parts of the country they had seen on television or in Sanaa” (Adra 2001, 193). Adra continues, “[t]his would have been inconceivable in the past” (Adra 2001, 193-194). She implies the change in identity is due to the decrease in production of tribal identity and the increase in a national one. *Bara’* is different from *lu’b* in which performers constantly
add and remove steps. In addition, Adra places *lu'b* under the category of *raqs* (dance). Adra writes, “[*r*aqs, the generic Arab term usually translated into English as dancing, connotes frivolity” (Adra 2001, 195). *Bara’* is not frivolous, but “a demonstration of skill and valor” (Adra 2001, 195) that makes up the *Qaba’il* identity.

### American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views

Robyn Friend, in “Dance of Iran,” and Carolina Varga Dinicu (Morocco), in “The Marrakesh Folk Festival,” define tribal dance in the Middle East in standard ways – rural, participatory forms with long histories of being performed with very little change. For example, Friend distinguishes rural tribal dance from urban dance when she differentiates Southwest tribe’s improvisational dances from the Tehrani ones. Friend does not stop there with her division as she splits rural areas into tribal and village, indicating tribes are nomadic and not sedentary like those living in villages.

Dinicu notes her use of tribal dance comes from the translation of *Ait*, which means “tribe or nation” (Dinicu 2004b, 43). Unfortunately, similar to Adra, she does not discuss the tension between tribe and nation. In fact, Dinicu views the dancers at the festival as “real Berber tribes” (Dinicu 2004a, 64-65), and in the description of her video from the event, calls their dance “authentic tribal dancing” (Dinicu 2008a). She distinguishes their tribal dance from folkloric dance – staged-folk dance – such as those performed by Egyptians and Lebanese groups, which “look like Moscow or Hollywood-on-the-Nile” (Dinicu 2004b, 43). However, Dinicu does not discuss if, and how, dancing at large events on large stages, such as *le Festival Folklorique de Marrakech*, affects the
dances when they are not performed on stages in front of other Berber groups, urbanites from Marrakesh, and foreigners, or how the event is being used to promote a national identity.

Although Friend and Dinicu predominantly present tribal dance with a narrow scope, they also demonstrate the close connection and overlap people make among the strong traditional Middle Eastern genres of tribal dance, ethnic dance, and folk dance. For instance, in “Presenting Ethnic Dance on the Stage,” Friend places *Qashqâ’î* in the category of ethnic, and in the category of tribal in “Dance of Iran.” Dinicu finds tribal dances, which in Morocco means Berbers dances, within *le Festival Folklorique de Marrakech* (The Marrakesh Folk Festival). In Dinicu’s view, folk means Moroccan traditions in general. Friend and Dinicu portray the predominance of ethnic and folk as umbrella terms that can encompass tribal dance.

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views**

Similar to many in the American Middle Eastern dance community, the core EEMED choreographers have predominantly shifted their use of tribal dance to mean American Tribal and not tribal dance in the Middle East. Instead, they use ethnic and folk dance to indicate non-classical and non-belly dance genres. Only Tandemonium briefly addresses tribal dance in the Middle East while talking about the first part of their dance *Rumble in the Casbah* (2004). Claudia notes they were inspired by the *Qashqa’î*: “that tribal dance, those Iranian nomads” (Tandemonium 160). In this case, they apply the term
tribal dance in standard ways since they define it as a traditional Middle Eastern dance located within rural nomadic communities.

**Conclusion to Tribal Dance**

As this section showed, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers do not frequently utilize the term tribal dance. Instead, they locate tribal dance in specific rural, and sometimes nomadic, groups. Tribal dance is placed within larger and more common genre categories, such as ethnic dance or folk dance. In addition, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers may not regularly use the term tribal dance, due to its association with negative primitive images as Adra notes. Additionally, practitioners, such as the Qaba’il, are themselves moving away from a term that historically translated as tribal in favor of establishing a national identity. In fact, so much distance exists that the American Middle Eastern dance community has been able to co-opt the term tribal dance as short hand for a complete new form, American tribal Style (ATS).

**FOLK DANCE**

Folk dance is the most common genre term the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed here employ. Many of them connect it to broad national identities rather than specific “non-national” ones, such as ethnic and tribal. However, a couple of differences exist among
the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and
the core EEMED choreographers. For example, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance
differentiate folk dance from foreign dances performed in the same area and often by the
same group. The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED
choreographers use folk dance as an umbrella term, which includes dances that are not
classical dance and/or belly dance. In addition, the dance scholars typically employ one
term for this genre while the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core
EEMED choreographers two – folk dance and folkloric dance. These two terms come
about with the development of staged-folk dance, which will be explored further in the
“Staged-folk Dance” section. However, for purposes here, some of them use the term
folkloric for staged versions of folk dance and others for the non-staged forms.
Nevertheless, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the
core EEMED choreographers generally present folk dance as a strong traditional Middle
Eastern dance with little change and/or foreign influences, similar to their use of ethnic
dance and tribal dance. Their statements result in the impression that change and
experimentation are not a part of the Middle East’s dance traditions.

Dance Scholars’ Views

The dance scholars here use the term folk dance in a broad manner and do not
refer to specific groups, such as Qashqa’i or Qaba’il. For example, LeeEllen Friedland,
in her “Folk Dance” entry for The International Encyclopedia of Dance (1998), traces the
term folk dance⁸² first to a label for dances in European peasant culture. Nationalists,
starting in Germany, presented the dances of these rural groups as traditional, old, and untainted by outside influences sites that they mined for their own particular national identity. Kay Hardy Campbell, in “Folk Music and Dance in the Arabian Gulf and Saudi Arabia” (1998), and Najwa Adra, in “Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre” (2005), expand folk dance beyond its initial scope into the Middle East and urban classes. In fact, they examine it on national and regional levels. For example, Campbell emphasizes what she calls “the most common and most traditional venue for Saudi women musicians and dancers to perform” (Campbell 62) – ḥaflat al-zaffah (the women’s wedding party). However, she does not identify specific folk dances, but only observes “the traditional dances of the Peninsula” (Campbell 62). Adra locates her topic belly dance across a wide geographical range from North Africa, to the Levant, and to Central Asia. Although Adra acknowledges that variations of belly dance exist based upon their geographical locale, she does not divulge the information that many practitioners do not call their solo improvisational form belly dance or raqs al-sharqi.

Friedland and Adra emphasize folk dance’s strong traditional dance stance by contrasting it with another genre. For instance, according to Friedland, unlike the static image of folk dance, at the beginning of the twentieth century popular dance was presented as a recent “hybrid form consisting of borrowed and adapted foreign elements” (Friedland 32) and “promoted by known individuals” (Friedland 32). Friedland critiques the distinction between folk and popular dance as simplifying the complexity and interconnection of the two genres. Instead, she places them under her own umbrella term of vernacular dance, which includes dances that are a part of everyday life for a group of
people. While Friedland critiques the contrast of folk and popular dance, Adra continues to use it in order to separate traditional belly dance from its commercial professional version. She only offers examples of distinct images for traditional belly dance, while popular belly dance is newer and filled with Western commercial trends and aesthetics. In fact, she writes, “the new professional dancing is no longer indigenous and many locals find it distasteful” (Adra 2005, 47), and therefore, presents a negative viewpoint without unpacking her findings further.

Although Campbell does not differentiate traditional Saudi folk dance at haflat al-zaffah from popular dance, she does with Egyptian raqs al-sharqi, and therefore, separates the two based upon indigenous and foreign backgrounds. Unfortunately, Campbell does not specify how the two differ or whether they influence each other. In addition, Campbell observes, “Saudi women’s folk music and dance are alive” (Campbell 67), but she does not offer any examples of change in the traditional Saudi dance at the haflat al-zaffah. Even when Campbell notes technology permits foreign music to enter and helps maintain the popularity of “Saudi women’s folk art” (Campbell 68), since weddings give “even the poorest women access to the latest women’s folk music, whenever they want to hear it” (Campbell 67), she once again does not indicate how foreign music impacts traditional Saudi dance.

Friedland, Campbell, and Adra’s separation of folk dance from other genres is predominantly based upon the accommodation of change. Friedland notes, which Campbell and Adra continue, a standard historical portrayal of folk dance with strong traditional concepts of continuity, local, amateur, and participatory. Scholars also view
folk dance as holding significant purposes and roles in society, including ceremony, courtship, and “a vehicle of communal expression” (Friedland 31). In fact, by the end of her entry, Friedland partakes in a shift in current dance scholarship by not using folk dance, and instead, employs the term dance traditions. Through her exchange of terms, Friedland continues a strong association of the two with each other, but does not discuss the implications of replacing the term folk dance with dance tradition.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

The American Middle Eastern dance community uses several terms, including folk, folklore, and folkloric, with folk dance being the most standard, for this genre. For instance, in “Çûb-Bâzî – The Stick-Dances of Iran” (2007a), Robyn Friend categorizes Çûb-Bâzî (stick game or raqs-e çûb, stick dance) as a folk dance. In fact, in “The Exquisite Art of Persian Classical Dance,” (1996), Friend defines folk dance as “recreational dance of the villages and tribes” (Friend 1996). Barbara Siegel (Habiba), in “Tunisian Images, Learning the Dance” (1983), and “Tunisian Images, In Search of Dance” (1982), also uses the term folk dance. However, Mahmoud Reda’ in his June 19, 2003 interview with Dinicu, used, and sometime qualified, the terms folklore and folkloric for both the “real folklore” (Dinicu 2003) and his own style that is “inspired by the folkloric” (Dinicu 2003). Despite the different, yet similar names, Friend, Siegel, and Reda refer to the same type of dance. In fact, although they do not use the term tradition to describe folk/folkloric dance per se, they present it with standard and strong traditional characteristics – amateur, participatory, and rural (villages and tribes), with little or no
change. Reda, by drawing on folkloric dances for his choreographies, indicates that they were around before he developed his style, and therefore, are older. However, Friend identifies two main versions of Çûb-Bâzî, which points out that change occurred at some point.

Friend and Siegel distinguish folk dance from staged versions, and from classical Persian in Friend’s articles and from Oriental dance in Siegel’s. As previously noted, Friend placed tribal dances into another genre category. For example, Friend chooses to call Çûb-Bâzî a folk dance rather than a tribal dance even though, as she states, the Çûb-Bâzî “is found primarily among the tribes of Southwest Iran: the Lor, Bahktiari, and Qashqai” (Friend 2007a). She participates in the use of the term folk dance as an umbrella genre.

Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

As noted with the American Middle Eastern dance writers, the core EEMED choreographers also use two terms for the same genre. For example, Anaheed and Elayssa employ folkloric dance and Djahari and Tandemonium folk dance. Nevertheless, they all define folk/folkloric dance in the same manner – as a participatory dance form practiced by amateurs. For most of the core EEMED choreographers, folk dance is not classical, social, or belly dance. In fact, Anaheed and Tandemonium make the point that it is not belly dance, because belly dance is performed by professionals for entertainment, while folk dance is practiced by amateurs for social occasions. Claudia, with whom Jean agrees, takes the division a step further by stating belly dance is not “old enough to be
really a tradition…” (Tandemonium 40). Although they trace belly dance’s roots to the ghawazee, Tandemonium does not consider their dance folk dance because ghawazee are professional entertainers.

Tandemonium and Elayssa locate folk dance in different places but together indicate the complex history of folk dance, which Friedland discusses. Claudia perceives folk dance as developing “in the peasant societies or lower class societies, organically over the centuries” (Tandemonium 35). Anaheed and Djahari also notice folk/folkloric dance contains communal purposes that are often connected to seasonal events. Elayssa stipulates folkloric dance is “a national dance” (Elayssa 23) as opposed to ethnic dance, which practitioners perform at home. She also says folkloric dance seems more structured, often employs more than one dancer, and may be choreographed. Elayssa’s contrast between ethnic and folkloric dance is similar to the distinction others make between folk and staged-folk dance, in which folk (ethnic) dance is more leisurely and often improvised and folkloric dance is choreographed and performed on stage.

The core EEMED choreographers employ the term folk dance in other standard ways. For instance, Anaheed, who does not identify the term ethnic or tribal dance, utilizes folk dance as a general term in order to refer to non-cabaret dance forms and traditional Middle Eastern dance in general. Tatianna, however, uses ethnic dance as her umbrella term instead of folk dance. Djahari, Elayssa, and Tandemonium also connect folk dance to traditional dance. In fact, Claudia claims that Middle Eastern dance folk and traditional are the same genre. However, she notes it is not the case everywhere. For instance, Claudia says kabuki is traditional “because it’s been around for centuries…. 
it’s indigenous to a particular people [and is] an important part of their national cultural identity, but it’s not folk dance. It’s not from the villages” (Tandemonium 40-41).

Elayssa, Djahari, and Tandemonium acknowledge folk dances are traditional dance because they are established forms with sets rules and a long history. In Jean’s view, tradition goes back “hundreds of years” (Tandemonium 43). Claudia agrees and says tradition should go back “three or four generations at least” (Tandemonium 41). For example, she says, “Hungarian folk dance that dates back to the mid-eighteen hundreds is old enough to be really traditional” (Tandemonium 41). Claudia also stipulates that her time period is “not a hard [and] fast rule” (Tandemonium 44), and therefore, allows an amount of fluidity within her definition.

Although Djahari, Elayssa, Anaheed, and Tandemonium perceive folk dances to be traditional Middle Eastern dances, it does not mean they think these dances stay the same. They do, in fact, change. Jean and Claudia are the only ones who note modifications at its “source.” For example, they indicate that subtle modifications take place when dances are passed down from one generation to the next. Claudia states it “is just natural drift” (Tandemonium 45). Anaheed, Djahari, and Tandemonium address the considerable changes made to folk dance when it is placed onto the stage. In Tandemonium’s view, folk dance’s move to the stage is so that a new, but related style, folkloric dance, can be formed. Djahari and Anaheed do not use a new name, but instead, qualify folk dance. For example, Djahari notices, “there’s a lot of choreographed folk dance out there” (Djahari 43) and presents a dance she has performed, Nazemi’s *shiraz* dance, as an example. Anaheed relates some of her work along the lines of Reda’s, as
staged versions of folk dance. For instance, while describing the Per
cumes of Araby

Annual Concert she produced from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, Anaheed says,
“the first half was traditional in the sense that it was based on fol
kloric” dances (Anaheed 23), including Arab, Armenian, Yemenite, Israeli, Moroccan, Jordanian, and Lebanese
(\textit{debke}).^{93}

\textbf{Conclusion to Folk Dance}

The scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance
writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed here do not ready
ly participate in current American dance scholar discourse about folk dance’s negotiation between local
and national identities. A few of them connect folk dance to a national identity by using a nation-state’s name in front of a specific genre or the term dance. The section on “Staged-
Folk Dance” will focus on the national aspect explicitly. Instead, the scholars of Middle
Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED
choreographers more often discuss folk dance as a local dance form. In fact, they
continue to iterate folk dance’s continuing identity as old and traditional, untainted by
foreign ideas.

\textbf{RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT PRACTICES}

For the most part, the core EEMED choreographers sidestep the topics of Islam
and Middle Eastern religious movement practices in their discussion of traditional Middle
Eastern dances. Nevertheless, religious movement practices are included in this chapter
because of the ways in which the core EEMED choreographers approach the topic. Also, a long tradition of distinguishing sacred and secular Middle Eastern dance exists. As several of dance scholars note, the topic of religious movement practices facilitates debate regarding the relationship between dance and religion. Additionally, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance and the American Middle Eastern dance writers observe within it strong traditional Middle Eastern dance characteristics, such as participatory, amateur, old, and unchanging.

Dance Scholars’ Views

The dance scholars employ a variety of terms to label religious movement practices. For example, Amnon Shiloah, in *Music in the World of Islam* (1995), contains two categories, “Dance among the Mystics” and “Healing Rituals.” Within the mystic dance category, he lists spiritual dance, ecstatic dance, ecstatic ritual, and ecstatic trance, and in “Healing Rituals,” ecstatic dance, magical-religious healing practices, and therapeutic dance. Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, in “Dances of the Muslim Peoples” (1976-77), focuses on one type, “religious dances of mystical brotherhoods.” Anthony Shay, in *Choreophobia* (2002), separates “Dance in an Islamic Context” from “Non-Dance in an Islamic Context,” which he further divides into “spiritual and martial arts, which can also carry spiritual connotations” (Shay 1999, 91).

The dance scholars undertake several positions in regards to sacred and secular dance. Shiloah and al Faruqi distinguish the two. For example, Shiloah differentiates dance among the mystics and healing rituals from two types of secular dance – art dance,
which is “practiced in the rulers’ courts or in the houses of aristocrats….” (Shiloah 141) and folk dance, which reflects “the great variety of ethnic groups and sub-groups that dwell in the region; they encompass nomads, semi-nomads, peasants and city-dwellers…” (Shiloah 148). al Faruqi presents three other types of dance besides religious dances of mystical brotherhoods – combat dances, solo improvisational dances, and chain dances. She acknowledges the categories are only an aid in helping readers learn more about Muslim dances.

Unlike Shiloah and al Faruqi, Shay takes a step further and removes Iranian religious movement practices from the category dance, which Iranians call raqs (an Arab term) and oyun (a Turkish term). Shay’s comments about the negative status of dance in the Middle East are based upon data from interviews and historical sources. For example, Shay notes, Kâtib Çelebi, a seventeenth-century scholar, who in his discussion of the Mevlevi’s samā’, states that some of the Orthodox Ulamā’ classified whirling as “dance,” while Sufis maintained it was not. Shay also asserts that some people inside and outside Iranian society wrongly call non-dance activity dance because they perceive them as “patterned, rhythmical movement and because music and/or rhythmic accompany it” (Shay 1999, 81). However, Shay does not give their position much credence. In fact, he is critical of dance scholars and researchers who label “as ‘dance’ those activities that participants themselves regard as religious or non-dance, simply because they fit a particular academic description, perpetuates a kind of cultural imperialism” (Shay 1999, 83) and do not take into consideration tensions between sacred and secular elements.
By classifying religious movement practices into the category of “dance,” albeit “sacred dances,” and by not exploring if, and how, practitioners may utilize the term “dance,” Shiloah and al Faruqi remove an important argument practitioners used against those who critique and condemn their sacred practices. By insisting that it is not dance, participants strive to detach their actions from a very general negative attitude towards dance. Although the separation may help their position, it does not help place “secular dance” in a better light. By using the term dance, Shiloah and al Faruqi widen its scope and boundaries. Susan M. Kenyon, in “Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan” (1995), sidesteps the debate somewhat by labeling the zar a ritual. Occasionally, she uses the term dance to describe the movement portion within the ritual.

Shay, Shiloah, al Faruqi, and Kenyon indicate various religious movement practices contain long traditions, while Shay, Shiloah, and al Faruqi only present distinct images. Kenyon is unique among the dance scholars surveyed since she offers examples of change. At times she examines continuity within Sudanese zar’s contemporary practices. For example, she writes, “Zar, in the sense of possession, is usually (though not exclusively) inherited. It is frequently passed on from mother to daughter, or to a close relative who in a sense ‘adopts’ or is adopted by the spirit of their relative” (Kenyon 111). At other times, Kenyon looks at its modifications, such as shifts in the spirit population and incorporations of “distinctly ‘modern’ or foreign traits” (Kenyon 116), which are affected by social processes. Kenyon’s main point emphasizes spiritual changes are a traditional part of the zar and do not disrupt its primary function and ceremonial structure.
American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views

In a similar manner as the dance scholars surveyed above, Dinicu, in “Guedra: Dance as Community Identity in Selected Berber Nations of Morocco,” and Karol Harding (Me’ira), \(^{101}\) in “The Berber Dances of Morocco and Tunisia” and “Trance Dancing and the Cult of the Zar,” utilize several terms to describe religious movement practices. Harding prefers to use the term dance for this genre. For example, in “The Berber Dances of Morocco and Tunisia,” she identifies the guedra as a “dance of blessing and good-will” (Harding 2008a), \(^{102}\) and in “Trance Dancing and the Cult of the Zar,” the term trance dance is noted in her title. Harding also calls the Tunisian Stambali and the Persian Hadra, “religious dance” (Harding 2008b). However, Dinicu prefers to use the term ritual. She writes, “[f]or the Blue People, Guedra isn’t merely a dance, it is a ritual in which anybody and everybody can participate…” (Dinicu 2007). Although both Dinicu and Harding employ the term dance in religious contexts, Dinicu’s quote indicates that in her view the guedra is more than dance.

Although Dinicu and Harding do not directly call the guedra and zar traditional, they present strong distinct images of them. For example, since Dinicu’s purpose for the article is to introduce American Middle Eastern dancers to the guedra, she shares many details about the practitioners, costume, movement procession, and purpose, but also offers a distinctive image without any indication of change or modification. Harding attempts to historicize the guedra and zar by linking them to ancient times without citing any sources. Nevertheless, she does not indicate how the dances may have changed over time, and therefore, portrays them with distinctive and static images.
Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

The core EEMED choreographers do not acknowledge specific names of religious movement practices, and rarely mention a genre label. In fact, they only discuss religious movement practices in reference to their own EEMED dances. For example, Tandemonium recalls the “dances” that inspired Delirium Awakens the Sacred Spirit (2005) were traditional healing and shaman dances. Anaheed, Tatianna, and Elayssa employ the word spirituality, but as will be shown, they use it more as a description than as a dance category. From working with them, I know that the core EEMED choreographers are familiar with some of the religious movement practices addressed by the American Middle Eastern dancer writers, but they did not bring them up during the interview. Their omission also comes from the fact that the core EEMED choreographers do not possess a strong background in religious movement practices and/or in Islam. Djahari is an exception, since her parents were Muslim. However, Djahari asserts that her parents did not require her to participate in their belief system.

The core EEMED choreographers chose not to reference Middle Eastern religious movement practices in their EEMED dances since it seems to them the Middle East does not contain practices that connect to their own spirituality. However, on closer inspection, one may find narratives within Islam that present powerful spiritual women. The core EEMED choreographers look elsewhere for symbols, movement, costuming, music, and narratives that fit into their particular outlook. For example, Tandemonium’s Delirium Awakens the Sacred Spirit finds inspiration from Central Asia. Since the piece was not a focal point in their interviews, Tandemonium offer very little
information on the “dances” that inspired them. In the program, they give a general description of the religious movement practice – “the shamans summon the powers of animal spirits by mimicking their movements and the rhythms of nature” (Program 2005b). Anaheed, in The Lotus and the Cross (2000, 2001), Tatianna and Djahari, in Undulating Thru the Cacti (2001), and Elayssa, in Sacramental Skins (2002), all note they were inspired by East Indian religious themes rather than Islamic ones. Anaheed recalls that she went towards India because she was inspired by a Shelia Chandra song containing both Christian and Hindu prayers. At the time of developing Undulating Thru the Cacti, Tatianna recounts she and Djahari were moved by the movie Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love (1996), a fictional love story based in sixteenth-century India. Djahari, the principle choreographer, adds that she drew from Bharata Natyam, The Kama Sutra, and Hindu statues for the temple scene. Elayssa pulled from the same sources of Undulating Thru the Cacti for Sacramental Skins. When I asked Elayssa why she chose Hindu spirituality over Islamic, she said it was because of her long standing familiarity with it and her interest in how East Indian culture used to accept the connection between sexuality and spirituality. She also looked towards the general idea of a goddess, which she pulls from Hinduism and the American Middle Eastern dance community.

The relationship between the female nude body, spirituality, and Middle Eastern dance is a complex topic, and out of my current scope. However, I would like to comment that Djahari and Elayssa build upon general ideas of East Indian historical iconic presentations of the nude body in public space and look to what they observe as a previous culture’s, and not necessarily contemporary one’s, “acceptability” of dance,
sexuality, and spirituality. Djahari notes that she could not find such representations in the Middle East or the United States. Islamic cultures, for numerous reasons including a general prohibition of representing the human form, the limited role of dance and women in “public space,” and the relationship between sacred and secular practices, do not offer American Middle Eastern dance community many examples or resources for what Djahari and Elayssa are trying to create.

Many accusations of Orientalism, imperialism, and exoticism could be made against the core EEMED choreographers for picking and choosing what they want to use from a complex and dynamic tradition, and ignoring the contemporary culture from which they are drawing inspiration in order to satisfy and make their own personal statements. Djahari and Elayssa are aware of some of the socio-political issues. For example, while discussing Sacramental Skins, Djahari recalled that she tried to talk to her Bharata Natyam teacher about “the sexuality that seems historically to have been a part of the dance and is now erased” (Djahari 128), but she was reluctant to do so. Djahari says, her teacher “just kept kind of cutting me off and saying, ‘that’s not what is anymore. That’s not what we do’” (Djahari 128). In addition, when I questioned Djahari about the discrepancy between the historical images and texts she has read and seen, and the current disposition, she attributes it to negative Western influences on East Indian culture. Elayssa also comments, “I tread lightly in my mind because I don’t ever have the intention of offending anyone who comes from the main culture that I’m getting this feel from for my piece” (Elayssa 88). Nevertheless, she continues to pursue her fusion.
In the core EEMED choreographers’ view, religious movement practices are dances. For example, while discussing the boundaries of traditional dance, Djahari says, “dance can be performed in a sacred way, in a sacred venue but I don’t think dance itself is sacred and can’t be touched” (Djahari 36). In the Middle East, some choreographers take religious movement practices, such as zar and guedra, out of context and place them on stage. Others, like the Mevlevi sema’, do not need any changes since the stage is similar to its “original” public venue. In other cases, like the tanoura, performed in Egyptian nightclubs, a showy version is developed, which still connects into spiritual practices.

For their experimental Middle Eastern dances, the core EEMED choreographers treat religious movement practices like any other source – places to find ideas and concepts regardless of the original intent. They combine various religious symbols and images in music, dance, and costumes with their base in Middle Eastern dance in order to attain transcendental experiences on stage and present what they understand to be positive messages. The core EEMED choreographers are certainly interested in developing their own personal spirituality. For example, Desert Sin, in Sacramental Skins and Undulating Thru the Cacti, experience sexuality, nudity, and spirituality together, while Anaheed and Tandemonium focus on healing in a secular theater context.

The core EEMED choreographers’ religious/spiritual backgrounds can be observed in their experimental Middle Eastern dances. For example, Claudia was raised Protestant, but has since become a Wiccan and Ancient Egyptian priestess. Jean says, she draws into her spirituality “a little bit from everywhere” (Tandemonium 12). She was
raised Catholic, studied Wicca and Ancient Egyptian religions as an adult, and converted to Judaism after she married her Jewish husband. Their personal eclectic spiritual experiences with less common spiritualities practices, including shamanism from Central Asia, come through in Delirium Awakens the Sacred Spirit. In fact, Tandemonium notes that their dance was one of the strongest spiritual experiences they have had during EEMED. It was important, according to Claudia, because they wanted to transport “the power of the spirits into the theater” (Tandemonium 201).

Anaheed, Tatianna, Djahari, and Elayssa acknowledge that they do not follow any specific religion. In fact, Tatianna, Elayssa, and Djahari comment how they dislike and are frustrated with organized religion. Anaheed calls her spirituality “Interconnectedness,” which “is the feeling that you are a part of that whole; of that reaching out to the universe…” (Anaheed 2). Anaheed thinks of herself as sharing her spirituality whenever she dances. The Lotus and the Cross is a strong example of Anaheed producing and presenting her concept of Interconnectedness since it shows, as Anaheed says, “everyone is headed to the same source. You’re heading back to the light. You’re heading back to the ultimate power, and you can come to it from the East, from the West, [or] from any direction” (Anaheed 44).

Elayssa presents a similar disposition as Anaheed. She notes, “I feel connected to something that is greater than I am. I feel connected to the world through that” (Elayssa 6). In addition, Elayssa wants to present her eclectic “universalistic” spiritual practices, but uses distinct cultural images to create it. For example, in Sacramental Skins, Elayssa states that in her view, the dance represents “the whole cycle of life and all of it being
spiritual, accepted, and beautiful” (Elayssa 69), which includes sexuality, meditation, love, and anger. She continues, “what I hoped is that people might realize that they can look beyond the aesthetic choice of being this Indian goddess with this music and realize that there’s something worldwide in its message. That it’s a human message” (Elayssa 88).

Like the other core EEMED choreographers, Djahari works to create her own spirituality by using dance to experience and explore her personal spiritual quest. During the temple scene in Undulating Thru the Cacti, Djahari pays homage to the American belly dance image of the goddess. Djahari states, she does not “believe in the goddess, but it’s an idea of this [supportive] energy that might tie women together” (Djahari 116). Here, Djahari is building upon the “goddess” image and worship, which has developed a strong following in the American Middle Eastern dance community since the 1970s. Her image resonates with Anaheed’s woman in Lotus and the Cross, in which they both demonstrate and express compassion.

**Conclusion to Religious Movement Practices**

Similar to the other traditional Middle Eastern dance genres, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers treat religious movement practices as another genre to learn. They, along with the dance scholars, certainly do not discuss a spiritual practice of these genres. Some American Middle Eastern dancers, such as Dinicu perform them on stage, and they, as Tandemonium notes, may achieve spiritual
experiences. However, they are not concerned, as are several of the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, whether to designate religious movement practices as dance or not.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

Part One demonstrates that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed frequently employ pre-existing standard genre terms – ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance – to label various forms of Middle Eastern dance. Religious movement practices is my own term that I employ here, although I could have used a more common term, such as religious dance or sacred dance. In fact, the four genres make up the assemblage that I have been calling strong traditional dance. They share characteristics that developed in the Middle East and consist of a long history of stable practice, which supposedly restricts fluidity, and therefore, are authentic and untouched by Westernization. These well-defined genres are so strongly entrenched that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers rarely look for changes. In fact, they offer very little, if any, practitioners’ perspectives in reference to how they categorize their dances, define traditional, or make changes. In fact, only occasionally do the writers bring up a different point of view from their own.

Several dance scholars place the genre terms – ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices – in historical contexts, problematized the utilization of the genre terms, and question their and other’s role in the development of dance discourse. Some work to shift the meaning of a genre in order to overcome
problems, but find it difficult to do so because the problems are so ingrained in the meaning of a term. As a result, some of the dance scholars start using or create a different genre name. More often, scholars of Middle Eastern dance, along with the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers, do not investigate and/or question their terminology, and therefore, continue through repetition to strengthen a specific genre’s discursive practices.

The practice of the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers to continue the distinctive images of ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices comes in part from their distant relationship with the genres. For example, going to an American Middle Eastern dance community event, one can quickly notice the popularity of belly dance, followed by that of American Tribal. Ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices compose only a small percentage of performances. The limited performance of these genres exists in part due to the easy access Americans have to belly dance and American Tribal, both culturally and economically. Those in the American Middle Eastern dance community who pursue strong traditional Middle Eastern dances, especially from an outside position, need to spend considerable time, energy, and money learning them. Very few American dancers dedicate enough time to become fluent in a strong traditional Middle Eastern dance. A dancer often needs to live in the Middle East in order to receive the training and experiences necessary to understand the rules and structures, and therefore, become creative within its framework.
A strong pedagogical discourse in the American Middle Eastern dance community surrounding repetitive use of strong traditional Middle Eastern dances exists. Frequently students learn a dance’s distinctive image primarily from their teachers in the United States and occasionally from the Middle East. Dancers may also invest in traveling to the Middle East to study a specific form. In turn, many of them then teach other Americans. The result of the process creates students who possess very little desire to make alterations or modifications to what they just learned. The American Middle Eastern dance community also commonly holds an attitude that as outsiders, they do not have the right to make changes.

The American Middle Eastern dance community pushes for dancers to know many forms of Middle Eastern dance by offering those who do higher status. However, the community’s goal also limits a dancer’s depth of knowledge about specific ones. For instance, most American Middle Eastern dance companies maintain only one version of a specific strong traditional Middle Eastern dance since choreographers often place within one dance all they learned about it. American Middle Eastern dancers’ versions also reflect their influence by staged-folk dance companies in the Middle East who present distinctive looks of various group dances within their borders.

Unlike the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers are concerned with performance. The American Middle Eastern dance writers write for a community that is not interested in complex examinations. Instead, they publish articles to introduce and educate other American Middle Eastern dancers to dances with basic details about the practitioners and their
culture, as well as descriptions of movement, structure, music, and costuming, so they can then recognize and reproduce them.

As a part of the American Middle Eastern dance community, the core EEMED choreographers study, learn, and perform any number of genres. In fact, Anaheed and Tandemonium also look to maintain and preserve traditional Middle Eastern dances. Similar to many in the American Middle Eastern dance community, the core EEMED choreographers are not interested in categorizing or producing scholarly writings on dances. For the most part, they want to learn vocabulary, music, and costuming in order to increase their knowledge and repertoire. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers possess a range of knowledge regarding ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices. Jean and Claudia, the only core EEMED choreographers who claim not to be American belly dancers, continually study and focus on ethnic dances, tribal dances, and folk dances. Therefore, they bring up traditional Middle Eastern dance terms more frequently, and with more depth, than the other core EEMED choreographers.

Unlike those in the American Middle Eastern dance community, the core EEMED choreographers, in their role as experimental Middle Eastern dancers, are interested in creating their own dances and not in producing “accurate” presentations, recreating, or continuing strong traditional Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers, when they create and perform experimental Middle Eastern dance, draw upon ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices as sources for music, movement, and costumes ideas.
The core EEMED choreographers are often part of the status quo in their discussions of traditional Middle Eastern dance, although they note more changes than the American Middle Eastern dance writers do. Their view of tradition as static allows them to break away from it with their experimental Middle Eastern dance. Their distance from traditional Middle Eastern dance also permits them to need less investment in the dances than other practitioners and frees them from responsibility to source communities. The core EEMED choreographers could be read as continuing their “inheritance” of an American imperialistic history in which they do “whatever they want,” regardless of the consequences on the sources. However, they view themselves as exploring, expressing their dynamic fusion identities as American Middle Eastern dancers in a global culture.
CHAPTER TWO, PART TWO
TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES

Part Two of “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres” concentrates on three “traditional” Middle Eastern dance genres, including staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance, because of their recognition and long-term use by the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers. In fact, the three genres make up the core EEMED choreographers’ foundations of which several of them continue to study, perform, and teach. However, Part Two will note that folk dance performed on a stage does not define a standard term. Therefore, in this dissertation, I employ the term staged-folk dance to indicate the differences between folk or in-the-field dance and their staged versions. Similar to many of the dance scholars and the core EEMED choreographers, I see their relationship as a complex and dynamic one, which includes many interpretations and presentations. I would also like to note that I perceive both genres as including the capacity to change as well as codify into a tradition.

Part Two also examines the varying statuses of staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance as traditional Middle Eastern dances and who wields the power to label a genre traditional Middle Eastern dance. Some of the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers assert that staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance are not traditional, innovative, or experimental dances. Instead, they present them as established genres. Others expand the
definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance to include these well defined and
established genres.

**STAGED-FOLK DANCE**

One of the problems the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance
writers, and the core EEMED choreographers factor into their discussions is where the
line between folk dance, and what I label staged-folk dance, exists. Some include both
genres with one term, most often folk dance, while others label them as different
genres. Regardless, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and
the core EEMED choreographers qualify them as somehow different.

Another issue the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and
the core EEMED choreographers point out is whether or not they consider staged-folk
dance to be a traditional Middle Eastern dance or not. Several American Middle Eastern
dance writers and core EEMED choreographers perceive it as traditional, although a
modified one. A few of the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers,
and the core EEMED choreographers state that they do not think staged-folk dances is a
traditional dance because they can trace it to “original” strong traditional folk dances.
However, they concede many do identify it as traditional. Staged-folk dance’s ambiguous
position exists due to the fact that it is built upon the premise of change, especially by
moving folk dance to the stage and by fusing it with other dance forms, notably ballet.
However, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core
EEMED choreographers note even with these modifications, practitioners still strongly
focus on staged-folk dance as continuing tradition. The practitioners’ insights demonstrate that traditions are constructed through recognition and promotion of them as such over a variable amount of time.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Frequently, when the dance scholars focus on the strong traditional Middle Eastern dance version of folk dance alone, they use the one term. However, when they factor in the staged version and the dynamic relationship between the two, their terminology varies. For example, Andriy Nahachewsky, in “Participatory and Presentational Dance as Ethnochoreological Categories” (1995), uses folk dance as an umbrella term, but differentiates its participatory from presentational forms. Anthony Shay, in *Choreographic Politics*, also places the two versions, “the field and the stage” (Shay 1999, 21), within the heading of folk dance. Farida Fahmy, in her thesis, “The Creative Development of Mahmoud Reda” (1987), offers a different perspective. She does not label either of them with the term folk dance, but instead, separates them into indigenous and folkloric dance. Nahachewsky, Shay, and Friend’s examples demonstrate that even dance scholars do not agree upon a set terminology.

Nahachewsky, Shay, and Friend differentiate folk dance and staged-folk dance by placing them on opposing poles of a continuum. For instance, Nahachewsky and Shay present folk dance as participatory, small repetitive moves, improvised, unrehearsed at predominantly rurally-located celebratory social events, and in-the-round setting where dancers emphasize group collaboration and processes and staged-folk dance as
presentational, complex floor patterns, varied large moves, predominantly choreographed by a known choreographer, rehearsed, formally taught in studios, and performed in urban centers. Shay takes the idea of continuum a step further by applying it to the category of (staged) folk dance. He places examples on the continuum based upon “the degree of authentic elements that each company utilizes for its presentations” (Shay 1999, 14). At the top are professional Folk Dance Companies, including the Reda Troupe, which contain “the least use of authentic elements” (Shay 1999, 21). Right above the division line are professional Folk Dance Companies who “are deeply committed to the extensive use of authentic, ‘particularized’ elements” (Shay 1999, 21). Below the centerline are “groups of traditional performers that demonstrate varying degrees of formal choreography and staging techniques…” (Shay 1999, 21), and those employing the least changes are at the bottom.

The dance scholar’s usage of a continuum between folk and staged-folk dance offers insight into the vacillating categorization of staged-folk dance as a traditional dance. Unfortunately, they do not apply the continuum to further the topic, but instead, label a dance as one or the other. For instance, Nahachewsky places two versions of western Ukrainian kolomyika – one in Pmjavor, Bosnia (performed in 1987) as participatory and the other in Alberta, Canada, (performed in 1992) as presentational – which he analyzes in his article not only into the folk dance category, but also into the traditional dance one. He claims that both of them continue a cultural background that originated “in western Ukraine prior to the turn of this century” (Nahachewsky 5).
Fahmy asserts that Reda’s folkloric dance is not traditional dance or is an accurate reconstruction of folk dance. In fact, she calls his work “creative” and “innovative.” Fahmy presents some insight into Reda’s process of changing indigenous dance to folkloric dance. She recalls that troupe members learned from practitioners how to wear costumes and jewelry and danced with them not only to learn steps, but also “the spirit and style of each particular dance” (Fahmy 46). Reda and the company made choices about which elements to keep and codify and which ones to label as “foreign,” and therefore, discard. However, while Reda and company ignored the foreign elements the practitioners added, they included their own.

Although Fahmy does not present folkloric dance as traditional dance, she claims that Reda’s dances are based in some aspect of Egyptian culture and, in fact, are “a natural progression” (Fahmy 64) of Egyptian dance. The strong identification with Egyptian culture is due, in part, not only because Reda desired to retain “the characteristic feature and integrity of each dance” (Fahmy 48), but also because he had concerns about “the dangers of allowing himself to succumb to Western influences” (Fahmy 16). Even though Reda combined Western and Egyptian dance culture, he downplayed the Western elements in order to promote the Egyptian ones. Reda’s portrayal, along with presenting distinctive stereotyped images of rural culture to urbanites, who Fahmy notes “were previously unaware” (Fahmy 53) of Egyptian folk dance traditions, lead audiences to view Reda’s dances as authentic. Unlike Nahachewsky, the dances’ continuations are not enough in her view to consider Reda’s dances to be traditional.
Fahmy does not discuss the nationalization project of the development of the Reda Troupe’s repertoire, but Shay touches upon governmental influence on state-sponsored staged-folk dance companies, such as the Reda Troupe (founded in 1959 and nationalized in 1961) and The Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble (*Turk Devlet Halk Dansları Toplantısı*) (founded by Mustafa Turan in 1975), and their production of traditional dance forms. For example, Shay notes that The Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble is filled with strong Turkish national identity since it is entirely supported by the state and participates in the government’s “eager to valorize Anatolian peasant culture as an icon of ethnic identity…” (Shay 1999, 212). He concludes, because of the Turkish government’s seventy-year involvement in producing and encouraging (staged) folk dance, most of the Turkish population has accepted the genre as a (close) repetition of dance in-the-field and as a traditional dance.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

The American Middle Eastern dance writers tend to be more consistent with their staged-folk dance terminology than the dance scholars. For example, in “The Exquisite Art of Persian Classical Dance,” (1996), Robyn Friend employs the term folkloric dance in the same manner as Fahmy – to mean staged versions of folk dance. Barbara Siegel (Habiba), in “Tunisian Images, Learning the Dance” (1983), uses folkloric as well in order to label “the Ballet Nationale, Tunisia’s folkloric dance company” (Siegel 1983, 4) as different from its folk dance sources. Siegel and Friend offer a few comparisons between folk and folkloric dance. For example, Siegel notes the only
difference between the folk and folkloric version of *raks al-Juzur*, the pot dance from the islands of Djerba and Kerkennah, is that the company used a special jug made for them, which is smaller and more decorated than the everyday version. Friend, in “Presenting Ethnic Dance on the Stage,” offers more specifics when she recounts the numerous changes she made to the *Qashqa’i* wedding dances in order to place them on stage as well as the elements she retained for cultural identification.

The close connection between folk dance and staged-folk dance is underscored by Siegel’s qualification of folkloric dance as a type of traditional dance. For example, she recounts Habib, a member of the Ballet Nationale and her teacher, labels the company’s dance “‘tradition polished’” (Siegel 1983, 4), and claims that the dance company is successful, because “they remain faithful to traditional choreography” (Siegel 1983, 4) and is not too flashy. Although Siegel notes the Ballet Nationale combines ballet with “traditional folk steps” (Siegel 1983, 4) from around Tunisia, she does not offer any indication of where the line of “faithfulness” to folk dance lies in the choreography or how choreographers make choices about what traditional elements to keep and which ones to fuse with ballet. In addition, Siegel does not investigate the role of the government in the state-sponsored dance company or its interest in presenting a traditional dance form, which could offer further insight into the role of the Ballet Nationale in constructing Tunisian tradition.
Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

Similar to the dance scholars, the core EEMED choreographers employ various terms to name the “staged-folk” dance genre. For instance, Anaheed uses folkloric dance as an umbrella term and includes the staged versions. Elayssa also employs the term folkloric dance, but to mean the staged version, and ethnic dance to refer to in-the-field dance. Djahari utilizes folk dance, and like Anaheed, distinguishes two major types within it. However, Tandemonium is the only one to distinguish participatory and presentational dance in two genre categories – folk and folkloric dance, respectively. In fact, like Shay, Tandemonium observes varying degrees of folk dance representation on stage. For example, the state-sponsored Moiseyev Dance Company are “doing more character studies” (Tandemonium 36), while Aman Folk Ensemble “wanted to bring [the dance] closer to what it would have looked like in the village” (Tandemonium 45). Aman Folk Ensemble accomplished their goal by wearing similar costumes, but with “subtle differences, because even in a village in Bosnia where everybody is wearing these big white sacks, little black vests, [they] have individual taste” (Tandemonium 45).

While the other core EEMED choreographers never state whether they think staged-folk dance is traditional or not, Tandemonium who separates them into different genres, strongly claims that folkloric dance is not traditional. Nevertheless, Jean and Claudia demonstrate their close connection between folkloric dance and tradition, when on several occasions, they label it as a modified traditional dance. For example, Jean says, one might call Uzbek dance’s stage adaptations traditional, but “it’s sort of a new traditional dance. It’s a new folk dance” (Tandemonium 41). In her discussion of Israeli
folk dance, Claudia shifts her definition closer towards Jean’s concept when she labels it “a presentation of a form of traditional dance” (Tandemonium 42), while Jean views it as an interpretation.

While the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers address changes made to folk dance when placed on stage, only the core EEMED choreographers assert that it contains experimental processes. For example, Tatianna says, and Djahari agrees, “Nazemi was considered experimental or non-traditional at one point in his career” (Tatianna 35) because of the fusion he was creating with ballet and Persian ethnic dance. Unfortunately, they do not offer any specific examples. In addition, Tandemonium, Tatianna, and Djahari’s discussions on experimental processes offer insights into the production of traditional dance. Since many of the dances have been performed on stage for many years, some people view and accept them as tradition. For instance, even though for Tandemonium folkloric dance is not traditional, they acknowledge Uzbek staged-folk dance has “became the accepted standard” (Tandemonium 67). Djahari observes such a process in Nazemi’s work. She states, he is not experimenting “anymore because he’s been doing this for thirty years and it’s very established as his style” (Djahari 12). Although Djahari does not personally identify Pars National Ballet as traditional, she acknowledges, “some of his work is seen as traditional” (Djahari 17).
Conclusion to Staged-Folk Dance

While discussing the relationship between folk dance and staged-folk dance, some of the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers predominantly focus on the changes made to the source: folk dance. As a result, they conclude staged-folk dance cannot be traditional Middle Eastern dance, especially since folk dance already makes up the category. However, others understand staged-folk dance is a continuation, albeit a modified, nationalized, and/or modernized version of folk dance, and therefore, conclude it is a type of traditional dance, just not a strong traditional dance. Of course, one of the main differences among several of the core EEMED choreographers and the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers is their reference to what they call “experimental” processes in the development of staged-folk dance, while several dance scholars employ milder adjectives such as “innovative” and “creative.”

CLASSICAL DANCE

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers predominantly connect classical dance to a court tradition, although they differ over whether or not it possesses a standard vocabulary and pedagogy. However, when examining classical dance in the Middle East, one needs to deal with several issues. First of all, none of the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, or the core EEMED choreographers claim that a contemporary Arab or Turkish classical dance exists. Although a few dance scholars connect Arab
and Turkish dances to a history of being performed in court, they do not label it classical
dance. The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core
EEMED choreographers present Classical Persian and Uzbek in a different manner. They
stress the dances’ development in royal courts. However, even though courts in Iran and
Uzbekistan no longer exist, their dances are frequently still labeled as classical dance. In
addition, some in the American Middle Eastern dance community use the term classical
to refer to the Golden Age of belly dance in Egypt, but they do not connect it to a court
practice.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Felicia Hughes-Freeland, in “Constructing a Classical Tradition: Javanese Court
Dance in Indonesia” (2006), and Janet O’Shea, in “Dancing through History and
Ethnography: Indian Classical Dance and the Performance of the Past” (2006), analyze
the complex formation and construction of a classical dance that connects with a courtly
tradition. For example, Hughes-Freeland employs Bēdhaya\textsuperscript{126} of the Yogyakarta court
tradition as her main example for the transformation of Javanese court dance “into the
Indonesian classical tradition” (Hughes-Freeland 53) during the New Order Period (1966-
1998). O’Shea focuses on the re-contextualization of Bharata Natyam between 1923 and
1950 by three different groups.\textsuperscript{127} Hughes-Freeland and O’Shea’s investigation of the
fluidity and multiplicity of classical dance questions the concept of traditional dance. For
example, although practitioners within the three types of Bharata Natyam focus on their
own “fixed” view, debates about the legitimacy of each one demonstrates that it actually
contains multiple histories. In addition, Hughes-Freeland emphasizes that Bèdhaya performances, during the New Order Period, “are the result of change and innovation, not repetition of fixed past practices” (Hughes-Freeland 70).

Through their case studies, Hughes-Freeland and O’Shea demonstrate that dancers and scholars make choices about what elements they identify, maintain, and/or codify and which ones they disregard, restrict and/or discard. However, they reveal practitioners cover up and ignore transformations in order to promote continuity, longevity, and stability of the past at the cost of acknowledging its construction and changes. For example, Hughes-Freeland claims that a “process of formalization” (Hughes-Freeland 61) led the codification and restriction of variations within New Order Period Bèdhaya performances. O’Shea notices that although Bharata Natyam dancers all agree continuity with the past is a vital aspect of the dance, they debate which ones “constituted tradition and what lay outside of the boundaries of a classical performance” (O’Shea 2006, 131). Hughes-Freeland and O’Shea contend practitioners connect with certain parts of the past in order to create legitimacy and lineage for their specific artistic and political position.

The scholars of Middle Eastern dance surveyed here assert that the contemporary Middle Eastern dance does not contain classical dance. For example, Shay, in Choreophobia, claims that no Classical Persian dance exists with respect to standard definition of classical dance, which includes, “a codified, standardized movement vocabulary and academy with standard pedagogical practices…” (Shay 1999, 179). Nevertheless, he also notes some people, although not who or why, employ the term
sonnati, which he translates as classical, “to fine performances of solo improvised dance…” (Shay 1999, 179). Unfortunately, Shay does not take the next step, as Hughes-Freeland and O’Shea do, and examine the formation of classical dance, why people label it as such, or often as a traditional dance. In addition, he discounts those who call it sonnati because it does not correspond to his definition of classical dance. In their “Introduction” to Belly Dance (1995), Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young present a similar position as Shay does with Persian dance when they contend belly dance “does not have a classical tradition – i.e. a named vocabulary, an academy, or a set of named standardized movements for purposes of teaching” (Sellers-Young and Shay 2).

From the viewpoint of Metin And, in Dances of Anatolian Turkey (1959), and Karin van Nieuwkerk, in ‘A Trade like any Other.’ Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt (1995), Sellers-Young and Shay’s standard criteria are not important components of classical dance. Instead, they concentrate on how contemporary forms of Turkish or classical Arab, respectively, connect to deceased courts. For example, And briefly recounts that çengi (female dancers) and köçek (male dancers) performed in the seraglio, and even though by the mid-twentieth century no Turkish court exists, they still perform çiftetelli. Nieuwkerk depicts a similar situation in Egypt. She brings up the ‘awālim, who in the early nineteenth century danced, sang, wrote poetry, and composed and improved music for upper class women. She traces their history from the beginning of the nineteenth century, to their banishment from Cairo by Muhammad ‘Alī in 1834 (the ban was lifted by ‘Abbâs Basha sometime between 1849 and 1854), to their peak at the end of the nineteenth century, and to their “disappearance” by the 1970s. Nieuwkerk claims that
although the ‘awālim as a group no longer “survive,” their influences can be found in contemporary raqs al-sharqi.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

When American Middle Eastern dancers use the term classical for Arab dance, they refer to the Golden Age of Egyptian dance (1920s to 1970s), when raqs al-sharqi emerged as a style performed in newly “developed” nightclubs, restaurants, and Egyptian cinema. They differentiate it from turn-of-the-twentieth-century beledi and end-of-the-twentieth-century modern Egyptian dance. While raqs al-sharqi has connections to the ‘awālim, the American Middle Eastern dancers community does not emphasize or promote its courtly aspects, although the idea of “being the best” resides in both the courts and Golden Age contexts.

Robyn Friend, in “The Exquisite Art of Persian Classical Dance,” observes Persian classical dance came out from not only the court tradition but private homes and “tea houses” (Friend 1996, 8). She contends that Persian classical dance is unlike other classical dance forms, such as Indian and Ballet, because it is not organized or codified. Instead, it is traditional, refined, and sophisticated and dancers improvise and innovate around a set framework. However, part of Friend’s definition of Persian Classical dance includes the idea that it “has a tradition [and] is taught and maintained through the generations, whether by schools, dance masters, or by any student-teacher relationship” (Friend 1996, 6). Therefore, there must be some amount of codification and ordering of the dance in order for teachers to pass it along.
Friend does not specify how Persian Classical dance has changed, except for a historical account of its socio-economic settings. For example, Friend writes, “the seeds of modern Persian classical dance were sown during the Qajar dynasty (1780-1906)” when Fath ‘Ali Shah (1797-1834) and his grandson Muhammad Shah (1808-1848) “devoted a great deal of the royal treasury to all forms of art, including dance” (Friend 1996, 7). After the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the monarch’s decline in power led to a decrease “in the support and status of dancers” (Friend 1996, 7) as well. According to Friend, the tradition of classical Persian dance “was maintained by prostitutes and courtesans; these women, and also dancing boys, were the only public performers” (Friend 1996, 7), and by non-professionals at home. In the 1950s and 1960s, a revival of Persian classical dance began, which the court of Mohammad Reza Shah (reigned 1941-1978) and his wife Sorayya strongly supported. During this period, the state sponsored dance companies, such as Sâzmân-e foklor-e Irân (The Mahalli Dancers of Iran) and placed classical and folk dance performances on television. The 1950s and 1960s may be the period in which modern Persian Classical dance, as Friends calls it, began. Although after the Revolution in 1979, dance was banned in Iran, Friends observes it flourishing in diasporic communities, such as Los Angeles.

Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

The core EEMED choreographers, with the exception of Tandemonium, do not commonly use the term classical dance. On occasion, Anaheed states that she performs classic American belly dance. More often, the core EEMED choreographers, such as
Djahari, Elayssa, and Jean label non-Middle Eastern dance forms, such as ballet and Indian dance, as classical. In these cases, the core EEMED choreographers use the term classical to mean old and traditional. For instance, Djahari says, modern dance “is about taking classical forms, traditional forms, and breaking them” (Djahari 22). Incidentally, Djahari, Elayssa, Tatianna, and Anaheed have performed with Nazemi’s Pars National Ballet. However, when discussing Persian dance, none of them describes it as classical dance. They may be influenced by the common assertion that no classical Middle Eastern dance exists and/or by Nazemi who does not employ the term classical for Iranian dance, but only for ballet. For example, his website states, “[t]he company’s repertoire ranges widely from classical ballet, Persian Ballet, regional ethnic dances” (Pars National Ballet). Their position is different from Friend’s who may label many of Nazemi’s dances classical Persian.

Tandemonium who hold the strongest background in Persian and Uzbek dance utilize and define the genre term classical dance. For example, they primarily differentiate it from folk and folkloric dance, since classical dance is more rigid and concise. Jean adds, it is “codified” (Tandemonium 23). Jean and Claudia present the construction of classical Uzbek dance by discussing its move during the 1920s and 1930s by the Soviets from the court to the stage, and therefore, offer insight into the relationship between tradition and experimentation. In fact, Claudia claims that the move “would be considered experimental because they were taking it out its context…” (Tandemonium 38). They also present some specific details about the transition from court to stage. Choreographers took away, as Jean notes, “the huge, humongous caftans that had really
no body shape” (Tandemonium 32) and replaced them with “close fitting coats and flowing chiffon dresses…” (Tandemonium 32). She also observes groups perform what used to be solo dances and mixed couples perform what used to be a woman’s dance. The newly choreographed versions left “no individuality [and] no improvisation” (Tandemonium 35). Jean and Claudia see these changes and breaks from the former court traditions.

Due to classical Uzbek dance’s changes and move from its source, Tandemonium does not view it as traditional dance. However, they acknowledge that over the decades the new types of classical Uzbek and Persian dance have “become traditional” (Tandemonium 42), although Jean and Claudia do not identify by who or when. Tandemonium indicates that changes were made to the dances in order for them to be re-presented as traditional, but in a national position, and no longer a royal one.

**Conclusion to Classical Dance**

Scholars of Middle Eastern dance, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers who readily discuss classical dance also factor in its relationship to the past. For example, some dance scholars and core EEMED choreographers investigate the construction of classical dance into a traditional dance by examining choreographers, scholars, and administrators’ decisions about what makes up a dance. They account for what aspects have been practiced and presented as continuous and which transformations, variations, and histories have been discarded and/or ignored, and by whom. These dance scholars also note that although there may be several versions
of a classical dance, often one version is sanctioned by a ruling class. American Middle Eastern dance writers and core EEMED choreographers who present classical dance as traditional dance do so because of its legacy and association with a court, often a court, which no longer exists. As Friend’s text indicates, placing classical dance within the category of traditional Middle Eastern dance does not undermine the fact that it has changed. However, for others, changes demonstrate that classical dance is no longer what it used to be, and therefore, it is not a traditional Middle Eastern dance.

**BELLY DANCE**

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers generally employ belly dance as an umbrella term that covers various solo, improvisational dance forms both inside and outside of the Middle East. They may utilize a variety of other terms as well, such as Oriental dance, Middle Eastern dance, cabaret, *raqs al-sharqi*, and *danse du ventre*. Belly dance is not only the most popular Middle Eastern dance genre but its etymology and various names are the most investigated of the genres discussed in the dissertation. Another area of interest the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers factor in is the relationship belly dance maintains with tradition and change. For some belly dance is not traditional, but nor is it experimental or innovative. Instead, they view it as an established genre. Others assert that belly dance contains both traditional and innovative forms. A person’s perspective generally comes from how she or he perceives the relationship between belly dance and folk dance. Some identify a folk
dance version of belly dance, and therefore, the commercial one cannot be traditional.

Others, frequently practitioners, experience belly dance as a traditional form.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Barbara Sellers-Young and Anthony Shay, in “Introduction” to *Belly Dance*, Shay, in the entry for “Danse du Ventre” in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, and Najwa Adra, in “Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre,” use belly dance as an umbrella term that encompasses many forms of solo improvisational dance practiced by women, men, amateurs, and professionals in various places, such as homes and nightclubs. They all also recognize regional forms of belly dance. In fact, Sellers-Young and Shay acknowledge it “is not historically a single dance but a complex of movement practices and vocabularies…” (Sellers-Young and Shay 1). For example, Shay writes, “Arabs outside Egypt often call it *raqs al-sharq* (‘Oriental dance’) and *raqs al-misir* (‘Egyptian dance’)…” (Shay 1998, 344), and *çiftetelli*, a similar genre, is also found in Turkey and Greece, but no belly dance exists in Iran. Sellers-Young, Shay, and Adra locate belly dance in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. However, Adra limits her scope to “those countries where it is indigenous and where Arabic is the predominant language” (Adra 2005, 29), mainly the Middle East and North Africa. Sellers-Young and Shay also include within their definition, “hybrid forms created in the United States and elsewhere…” (Sellers-Young and Shay 1), such as Europe and Canada.

As part of examining the history of belly dance in the United States, in their “Introduction,” Sellers-Young and Shay look at its terminology. They mark the beginning
of the term belly dance to when Sol Bloom\textsuperscript{139} “labeled” it at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893. In “Danse du Ventre,” Shay traces belly dance to the French term \textit{danse du ventre}. He speculates,

> \textit{danse du ventre} (also known as \textit{belly dance} or \textit{danse orientale}) most probably derived its name from one of two sources: (1) a corruption of the Arabic \textit{raqs al-baladi}, meaning ‘dance from the countryside,’ and (2) a reference to the highly developed movement articulation of the torso and abdomen…. (Shay 1998, 344)

Although \textit{danse du ventre} translates as “dance of the stomach” and refers to a primary area of movement – the abdomen – it seems unlikely that it is a mispronunciation of \textit{baladi}, as Shay and many in the American Middle Eastern dance community consider. Based upon its historical context, the term belly dance seems to be a translation of the older French term \textit{danse du ventre}. Incidentally, in his encyclopedia entry, Shay starts with the term \textit{danse du ventre}, but then switches to belly dance. Neither he nor any other dance scholar surveyed, directly indicates why he has chosen to use one name rather than another.

While Sellers-Young, Shay, and Adra employ the term belly dance as an umbrella term, they differentiate it from folk belly dance. Sellers-Young, Shay also label the non-folk dance version with a popular alternative term, “cabaret.”\textsuperscript{140} In “Danse du Ventre,” Shay distinguishes cabaret from “regional folk movement practices” (Shay 1998, 344), “rural professional dancers” (Shay 1998, 345),\textsuperscript{141} and “traditional belly dance” (Shay 1998, 246). Adra uses the terms folk and commercial belly dance. Sellers-Young, Shay, and Adra’s terminology is different from Raqia Hassan, a famous Egyptian dancer and choreographer. Sellers-Young and Shay recall that in her \textit{Ahalan Wa Sahalan} festival,
Hassan distinguishes belly dance from folk dance and resists using the term “belly dance as an all-inclusive designation…” (Sellers-Young and Shay 23).

Sellers-Young, Shay, and Adra note the movement of beledi into Egyptian nightclubs after World War I and the subsequent production of raqs al-sharqi. For example, Sellers-Young and Shay observe cabaret’s movements “are often highly developed and sophisticated versions of raqs baladi,\(^{142}\) or what we refer to in the course of this study as the domestic, folk version” (Sellers-Young and Shay 371). Unfortunately, they do not discuss if, or how, cabaret influences folk dance or traditional belly dance. However, both versions are found within the nightclub venue. For example, Sellers-Young and Shay claim that Fifi Abdou, a famous Egyptian dancer, in her raqs al-sharqi section “might include trappings of western orientalism in costume style and movement…” (Sellers-Young and Shay 23), while her baladi section links to “community norms and related characters” (Sellers-Young and Shay 23).

Shay and Adra describe folk belly dance as a strong traditional dance and offer very little, if any, indication of change. However, they acknowledge in contrasting ways in which cabaret dynamically changes and is influenced by outsiders. For example, Shay notes Hollywood and Russian Orientalism impacted the cabaret costume.\(^{143}\) Adra adds, “[o]ccupying armies and European travelers encouraged sexualized forms to be performed by professional dancers” (Adra 2005, 47), “Western-style orchestras replaced the small group of musicians…” (Adra 2005, 47), and dancers increased their usage of floor space. Shay and Adra’s comments imply cabaret is not traditional, because of the foreign influences that dancers incorporate. Therefore, it is less Middle Eastern, and
therefore, inauthentic. Although Sellers-Young, Shay, and Adra note cabaret’s history is filled with famous individual dancers altering and fusing the dance, they do not label these dancers’ choreographic and dance processes as “experimental” or “innovative.” However, Sellers-Young and Shay use the term “experimenting” to describe what Americans have been, and are currently creating, with Middle Eastern dance. Sellers-Young and Shay’s different descriptive terms indicates that they see different processes occurring in the Middle East and United States, but unfortunately, do not specify how they differ.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

Similar to the dance scholars, the America Middle Eastern dance writers use belly dance as an umbrella term, in which they include many specific genres from many locations in and outside of the Middle East. They also acknowledge that several terms are frequently translated as “belly dance.” For example, Kajira Djoumahna, in “Belly Dance – In Brief” (2000), Ibrahim Farrah, in his editorial “Belly Dance vs. Oriental Dance” (1977), and Donna Carlton, in *Looking for Little Egypt* (1995), refer to the term *raqs al-sharqi*, but none of them discuss Turkish Çiftetelli or Greek Tsiftetelli, which the American Middle Eastern dance community also commonly translates as “belly dance.” They also note terms American Middle Eastern dancers frequently interchange with belly dance, including cabaret, Middle Eastern dance, Oriental Dance, *Danse Orientale*, and *danse du ventre*. According to Shira, in “Styles of Belly Dance. In The United States, Part 1” (2008b), “[i]n North America, belly dancers have used the word
cabaret since Jamila Salimpour coined this use of the term in the 1960’s” (Shira 2008b) in order to refer to dance developed in Middle Eastern restaurants and nightclubs. In addition, Shira also notes that cabaret is often associated with a variety show, and in some areas, with stripping.

In the speculations about where the name belly dance originated, one can observe a rare case in which the American Middle Eastern dance community influenced dance scholarship. In 1977, Farrah presented a theory that the term belly dance was first used at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 as “a corruption of the Arabic word, ‘beledi’” (Farrah 3). Djoumahna makes a similar statement about the translation of beledi along with another observation that some believe the term is “an insult that came out of the Victorian era when dancers appeared at the Chicago Exposition” (Djoumahna 10). Even though Farrah does not offer any source for his assumption, one can trace the reiteration of the idea not only in the American Middle Eastern dance community, but also in dance scholarship through Shay’s text.

On rare occasions, the American Middle Eastern dance writers discuss the problem of which term the American Middle Eastern dance community should use. For example, Farrah wants the American dancers to relinquish the term belly dance because it is not “their” term. Middle Easterners use it to communicate with Americans. Instead, “[t]he dance has always been call ‘Raks al Sharki,’ or ‘Dance from the Orient’ (Farrah 3). Rather than recommending that Americans use the practitioners’ term raqs al-sharqi, Farrah states Americans should be using the French term Danse Oreintale, translated as Oriental Dance, because Middle Easterners have commonly used it since the French
occupation. Farrah employs Oriental Dance in spite of the fact that he acknowledges for many American dancers Danse Orentale “denotes the Far East” (Farrah 3) and not the Middle East. Farrah does not apply the same critique to Oriental Dance as he does to belly dance – Middle Easterners adopting a non-Middle Eastern dance term in order to communicate with foreigners. In these cases, one term happens to be older than the other. In fact, to show his affect, Farrah notes between 1975, when he started the magazine, and 1977, when he wrote the editorial, the frequency of the term belly dance in advertisements decreased from 70 percent to 30 percent. Instead, advertisers used terms, such as Middle Eastern, Oriental Dance, and Danse Orentale.

Due to the numerous terms for belly dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers rarely choose one name over another. For example, Djoumahna often exchanges belly dance with Oriental dance. In another case, Carlton examines the early history of belly dance in America with a focus on the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893. The names Carlton employs in her own text, danse du ventre and Oriental dance are found in articles, portfolios, photographs, and fair signs from this era. Although she mainly employs danse du ventre for dance from the turn of the twentieth century, she uses Oriental dance for both historical and contemporary forms, and raqs al-sharqi for “the modern-day” (Carlton 64) version that she notes emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in Cairo’s nightclubs.

One can infer from the American Middle Eastern dance writers that they do not view belly dance as a strong, and some cases, even traditional Middle Eastern dance. For example, although Carlton traces the history of belly dance in the United States, she does
not label it traditional dance. However, similar to the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, Djoumahna detects both tradition and non-traditional forms of belly dance. In fact, she uses the phrase, “traditional Oriental dance” (Djoumahna 13) in order to differentiate it from innovative and fusion practices. For example, she notes some American dancers work “diligently at the preservation of traditional forms” (Djoumahna 12), while others “can also be considered innovators due to their fusionary approach to traditional Oriental dance styles” (Djoumahna 13).

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views**

The core EEMED choreographers primarily use the term belly dance for this genre and as an umbrella term that encompasses many specific forms, which as Anaheed, Tandemonium, and Tatianna assert, are not folk or ethnic dances. In fact, Tatianna, Djahari, and Anaheed predominantly call themselves “American belly dancers” (Tatianna 8, Djahari 36). Djahari also labels it “American gypsy belly dance,” which is the style she learned from Jenza, and consists of a “mishmash of a lot of different forms” (Djahari 26). Anaheed considers herself “an American classic belly dancer” (Anaheed 14) and her style “traditional belly dance” (Anaheed 103), “American Turkish style” (Anaheed 14), “American Turkish cabaret” (Anaheed 107), “American style cabaret dancing, [and] Turkish cabaret dancing” (Anaheed 38). Anaheed’s usage of these labels demonstrates the fluidity and variation of the American belly dance genre.

Elayssa acknowledges that she uses the term belly dance “all the time when I’m just being relaxed about it” (Elayssa 13), but also that she has moved away from utilizing
it to identify what she creates. Elayssa states, “I used to say I’m a belly dancer. I’m a Middle Eastern dancer. But now that I’ve branched off with Desert Sin and the experimental show, it doesn’t really encompass what I feel like I do. So, I just say, a dancer” (Elayssa 1). Elayssa also holds some reservations about using the term belly dance, partly because she does not think “the dance is really about the belly” (Elayssa 13), and partly because of the sexual stereotype image the name produces.

The core EEMED choreographers employ other terms. For example, Anaheed, Tandemonium, Elayssa, and Djahari regularly use the term cabaret in place of belly dance. In fact, Elayssa identifies different types of cabaret, such as Egyptian cabaret, American cabaret, and Lebanese cabaret. In Anaheed’s view, and as Jean states, cabaret refers to “the restaurant venue type of Middle Eastern dance, which is generally what people expect” (Tandemonium 34). Anaheed, Djahari, and Elayssa also utilize the term Middle Eastern dance to label their genre. In fact, it is Elayssa’s preferred name. Tandemonium and Tatianna bring up the term Oriental dance only to question its applicability. Similar to Farrah, Tandemonium and Tatianna say it is a misnomer since they associate Oriental dance with the Far East and not the Middle East. However, Claudia also acknowledges it is called Oriental dance, because the Middle East is “called the Orient” (Tandemonium 34). In addition, Anaheed acknowledges some outside the United States utilize the terms raqs al-sharqi or danse du ventre.

The core EEMED choreographers’ usage of various terms for belly dance comes with their need to communicate with various groups people. For example, Anaheed and Tatianna acknowledge that they employ the term belly dance when talking to the general
public, because of its common usage and recognition in American society. Anaheed says, “whether that’s a good thing or a bad thing, I can immediately make my point…” (Anaheed 11). Anaheed also says she utilizes it “in [dance] class” (Anaheed 11).

However, when she speaks with dancers, Anaheed frequently “narrows it down to a type of dance and within the umbrella of Middle Eastern dance” (Anaheed 11). In the end, Anaheed uses whichever name she thinks the person will recognize and understand.

Elayssa comments that she employs Middle Eastern dance as her primary term in order to create opportunities to educate as well as to undermine the belly dance stereotype. I asked her whether her use of Middle Eastern dance confuses people. Elayssa answered, “[y]es, but that’s good, because then if they are confused and they ask me questions. I’m happy to talk about what kind of dance I do and what’s involved. I prefer that than not giving them the chance to be confused” (Elayssa 14). Unlike Anaheed who wants the most direct route to communication, Elayssa wants to create confusion in order to generate opportunities to talk further.

Anaheed, Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna inhabit, experience, and practice a dance that teaches, documents, and propagates belly dance as a longstanding art form, and therefore, claim that it is a traditional Middle Eastern dance. In fact, Elayssa holds no doubt that even American belly dance is a traditional Middle Eastern dance, because “I’ve watched two generations ahead of me, my mother and my grandmother, do it” (Elayssa 26). In addition, Anaheed, Elayssa, Tatianna, and Djahari acknowledge a history of change within belly dance in the Middle East and American belly dance contains many and often blatant fusions and alterations. For instance, Anaheed states, “Turkish
[American belly dance] style now is nothing like what was done [when I first began in the mid-1970s]” (Anaheed 14). Anaheed, Elayssa, Tatianna, and Djahari’s statements indicate that they accept change as a part of traditional American belly dance’s identity.

However, Anaheed and Djahari question American belly dance’s position as a traditional Middle Eastern dance genre. For example, Djahari recounts that she was taught it is a traditional Middle Eastern dance, but when she explores American belly dance’s history, she observes dancers have made so many changes to it since it was brought over to the United States that it “doesn’t seem to be what it used to be” (Djahari 34). Nevertheless, Djahari concludes American belly dance is a traditional dance because it has been in the United States since the “end of the 1800s [and] early 1900s” (Djahari 38) and belly dance has taken this long “to become a tradition” and for dancers to embrace “a sense of ownership” (Djahari 38). In addition, she asserts that the dance community considers it one. Anaheed thinks American belly dance could be called “a new tradition” (Anaheed 35) because there has been over forty years of “this continuing performance style” (Anaheed 35) with “certain elements [that are] easily identifiable [and] recognizable by an audience…” (Anaheed 36). In Anaheed’s view, a dance is a tradition “when it’s existed for maybe more than twenty years” (Anaheed 35).

As folk, ethnic, and classical dancers, Jean and Claudia do not perceive belly dance as a traditional dance; a different view from Anaheed, Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna. Instead, Jeans says, and Claudia agrees, American belly dance is “more of a dance style than, I think, a dance tradition” (Tandemonium 43). For instance, it does not fulfill their definition that a traditional Middle Eastern dance needs to exist for “three or
four generations at least or a hundred years” (Tandemonium 41). However, the difficulty with temporal definitions is trying to establish when belly dance formed. For the most part, Tandemonium refers to the Turkish-American style, which is a popular and moderately stable form of belly dance in the United States since the mid-twentieth century. However, Shay, Sellers-Young, Farrah, Carlton, Djoumahna, Anaheed, and Djahari acknowledge that belly dance has been in the United States for well over 120 years. In fact, Elayssa points out that she is a third generation American belly dancer and would most likely disagree with Tandemonium’s temporal assessment.

As previously described in the “Folk dance” section of this dissertation, Tandemonium interchanges folk dance with traditional Middle Eastern dance and note folk dance not only comes out of a peasant society, but its movements “actually have meaning” (Tandemonium 35) that refer to actions in everyday life and specific events. Jean notes the connections of belly dance to its “historical roots [in] a very traditional society, a very old society” (Tandemonium 43). However, Claudia states, “when I look at a cabaret number, there’s nothing about it that I see depicts a time, a place, an event, a situation. It’s strictly a dance of moves showing various ways of isolation… to entice” (Tandemonium 41) and “to entertain” (Tandemonium 36). Jean agrees, and states, “I see a dance to show off what your body can do to the music” (Tandemonium 71). In addition, Jean specifically does not perceive American belly dance as a traditional dance because it “has nothing to do with the society that it came out of first” (Tandemonium 43), that is, the Middle East. Claudia agrees, and comments, “[t]he word tradition to me also implies that it’s coming from a particular culture or subculture that’s developed over time”
(Tandemonium 43). In their view, American belly dance is too disconnected from the Middle East to be a tradition.

Another area Tandemonium identifies as undermining belly dance’s traditional status is its current modification. Part of Claudia’s traditional dance definition addresses the maintenance of rules and form. In her view, belly dance is not traditional Middle Eastern dance because “there really aren’t any rules. Not really…. You really can do what you want” (Tandemonium 43). She notices rules, such as the progression of musical sections, which include, entrance, taqsīm, and floorwork, no longer apply. According to Tandemonium, dancers are making too many changes and are destroying the structure of the dance to the extent no continuity exists for tradition to rely upon.

Anaheed, Elayssa, Tatianna, and Djahari also identify emerging forms of belly dance in the United States that are not yet traditional dances, but are not longer “experimental.” Elayssa and Djahari present gothic belly dance as an example of an established genre. Relying on her personal history, Djahari notes, Desert Sin started by performing gothic belly dance in gothic clubs. She says, “[i]t was extremely different because we were definitely not doing traditional Middle Eastern dance” (Djahari 19). Now, she notes a number of “gothic belly dance websites” (Djahari 24) exist.

**Conclusion to Belly Dance**

As this section demonstrated, dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers choose from a variety of terms to name the “belly dance” genre, each with its own history and socio-political significance. In fact, of
all the genres discussed in this dissertation, belly dance is the one in which the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and subsequently the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, investigate in order to understand the complex relationship American belly dance maintains with other Middle Eastern dance genres. To paraphrase Anaheed, for better or for worse, belly dance is the popular American name for the genre. Even though those who they may not be completely content with the term, use it anyway to communicate quickly “what they do,” especially when dealing with the general public.

Many of the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers note the stereotype images associated with the term belly dance, and therefore, work their way around it by using other names. For example, some use Oriental dance, although it seems to have fallen out of favor in the American Middle Eastern dance community since the 2000s. In addition, danse du ventre is rarely used. When the scholars of Middle Eastern dance and the American Middle Eastern dance writers employ danse du ventre, it is as a historical term. The term most often exchanged with belly dance is cabaret. However, Shira notes that the term cabaret wields its own drawbacks. For instance, many Americans do not associate cabaret with belly dance, but with a Western style nightclub variety show or stripping. For that reason, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, the core EEMED choreographers, and therefore, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, use the term cabaret within the American Middle Eastern dance community more than with the public. For instance, several scholars of Middle Eastern dance use cabaret to differentiate its commercial, nightclub version from
its folk dance versions. In the American Middle Eastern dance community cabaret is also used to differentiate belly dance from American tribal belly dance.

Some American Middle Eastern dance writers prefer to use the Arab name, *raqs al-sharqi* (the dance of the East/Orient) to reinforce their dance connection to the Middle East, in particular Egypt. However, none of them indicate or discuss the tension, which occurs within the term – it is the Arab term that contains a Western geographical position of power: the East of what? The West. The term Middle Eastern dance is a term several of the core EEMED choreographers prefer to use since it encapsulates a variety of genres, not just belly dance. In fact, as its occurrence in the dissertation shows, I prefer the term Middle Eastern dance and its variation, American Middle Eastern dance for this reason.

The term belly dance can be employed to encapsulate an array of dances, from strong traditional to innovative ones. Several scholars of Middle Eastern dance identify folk dance and commercial versions of belly dance. In fact, their classification leads them to distinguish one as a strong tradition not influenced by Westernization and the other as a non-tradition that is influenced by Westernization. In these cases, American belly dance is definitely presented as a non-traditional dance. A few American Middle Eastern dance writers and core EEMED choreographers do not identify belly dance as any kind of traditional dance, because it contains too many changes from their ideas of strong traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, they do not label a genre like American belly dance as innovative either.

For the most part, the American Middle Eastern dance community writers and the core EEMED choreographers differentiate folk dance from all kinds of belly dance. Since
they are not contrasting the two and are practitioners of American belly dance, these American Middle Eastern dance community writers and core EEMED choreographers assert that belly dance, even the American version, is a traditional Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers conclude it is a tradition that can accommodate change – a tradition-of-change. The same group distinguishes newer genres of belly dance from traditional ones. In fact, a few American Middle Eastern dance community writers label some new American versions as innovative and fusion.

CONCLUSION TO PART TWO

Part Two of “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres” demonstrates that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed continue to employ pre-existing standard genre terms – classical dance and belly dance – to label various forms of Middle Eastern dance. Staged-folk dance is my own term, although I could use a more common term, such as folkloric or folk dance. Several dance scholars place the terms classical dance and belly dance in historical contexts, problematize the utilization of these genre terms, and question their and other’s role in their development of dance discourse. In fact, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers participate, and in the case of belly dance, lead in these types of the inquiries more often than they did with the strong traditional Middle Eastern dance genres.

Each genre discussed in Part Two points to unique problems that have arisen with each genre term. For instance, although I and several others have personally settled on
our own particular term for staged-folk dance, as a group, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers have not. The situation reflects the complex relationship between folk dance and its staged versions and the fact that some people maintain an investment in labeling and promoting staged-folk dance as a continuation of folk dance in a new location, and others, as a different genre. In their discussions of Turkish, Arab, and/or Persian classical dance, several dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers note they do not fit within classical dance’s standard definition that includes a codified system and/or development in a court context. Therefore, in order to continue to label them as such, they need to expand classical dance’s definition. Belly dance’s various historical and contemporary terms indicates that the writers and practitioners strive to find an accurate label for this umbrella term, but that they also run into problems with translations and communications.

As assemblages, staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance do not contain strong and rigid boundaries as noted with strong traditional Middle Eastern dances in Part One. In fact, frequently, they possess lines of flight out of strong traditional Middle Eastern dance and connect with other lines of flight from outside of Middle Eastern dance. With the complex relationships that developed between the assemblages, dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers observe and experience staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance as strong traditional Middle Eastern dances, modified traditional Middle Eastern
dances, established dances that are neither traditional or new, and new Middle Eastern
dances.

People who experience and/or participate in the development of staged-folk
dance, classical dance, or belly dance may not identify them as traditional dance. In fact,
several dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED
choreographers contrast one of the three genres in Part Two, which are on a type of stage,
professional, and formed is within the twentieth century with a strong traditional form,
which are consistent, long in duration, non-professional, and local. For example, several
dance scholars compare folk dance with staged-folk dance and cabaret with folk belly
dance. By creating a “new” genre, which allows and accepts alterations and
modifications, writers and choreographers are still able to “have” a version they can
present as a distinctive image and a tradition that contains very little change. However,
the new genres are not frequently called innovative or experimental, instead, they are
presented as established genres.

Those entering into an established genre, such as staged-folk dance, classical
dance, or belly dance experience the dance as a traditional dance. In fact, the American
Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers typically treat these
genres like a strong traditional Middle Eastern dance. This is not to say they do not
question staged-folk dance, classical dance, or belly dance’s status as tradition. However,
since the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers
spend a lot of time, energy, and money learning them, and therefore, possess very little
desire or feel they hold the right to make alterations or modifications. The result is that
staged-folk dance, classical dance, or belly dance often become stable with very little change.

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers who identify staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance as traditional dance expand the definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance beyond a concept of strong tradition. Those who claim American belly dance as a traditional dance, mainly participants, assert that traditional Middle Eastern dance genres have developed outside of the Middle East. Those who present staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance as traditional dance also content traditional Middle Eastern dance can accommodate change, and also foreign influences.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER

This chapter offers insight into the core EEMED choreographers’ discursive practices of traditional Middle Eastern dance genres. It shows how their practice of certain genres influences their views of what is, and is not, traditional Middle Eastern dance. For example, the dancers who hold American belly dance (one of the most contested “traditional” Middle Eastern dance forms) as their primary form view most of the genres discussed in this chapter as traditional Middle Eastern dance. Their position is different from those who retain Persian and Uzbek classical and folk dance as their primary form and a more restricted definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance.

The chapter also connects the core EEMED choreographers’ ideas with those of the American Middle Eastern dance community and American dance scholarship. For
instance, the core EEMED choreographers use the same pre-existing genre labels as the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers surveyed. Sometimes they question the validity of a genre’s term by analyzing its history and use within certain groups. Some work to modify a term’s meaning. However, the writers and dancers often discover that even with their efforts, the distinctive image of a genre does not change readily. Others choose instead to sidestep a common term and use another one. However, they rarely explore the values and problems with their “new” genre label. Yet, many dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers continue to reinforce the standard meaning of a genre.

The genre terms examined in Part One, ethnic dance, tribal dance, folk dance, and religious movement practices, demonstrate the strong genre assemblages that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers construct. They do not detect many lines of flight into traditional space, and therefore, not a lot of change. Although some note, and many more may also do so if they were directly asked, some alterations occur because of individual choices or influences from the outside. However, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers’ rhetorical and pedagogical tools and actions shield them from acknowledging genres’ changes and continue to solidify images of static genres. Some of their actions come as a result of their lack of knowledge and experiences about if, and how, dances may have changed. In addition, when modifications are acknowledged, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance
writers, and the core EEMED choreographers frequently do not investigate them, especially when they are influenced by those outside the “original” community.

The chapter shows, choreographers and writers are inclined to view some genres as traditional dance, while others, such as staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance, are open to debate. The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers frequently discuss and compare these three genres in regards to their strong traditional Middle Eastern dance prototype noted above. They see lines of flight coming out of a strong traditional Middle Eastern dance and connecting with those from other sources, typically Western, to form new assemblages. Several dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers examine the construction of staged-folk dance, classical dance, or belly dance through what choices are made, and by whom. Those who focus on such a process, typically state that staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance are not traditional Middle Eastern dance.

Several dance scholars, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers call the formations of folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance, “innovative.” In fact, several core EEMED choreographers employ the label “experimental.” However, none of them consider these genres as such today, except for some of the emerging forms of American belly dance, because they are no longer creating lines of flight, but are stable assemblages. Instead, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers consider them well defined and established genres, which similar to strong traditional Middle
Eastern dance genres, contain boundaries, structures, and distinctive images. In fact, many practitioners do not want to change staged-folk dance, classical dance, or belly dance because of the time, energy, and money they had to invest in order to learn them. Therefore, they may approach and/or experience them as strong traditional Middle Eastern dance.
In this chapter, “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” I utilize the label “experimental” as an umbrella term that encompasses several genres. Part One explores two American dance genres – modern dance and post-modern dance – which scholars of Euro-American dance, scholars of Middle East dance, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers surveyed frequently associate with experimentation. Additionally, it analyzes ways in which the core EEMED choreographers’ works overlap or not with experimental dance genres. Part Two examines terms the core EEMED choreographers and some American Middle Eastern dancers use to label their experimental Middle Eastern dance – interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance. Additionally, the chapter investigates how the core EEMED choreographers view and conceptualize their dances in order to present what it means for them to be experimental dancers within the context of Middle Eastern dance.

“Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” uses the framework of the previous chapter and contextualizes the core EEMED choreographers’ terminology within dance scholarship of the United States and the Middle East, and within the American Middle Eastern dance community. It is not a comprehensive survey of the dance genres’ terminology. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the dance scholars make even fewer references to the examined genres...
than they did to those in the previous chapter. Discussions of experimental dance genres are still incipient due in part to their recent emergence – many since the mid-1990s – and their non-mainstream position within the American Middle Eastern dance community and American dance in general.

INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

Part One examines various positions the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers take towards modern dance and post-modern dance. For example, the dance scholars acknowledge modern dance and post-modern dance are genres that change over time and consist of numerous approaches and styles. In other words, modern dance and post-modern dance are traditions-of-change, which one can analyze in order to conceive how experimental processes can become established genres. In addition, the dance scholars surveyed study modern dance and post-modern dance and their ideologies not only in the United States and Europe, but also in parts of the Middle East, specifically Turkey and Israel.

The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers present limited examples of modern dance and post-modern dance. It should not be surprising since these genres are outside of traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, their rare references and “silences” display a disconnection not only from modern dance and post-modern dance practiced in the United States, but also in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers occasionally use the terms. For example, they may attach the word
“modern” to an older traditional Middle Eastern dance genre to indicate a new version, generally the result of fusing a traditional Middle Eastern dance with other dance forms. Therefore, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers are able to maintain a genre within the traditional Middle Eastern dance umbrella, but also to take into account and mark change-in-tradition. In addition, they employ the term modern or post-modern to point out the fact that they live within this era.

The core EEMED choreographers fuse various standard modern dance and post-modern dance elements into their own experimental version of Middle Eastern dance. In fact, on occasion, they consider the idea that their experimental Middle Eastern dance could be called by one of these two names, and sometimes do. More often, the core EEMED choreographers back away from the terms modern and post-modern not only because they perceive them as different genres with their own histories, but also because of the negative and elitist images they and the general public hold of them.

MODERN DANCE

Although the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers do not often reference the term modern dance, I explore the genre in this dissertation because it offers a way to contextualize experimental Middle Eastern dance within American dance culture. For instance, modern dancers and core EEMED choreographers reject and move away from their foundations and participate in an ideology of continuation and change. The information scholars of Middle Eastern dance
present in their descriptions of modern dance in Turkey and Israel allows for an examination of experimental dance in the Middle East and an understanding of how these choreographers and core EEMED choreographers negotiate various cultural traits and globalization from different, but related perspectives.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Frequently, the dance scholars surveyed employ the term modern dance as a genre, which includes any art theater dance that is not ballet, ethnic dance, or staged-folk dance developed during the twentieth century. In addition, it is an umbrella term that encompasses many specific forms and personal styles. For example, Mark Franko, in *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (1995), observes that different types of modern dance point to the fact it has gone through modifications over time, sometimes within a choreographer’s career. I label the process Franko discusses a tradition-of-change within a genre.

Dance scholars researching modern dance in Israel and Turkey, including Susan Bauer, in her conference paper “Modern Dance Developments in Turkey, 1990-2005” (2006), Ruth Eshel, in “Concert Dance in Israel” (2003), and Judith Brin Ingber and Giora Manor, in “Theatrical Dance” in “Israel: An Overview” in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* (1998), focus on the constant change in modern dance in these countries due to the influx of various styles from the United States and Europe. They, along with Arzu Öztürkmen, in “Modern Dance Alla Turca: Transforming Ottoman Dance in Early Republican Turkey” (2003), also discuss the ways in which modern dance
entered the Middle East. For example, many early Israeli immigrants brought European modern dance, while American versions came with mid-twentieth-century immigration. Israel is different from Turkey in which “Western” culture is imported. Due to their history, Eshel and Özturkmen imply that now a “tradition” of modern dance exists, going back to the early part of the twentieth century.

Eshel, Bauer, Özturkmen, Ingber, and Manor also acknowledge modern dance in parts of the Middle East includes a history of choreographers negotiating “local” and “imported” dance cultures. For example, Özturkmen asserts that Selma Selim Sırrı worked within the framework of modern dance in the vein of the European or American forms in the early twentieth century. Ingber and Manor notice a similar move in Israeli modern dance with immigrants Rena Shaham and Rena Gluck who brought with them Martha Graham’s style.

Other individuals experimented and fused to varying degrees modern dance and folk dance. For example, Bauer observes during her first period of investigation (1990-1992), Turkish choreographers embraced several styles, predominantly Cunningham and Graham techniques. However, they went outside modern dance by using ballet as their base and sometimes drawing “on traditional Turkish stories and themes” (Bauer 2006, 56). Eshel recounts some Israeli modern dancers fused folk dance and modern dance. For instance, Rina Nikova, a Russian ballerina who immigrated to Israel, was inspired by the work of modern dancers, including Ruth St. Denis, Isadora Duncan and Rudolf von Laban to produce her own version of modern dance by combining modern dance with Yemenite dances for her Yemenite Company, founded in 1933. Yardena Cohen, another
Israeli modern choreographer, took a similar approach by combining Ausdruckstanz and “folkloric dances of the Arabs and bedouins” (Eshel 2003, 66).156

Although both Eshel and Bauer claim that Israeli and Turkish choreographers respectively, develop their own modern dance, not everyone does. For example, Bauer cites Özturkmen’s 2002 article, “Dance and Identity in Turkey,” in which Özturkmen argues no synthesis of Turkish and modern dance occurs. She acknowledges that although ballet and modern dance may use Turkish themes, they are not from contemporary life. Bauer brings in a response by Beyhan Murphy, Director of the Istanbul State Ballet,157 who also does not perceive modern dance as Turkish. Murphy states that choreographers do not know modern dance well enough to produce a Turkish form. However, Bauer presents a different outlook. She writes,

I am not convinced however, that to be ‘Turkish’ choreographers need to incorporate traditional dance forms into their work either thematically or kinesthetically. As described above, current Turkish choreographers are working from their own life and movement experiences which in the end makes their work ‘Turkish.’ (Bauer 2006, 62)

While Özturkmen and Murphy claim that modern dance maintains its foreign status, and therefore, cannot be Turkish, Bauer thinks it can be Turkish since Turkish choreographers cannot help but add their Turkish identity into their work whether they intend to or not.

Franko undertakes a different approach to examine modern dance in the United States. By utilizing “expression theory analysis” (Franko x), he presents “a revisionary account of historical modern dance” (Franko ix), and therefore, does not consider modern dance so much as a progression than as a continual return to subjectivity. Each choreographer takes her/his own approach and mode of operation that results in new
choices. With his method, Franko’s takes into account changes within the genre while assessing what keeps dances within the label of modern dance.

In addition, Franko offers insight into the relationship between tradition and experimentation by indicating which specific dance elements of their predecessor a choreographer rejects or maintains. For example, Franko perceives experimentation at the beginning of Martha Graham’s career in the 1930s, which he calls “experimental.” She continued in the modern dance pattern of rejecting both immediate and classical influences and maintained in her work modern dance’s position as a dignified “autonomous art” (Franko 38). Franko also acknowledges Graham searched “for subjective form” (Franko 40), a common modern dance mission, but broke away from her predecessors by approaching it differently. Over time, her style formed a personal tradition – a distinctive image – which the next generation could break away from and/or reject. Franko also observes such a process played out between Merce Cunningham and Douglas Dunn. Even though Cunningham’s work in the 1950s was his “most radically experimental period” (Franko 81), when Dunn moved away from Cunningham’s tutelage in the 1980s and developed his perspective on expression, Franko labels Cunningham’s style a “tradition.”

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

The only time an American Middle Eastern dance writer surveyed discusses modern dance as a genre occurs when Soher Azar, in her on-line essay “A Primer on Middle Eastern Dance Styles,” observes a Middle Eastern dancer fusing it with Middle
Eastern dance. She writes, “[s]ome dancers are very experimental and avant-garde in their creation of new dance forms: Z-Helene combines modern dance with Middle Eastern and Indian to create her Blue Wave style” (Azar). However, Azar does not fold Z-Helene’s work into the modern dance genre, but instead, keeps it within the Middle Eastern dance umbrella. Moreover, Azar uses the terms experimental and avant-garde to describe these innovative types of dances, which indicates that in her view Middle Eastern dance contains more than traditional forms.

The American Middle Eastern dance community has co-opted the term “modern” for its own usages. Azar, in the article mention above, and Monica, on her website’s “Frequently Asked Questions,” present examples of the most common application – to indicate that major changes were made to an older form, generally by fusing elements from a “foreign” and/or “Western” source. Azar refers to “Modern Egyptian cabaret dancing” (Azar) and Monica to “modern belly dance” (Monica). Even though the term modern indicates a tradition-of-change for the scholars of American dance, when the American Middle Eastern dancers add it to an established genre, they perceive it as a change-in-tradition. However, when dancers attach the term modern to a more recent form, such as Monica does with “modern tribal fusion dance,” she locates it as arising out of contemporary practices. Unfortunately, Azar and Monica do not discuss how many modifications need to occur or who gets to decide a dance should be relabeled as modern.
Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

The core EEMED choreographers frequently use the term “modern” in the same way as the American Middle Eastern dance writers. For example, Anaheed, Elayssa, and Djahari identify it as one of the genres from which they add elements into some of their experimental Middle Eastern dances. However, they do not offer any specifics. Additionally, Anaheed, Tandemonium, and Djahari employ the term modern to indicate that a current or new version of a traditional genre, such as “modern Turkish and modern Egyptian…” (Anaheed 35), “modern belly dance” (Djahari 154), and “modern Uzbek dance” (Tandemonium 143). Similar to the American Middle Eastern dance writers, they present these dances as a change-in-tradition. Anaheed, Tandemonium, Tatianna, and Elayssa also utilize the term modern to point out that some element comes from contemporary times. For instance, while discussing her Loïe Fuller dances, Anaheed states she incorporates “a little more modern interpretation” (Anaheed 96) by changing the music to something more recent, updating the lighting capabilities, and “express[ing] the movement in my own way” (Anaheed 96). In addition, Jean observes some core EEMED choreographers are “mixing in modern elements whether it’s costume, or music, or attitude, or staging” (Tandemonium 61), and therefore, are changing the traditional dance.

Tatianna undertakes a different approach to the term modern from the other core EEMED choreographers, American Middle Eastern dancer writers, and dance scholars. She uses it to distinguish various degrees of experimentation at EEMED. As previously addressed, Tatianna classifies Middle Eastern dance into several genres, including ethnic,
modern, and alternative dance. In fact, she says, “belly dancing would be considered modern…. meaning it’s not antique [ethnic], but it’s not outrageous [alternative]” (Tatianna 19). Tatianna not only finds modern in traditional belly dance, but within EEMED dances as well. She primarily uses the term modern in contrast with the term alternative, which in her view is a type of “aggressive” (Tatianna 20) dance. For example, Tatianna perceives my Plan Nine (2003) and Elayssa’s Envinomation (2001) as alternative because they are edgy, and with respect to Plan Nine, darkly comedic. The two dances differ from Anaheed’s The Monkey King (2005) and my Transference (2004), which Tatianna calls modern. She may view the pieces as modern because neither of them ends darkly or employs the color black as a dominant costume color choice.

Several of the core EEMED choreographers relate their experimental Middle Eastern dance to modern dance’s ideology. For example, Anaheed, Elayssa, and Djahari assert that both genres create new things by breaking away from rules and guidelines that came before. Anaheed stops short of labeling her own work as such, but Elayssa, Djahari, and Tatianna on rare occasions identify their work as modern dance. For instance, Elayssa describes her own style of experimental Middle Eastern dance as “modern dance mixed with Middle Eastern dance” (Elayssa 29), along with dance theater and theatrical dance. Djahari states she uses the term modern to refer to experimental Middle Eastern dance at least to herself. Tatianna thinks the term modern dance may be appropriate for describing Desert Sin. In fact, she acknowledges that people may label experimental Middle Eastern dance as some “kind of modern dance” (Tatianna 38) because “modern dance seems to be the label for the things that nobody else knows what to call” (Tatianna
9). In other words, Tatianna defines the term modern dance with vague, broad, and encompassing characteristics.

Nevertheless, Djahari, Tatianna, and Elayssa are wary of employing the term modern dance for their own work because of its negative association with weird and bad dancing that they have and/or perceive the public as having. Their cautiousness also may be because the two genres do not share a direct lineage. Elayssa is the only one who asserts that in spite of its image she uses the term as a supplemental name for her style, because for those who understand, it helps communicate what she is carrying out.

The core EEMED choreographers are certainly not directly following modern dance’s technique and vocabulary, although they may add them to their experimental Middle Eastern dance choreographies. Nor are they rejecting classical ballet as modern dancers and dance scholars sometimes claim. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers do not view themselves as continuing an American dance or fusing an American dance and Middle Eastern dance.

However, modern remains a functional term that the core EEMED choreographers sometimes use to supplement the identity of their work because it links with many people’s association of modern dance with “art” dance on a proscenium stage. The term modern dance also implies for the public that a dance is “new.” The core EEMED choreographers share with modern dancers a rejection of and/or movement away from a standard dance form – in their case, traditional Middle Eastern dance – and a development of a tradition-of-change. Additionally, although the core EEMED
choreographers and the modern dancers in Israel and Turkey possess different foundations, they both connect to an interest in fusing various dance forms. By applying Franko’s expression theory analysis of modern dance to the core EEMED choreographers’ dances, one can perceive other bonds. In his theory, Franko notes American modern dancers produced several types of expressivity over the course of the twentieth century. Many types of expressivity can also be found in the core EEMED choreographers’ experimental dances, which expand the emotional content in Middle Eastern dance beyond the happy belly dancer.\textsuperscript{164} For example, one sometimes finds elements of Duncan’s type of subjectivity – a move from the internal to the external world. The core EEMED choreographers also at times in their dance rely upon the “internal” for inspiration. Elayssa calls it “intuition.” However, their expressive process is not a closed circuit created and sustained by the “inner soul” that giving rise to sensation and coming out as expression as Duncan declares. Nor are the core EEMED choreographers interested in abdicating their individuality to “nature.”

In fact, the core EEMED choreographers can utilize the expressive circulatory process present in traditional American belly dance. While improvising, dancers rely upon training and muscle memory to interpret the music (which also includes improvisational elements) and to connect with audience members. Although dancers are frequently “in the moment,” they can also reflect and make conscious decisions based upon their sense of self and connection with musicians and audiences. The circulatory interaction among dancers, musicians, and audience members produces tarab – an Arab word for the ecstatic/symbiotic state created through collective energy and enjoyment.
Some EEMED pieces move more along the line of Graham’s early work in which emotion exists as a byproduct and not as the sole purpose of a dance. These dances are less internal and more about the movement. Other choreographers’ dances parallel Cunningham’s work to disassociate dance from emotion and interiority. However, none of the core EEMED choreographers takes the treatment of subjectivity to the level Cunningham does with his chance procedures and random layering of music with the movement and costumes. Nor do they employ Dunn’s approach and disassociate emotion from narrative. The core EEMED choreographers do not frequently assume the modernist stance of rejecting subjectivity or looking for “the reduction of art to the essence of its own formal means” (Franko x). Instead, they work to communicate and connect with an audience. Several accomplish their goal by developing closer ties between movement and expression and exploring the ways in which movements beyond facial expressions lend themselves to certain presentations of visual emotion.

Conclusion to Modern Dance

The core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers’ discussion and usage of modern dance show a distance not only from its American versions, but also Middle Eastern ones. In fact, Claudia states she is not sure “if there are any modern dance companies anywhere in the Middle East” (Tandemonium 68). The lack of information and acknowledgement by the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance community demonstrate that the small amount of dance scholarship on experimental Middle Eastern dance in the Middle East is not read
by the American Middle Eastern dance community. In addition, although dance scholars do not theorize as much about modern dance in the Middle East as they do about European and American versions, they at least mark the beginning of and demonstrate the need for further research. The gap also shows the strength in which people associate tradition with the Middle East. Nevertheless, all of these writers and choreographers establish that Middle Eastern dance includes more than tradition.

**POST-MODERN DANCE**

Even though the term post-modern dance is not discussed by the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and rarely addressed by the core EEMED choreographers, I examine it in this dissertation because the dance scholars present an experimental dance genre and it shares rhetorical attributes with experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, both groups of choreographers reject and/or move away from their foundations and participate in an ideology of continuation and change. This section also helps contextualize the core EEMED choreographers’ experimental work not only within late twentieth-century American dance, but also within post-modern dance in parts of the Middle East.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Susan Manning, in “Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric: A Response to Sally Banes’ ‘Terpsichore in Sneakers,’” (1988), and Judith Mackrell, in “Post-Modern Dance in Britain” (1991), demonstrate the difficulty dance scholars can undergo with
defining parameters of current dance practices that are still in action, process, and development. Since the 1980s, dance scholars confront two problems when examining post-modern dance. One has to do with establishing the line between modern dance and post-modern dance. Although Manning and Mackrell perceive post-modern dance as its own genre, they do not identify a clean break away from modern dance. In fact, they link the two through a history of experimenting – a tradition-of-change – although with different elements and aesthetics. Manning starts by re-defining and establishing the parameters of modern dance with two conditions. Her research leads her to define postmodern dance as being contingent upon one of the two modern dance conditions no longer existing. In fact, she notes that from the late 1960s to late 1980s in many cases neither of modern dance’s conditions exists.

The second issue dance scholars contend with is the reconciliation of a split within post-modern dance, which ties into negotiations between an inclusive rhetoric and the development of specific genres and personal styles. Manning notices this dilemma in Banes’ revised introduction to her book. In her first introduction, Banes presents a descriptive chronological view of post-modern dance as arising out of modern dance, but also as breaking away from the cycle of “revolution and institution” (Manning 32, Banes 1987, 5). Between the 1960s and the 1970s, dancers focused on the medium of dance rather than its meaning. Although Banes’ concept of post-modern dance is pluralistic and inclusive, in her second introduction, she has difficulty with accounting for changes and the continued cycle of the “revolution” in the 1980s against instituted post-modern dance. The shifts include, the “renewal of interest in expression, narrative, and virtuosity...
augmented by a revival of theatricality and musicality and by a preoccupation with autobiography, content, and meaning” (Manning 33). Manning notices, as a way to solve the dilemma, Banes proposes to re-contextualize the genres modern and post-modern dance. Banes states modern dance is not modernist, but post-modern dance is because of its “acknowledgement of the medium’s materials, the revealing of dance’s essential qualities as an art form, the separation of formal elements, the abstraction of forms, and the elimination of external references as subjects” (Manning 34, Banes 1987, xiv-xv). However, in the end, Banes concludes naming the dances of the 1960s and 1970s “post-modern” and those of the 1980s “post-modernist” would be too confusing. Manning herself determines post-modern dance is not stable or singular, and therefore, “varieties of postmodernism” (Manning 38) exist.

Mackrell observes a similar ideological problem between post-modern dance and New Dance in the British dance scene. She states post-modern dance “has always been somewhat confusingly associated with the movement ‘new dance,’ but not wholly identified with it” (Mackrell 40). Mackrell explains that New Dance, as defined in 1986 by Fergus Early, a founding member of X6, was “a catch-all term for non-mainstream work…” (Mackrell 51) and “re-iterated the point that ‘new dance’ could not be identified with a single style or method – that the one and only concept ‘essential to it, is liberation’” (Mackrell 52). Here, Early conceives of New Dance as a genre that spans many aesthetic differences including modifications made to British dance in the 1980s.

Conversely, Mackrell identifies New Dance as a specific genre and places it within the historical context of the 1970s. Her position is partly influenced by
choreographers, such as Michael Clark with “his rampant virtuosity and brash, riotous staging…” (Mackrell 52), who disregard and reject New Dance. She labels Clark’s works post-modern dance. In fact, Mackrell finds the differences between post-modern dance and New Dance closely aligned with those between Banes’ two post-modern dance periods. For example, minimalism is shifting into spectacle with costumes, props, sets, and lighting design, technique is playing a more important role, dancers are drawing from other dance forms and traditional dance values, and dance is becoming “market-place” art. Although she views them as different genres, Mackrell observes New Dance’s effect can still be felt and overlaps with current dance post-modern dance practices, including the idea “that anything the choreographer chooses can count as dance” (Mackrell 56).

Ruth Eshel does not investigate postmodern dance’s application or definition in “Concert Dance in Israel.” However, in her section, “The Breakthrough of Fringe Dance,” she offers a rare historical perspective and insight into the introduction of American, British, and German forms, and their subsequent practices, in Israel starting in the mid-1970s. Eshel observes Israeli choreographers looking towards the United States and Europe for inspiration and guidance. However, Israeli choreographers do not follow their lead completely, especially since they refuse to reject theatricality, narrative, message, and emotions.

In this section, Eshel uses a number of terms, including “experimental,” “postmodern,” “movement-theater,” and “fringe” dance. She does not explicitly define the differences among them, but from her presentation one can gain some insight. For example, Eshel employs experimental as an umbrella term in which she places the other.
genres. Eshel generally utilizes the term postmodern dance when referring to American postmodern dance. For instance, she writes that during the early 1980s, “American postmodern dance began to seem too conceptual to Israeli creators” (Eshel 2003, 76), and as a result, fell out of favor. In its place, tanztheater surged, especially after Pina Bausch’s Wuppertal Dance Theater performed in Israel in 1981. Eshel notes Bausch not only renewed interest and creativity, but also “awakened the historic connection that Israeli dance has with German dance” (Eshel 2003, 76). Eshel uses the term fringe dance for choreographers in the 1980s who do not work in big established dance companies. Unfortunately, she does not label or discuss Israeli concert dance during the 1990s, except to state some work to make connections “between folklore and artistic dance” (Eshel 2003, 77).

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

The American Middle Eastern dance writers do not employ the term post-modern dance, but a few use post-modern as a label for the current framework within which dancers make changes and adaptations to traditional Middle Eastern dance. For instance, Katya Faris,\(^{169}\) in her on-line essay “The Post-Modern Bellydancer,” observes post-modern values negatively affect traditional Middle Eastern dance in the United States, while Marilee Nugent,\(^{170}\) in her essay “Cairo. Mother of the World – Mother of the Dance,” perceives that at least in Cairo, they generate a positive impact and a new form. Faris and Nugent’s unclear definition of the term post-modern demonstrates the separation of American Middle Eastern dance from American dance and also the
difficulty of reflecting upon one’s current social ideologies. For example, Faris expresses a common and popular viewpoint of post-modern: it is inclusive. Faris defines it by paraphrasing Dr. Kemal Silay as “yet undefined…. [and] ‘anything goes,’ no one is right, no one is wrong; it is utter chaos” (Faris 1). Therefore, she concludes belly dance “is in crisis…” (Faris 1), and offers several American versions of Middle Eastern dance as examples, including bellydance aerobics, dancers who overly sexualize the dance, and spiritual dances that encompass a “combination of Sufi Whirling dance, the Dance of Universal Peace, and Ancient Celtic/Wiccan rituals…” (Faris 6). Faris takes issue with those who call these dances “authentic” Middle Eastern dance. She states practitioners’ actions are “insulting to the traditions and people from those cultures” (Faris 6). Unfortunately, Faris does not offer any references to back up her assertions of the ways in which dances are presented or Middle Easterners’ view of them. Additionally, Faris overly simplifies the definition of post-modernism and does not take into account the problems and ideologies that make up the discussions on defining post-modernism.

Nugent does not discuss or define the theory of post-modern or post-modern dance. Instead, she examines the effects of post-modernism on belly dance in Cairo. For instance, Nugent writes, “[a]s a contemporary entertainment and performance art, Egyptian Oriental dance embodies a myriad of post-Modern issues: gender and economics, primitive versus modern, local versus global, traditional versus Western” (Nugent 10). Unlike Faris, Nugent perceives changes in a positive light. However, it is difficult to ascertain how Nugent views the effect of post-modern principles on modern Egyptian belly dance, since many of the adaptations she recounts occurred during the
early- and mid-twentieth century – often labeled the modern era. With respect to the current post-modern era, Nugent only identifies a decrease in the number of dancers due to a troubled economy and an increase in “political Islam” (Nugent 8).

Nugent’s essay offers insight into the ways in which Egyptian belly dancers simultaneously practice two genres she identifies as often situated in opposition – baladi (a traditional dance) and modern belly dance within a “post-modern world.” Nugent acknowledges when modern belly dance was first developed as its own genre, a move of fusing baladi with “Western” elements in Egyptian nightclubs, stages, and films, it was perceived as “innovative,” but now is seen as a standard form. However, she does not go as far as to say it is a traditional dance even though it consists of an over eighty-year history. Modern belly dance contrasts with baladi, which she contends, is an indigenous traditional dance and is “in conscious opposition to the afrangi or Westernized populations – those either of non-native heritage or the urban elite who follow Western lifestyles and consumption patterns” (Nugent 2). Even though Nugent calls baladi a tradition, she also claims that it “has a unique adaptability that allows innovation while retaining much of its original character” (Nugent 11). In other words, baladi allows for a certain amount of change-in-tradition as long as dancers do not modify its character or its position as opposing “Western” influences.

While baladi and modern belly dance developed into two genres, modern belly dance reincorporates its roots. Nugent observes Egyptian belly dancers still “experiment with new ideas and others copy what works” and re-includes aspects of traditional baladi “as sources of creative inspiration, authenticity and artistic legitimacy” (Nugent 11) in a
variety of ways. In fact, Nugent writes, “a baladi section, in which the ‘down-home’ and ‘folksy’ feeling of the traditional women’s improvisational solo stands in contrast to the stylized, refined and ‘classical’ style of the opening and other sections of the routine” (Nugent 9). Nugent’s statement presents an experimental choreographic process in which Egyptian belly dancers re-add a traditional dance genre into their modern one. With this method, the Egyptian belly dancers pay homage to their traditional roots while innovating.

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views**

Many of the core EEMED choreographers do not discuss the term post-modern dance during their interviews. In one instance, Anaheed indicates that she perceives a connection among modern dance, post-modern dance, and experimental Middle Eastern dance through “individuals taking a chance and using technique in a different way that’s never been done before to communicate” (Anaheed 59), and therefore, creating a tradition-of-change. Djahari asserts that one can use the term post-modern dance to describe experimental Middle Eastern dance, but that “experimental is even more accurate” (Djahari 23). Nevertheless, she does not employ it to label her dance, because, Djahari notes, people, especially the general public, “don’t know what do with these words…. the world’s not ready for these terms” (Djahari 23). In fact, she contends that using such a word may turn people away from seeing Desert Sin’s shows or hiring them.

The fact that only two of the core EEMED choreographers acknowledged the term post-modern dance, and only after prompting, indicates how disconnected the two
forms are for them. The limited acknowledgement of post-modern dance may be because the core EEMED choreographers do not possess a modern dance and/or an early post-modern dance background. Therefore, they do not situate themselves with respect to either legacy. Additionally, the core EEMED choreographers may stay away from making too many connections not only because of post-modern dance’s Euro-American centrism, but also because of its elitist stance – with its serious, esoteric subject matters and presentations – in American culture.

Nevertheless, by applying several dance scholars’ definitions to the work of the core EEMED choreographers, one could read them as producing a type of post-modern dance. For instance, the core EEMED choreographers fulfill one of Manning’s post-modern dance criteria addressed above – they are not collapsing together modern dance and ballet forms. However, the core EEMED choreographers are disintegrating the boundaries between dance and theater. Although they may not be doing so to the extent that choreographers like Bausch do, for a genre, which does not possess a strong theatrical tradition, the core EEMED choreographers are bringing the two together. Additionally, as the core EEMED choreographers will later comment on, experimental Middle Eastern dance is not dependent upon the theatrical setting for its identification and can be performed off-stage, just like some types of post-modern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers tie into some post-modern dance concepts in their experimental Middle Eastern dance, especially with respect to trying new things and perhaps forming a tradition-of-change. Although EEMED choreographers are not following directly from, or commenting on, the modern dance legacy, they are
connecting with post-modern dance’s philosophy of breaking with, and at times, parodying and alluding to its own tradition. In addition, as Manning notes with her perspective on the relationship between modern dance and post-modern dance, the core EEMED choreographers rely upon what came before, in their case traditional Middle Eastern dance genres, to define their work.

The core EEMED choreographers’ dances do not generally correspond with Banes’ definition of early post-modern dance of the 1960s and 1970s, as stated by Manning and Mackrell. Banes observes that dancers concentrated on a variety of concepts, such as the medium of dance rather than its meaning, formalism, and abstraction. The core EEMED choreographers may not question what “dance” is or eliminate external references as subjects, but compared to traditional Middle Eastern dance, their work is radical and very different. American belly dancers during the 1960s and 1970s were already performing dance based on principles of abstraction and formalism, minus the display of “making dance.” In the 2000s, though not all, many of the core EEMED choreographers were moving away from formalism and abstraction. Banes also identifies that first period post-modern dancers used pedestrian moves, non-dancers, games, tasks, and improvisation. Both American belly dancers and EEMED choreographers share in the use of improvisation, although the core EEMED choreographers have become more reliant on choreography. None of them employ pedestrian moves or base dance structures around tasks and games. On rare occasions, the core EEMED choreographers supplement their piece with actors and martial artists. 

177
Banes also states first period American post-modern choreographers moved away from spectacle, technique, theater settings, and choreography. Once again, traditional belly dancers in the 1960s and 1970s were already improvising in non-theatrical settings, including homes, nightclubs, and restaurants. However, they were not moving away from technique and spectacle. In fact, American belly dancers were developing new techniques and vocabulary by fusing non-Middle Eastern dance vocabulary with various Middle Eastern dance forms. As addressed in the “Staged-folk Dance” section of the dissertation, during this time, choreographers in the Middle East were also presenting folk dance on the stage and focused on choreography, codifying technique, and spectacle. Similar to the first period post-modern dancers who were performing in new settings for them, the core EEMED choreographers also move away from their traditional dance’s standard settings, in their case, to the stage.

The core EEMED choreographers share many traits with second period post-modern dance. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers could be situated within second period post-modern dance; characterized as exploring virtuosity, theaters, sets, props, music, lighting, narratives, characters, the fusion of other dance forms, and the ability to choose from any number of aesthetics and structures. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers connect to post-modern choreographers in Israel who continue theatricality, narrative, message, and emotions. The pieces performed at EEMED cover a wide and eclectic array of aesthetics and purposes. They may be abstract, narrative, autobiographical, self reflexive, mythical, reconstructive, spectacular, minimalistic, virtuosic, amateurish, expressive, choreographed, improvised, staying on the stage,
moving into other parts of the theater, musical, meaningful, exploring quality, size, and shape, communicative, breaking away from tradition, revamping tradition, and/or ignoring tradition. The core EEMED choreographers add some elements, including narrative and theatricality, which are not a part of “traditional” Middle Eastern dance. Others, such as musicality and virtuosity, the core EEMED choreographers continue from tradition. A number of them also increase a traditional element’s range. For example, the core EEMED choreographers expand their expression capacity beyond those of the typical fun-filled and happy entertainer.

The main difference is that many American post-modern dancers reincorporate some of what they rejected, while the core EEMED choreographers still turn away from established traditions. For example, some American post-modern dancers in a move against modern dance left the proscenium stage, only to “return” to it in the 1980s. However, since American Middle Eastern dance did not develop on or possess a historical link to the proscenium stage, the core EEMED choreographers enter into a space that is new not only for them personally, but also for most traditional Middle Eastern dances forms. In addition, they add their established techniques and practices of the theater into their repertoire.

**Conclusion to Post-Modern Dance**

Post-modern dance and experimental Middle Eastern dance demonstrate the difficulty writers and choreographers have with defining what is presently happening in dance. The situation is compounded by the fact that dancers and choreographers negotiate
ideas of originality and break away from what came before while they simultaneously acknowledge their legacy and continuation of some pre-existing and/or traditional elements. The connections between experimental Middle Eastern dance and second-wave post-modern dance, such as the need to be new, unique, and different, also ties into larger American cultural traits. The rhetoric found in both genres – being indefinable, pluralistic, and encompassing – conflicts with development of specific genres and personal styles. However, as will be explored in the chapter “Traditional and Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Relationship,” the core EEMED choreographers’ work may solidify into a genre and perhaps even into a tradition of a theatrical type of Middle Eastern dance.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

Part One of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” demonstrates that modern dance and post-modern dance and American Middle Eastern dance contain quite a bit of distance between them. For instance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers do not regularly cite modern dance and post-modern dance as standard genres. Nor do they recognize modern dance and post-modern dance in parts of the Middle East, such as in Israel and Turkey. Instead, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers use the term “modern” in their own way – to indicate new versions of belly dance.

However, by contextualizing the core EEMED choreographers within the dominant American dance discourse of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, one
can identify where the two overlap. For example, the dance scholars indicate that at least in the United States and Britain, choreographers do not look to maintain a tradition within modern and post-modern dance forms, but to create new dance. Choreographers accomplish their goals by developing lines of flight and by moving away from their predecessors’ training. The dance scholars observe that choreographers either break away from their foundation and form a new genre and/or style, or continue established elements in a new manner. Either way, the experimentalists often create a personal tradition/style from which others can break away from as well.

The core EEMED choreographers share with modern dancers and post-modern dancers a move away from their primary training. However, they differ drastically because of their foundation. Post-modern dance participates in a general legacy of breaking away from modern dance, which in turn broke away from ballet. The core EEMED choreographers move away from various types of Middle Eastern dance, each with their own history, vocabulary, rules, settings, purposes, and expectations.

Part One also demonstrates that American Middle Eastern dancers and core EEMED choreographers are not the only ones negotiating with issues of local and foreign, tradition and innovation, and individual and group expression. Whereas in the United States and Europe, modern and post-modern dance choreographers move away from their legacy, choreographers in Turkey and Israel are constantly being influenced by dance forms, such as ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance imported from the United States and Europe, as well as by local traditional dances and non-dance culture. American Middle Eastern dancers and core EEMED choreographers focus on moving
away from traditional dance but do not necessarily look towards ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance for inspiration or guidance. Instead, the core EEMED choreographers work to maintain an open-ended approach. Time will tell whether the core EEMED choreographers are developing a specific genre and/or “starting” a tradition-of-change.
CHAPTER THREE, PART TWO

EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES

Part Two of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” examines the genres – interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance – that the core EEMED choreographers and some American Middle Eastern dancers frequently use to label their experimental Middle Eastern dance. While the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed overlap in the ways in which they define and use the four labels, differences among them also exist. For example, several American Middle Eastern dance writers and core EEMED choreographers utilize interpretive dance as a genre to label their own work while dance scholars utilize it to refer to a type of dance in both the United States and Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. In addition, Part Two demonstrates that the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers do not always identify interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance as genres. In the case of alternative dance, the dance scholars do not name it at all. Sometimes, as with interpretive dance, theatrical dance, and fusion dance, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers present them as umbrella terms that encompass traditional and experimental versions. At other times, they use the word as an adjective or to label a process.
INTERPRETIVE DANCE

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed frequently do not employ the term interpretive dance. It is discussed in this dissertation because several of the core EEMED choreographers define it in their own way and use it to label their own experimental and traditional Middle Eastern dances. In the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers’ view the term interpretive dance is not dated or in the past. In fact, none of them employ it to refer to the group of early-twentieth-century dancers that the dance scholars do.

Dance Scholars’ Views

Linda Tomko, in Dancing Class: Genders, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920 (1999), Sally Banes, in her chapter “Early Modern Dance” from Dancing Women. Female Bodies on Stage (1998), and Suzanne Shelton, in Ruth St. Denis. A Biography of the Divine Dancer (1990), employ the term interpretive dance to label a group of American dancers from the turn of the twentieth century. They note the dancers also went by other names. For example, Tomko lists barefoot dancers, “Greek dancers, classic dancers” (Tomko 31), and “expressive dancers” (Tomko 36) and Banes “aesthetic” (Banes 67). The turn-of-the-twentieth-century interpretive dancers are the same ones who Arzu Özturkmen and Mark Franko, in the “Modern Dance” section of this dissertation, call aesthetic dancers, rhythmic dancers, and natural dancers.
Tomko, Banes, and Shelton discuss interpretive dance as a historical dance that for the most part does not contain a continuous performance practice or is used by current choreographers as source material for new dances. They offer insights into which dance elements interpretive dancers, predominantly Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Loïe Fuller, utilize and combine to produce a new Euro-American art form for stage. The interpretive dancers created presentations centered on unique and individual expressions of the internal and the external. For example, Tomko, Banes, and Shelton present interpretive dancers’ process as a discovery of movement through improvisation and imitation, a way to relinquish other established dance practices, and an exploration of the relationship between expression and movement. Duncan, St. Denis, and Fuller formed new concepts of dance through a variety of choreographic methods, including fusing period dance elements with current ideas about spiritual, nature, technology, and foreign cultures. With their new practices, interpretive dancers took on previously male dominated positions as creators and producers of dance before a re-forming female audience, and therefore, countered and contributed to changes in many women’s traditional roles in both dance and society.

American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views

The American Middle Eastern dance writers’ concept of interpretive dance is different from that of the dance scholars’ since they do not refer to a specific collection of early-twentieth-century dancers. Nor do they use it with early-twentieth-century meaning. Instead, the American Middle Eastern dance writers employ interpretive dance to label
their own dance generally in one of two ways. For example, Barbara Siegel (Habiba), in her on-line essay “Raqs Sharqi. Belly Dance: the Oldest Dance,” and Ankhara, on her website, utilizes the term interpretive dance to describe American belly dance and its emphasis on the dancer’s traditional role of utilizing movement to visually represent the music. Most American belly dance teachers teach the expression of various musical qualities through movement as an essential part of Middle Eastern dance.

Other American Middle Eastern dancers employ the term interpretive dance in order to mean non-traditional dance that contains fusions of various dance forms and/or non-dance elements. For instance, during an interview by Desirée for Belly Dance magazine (2008), Frédérique David calls her form “interpretive, avant-garde belly dance” (Desirée 38). Although David does not directly define interpretive dance, she offers some insight though a description of her personal style. David recalls the move away from her foundation, American Tribal Styles (ATS), by changing its costuming (to vintage) and music (to electronic). In addition, she looks outside of belly dance for inspiration, such as turn-of-the-twentieth-century paintings and clothing. Even with the changes, David claims that she maintains the traditional Middle Eastern dance element of improvisation in her performances. Kajira Djoumahna, in a 1998 interview with Barbara Sellers-Young, also uses the term interpretive dance in order to label her non-traditional Middle Eastern dance. Djoumahna states while generally she does not mix various forms, “in my interpretive dancing you will find spontaneous movements from my vocabularies of Egyptian, Turkish, folkloric, American Tribal and Romany dances sometimes”
(Sellers-Young 2008). Like David, her interpretive dance is an improvisational fusion form.

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views**

Anaheed and Tandemonium are the only core EEMED choreographers who acknowledge the term interpretive dance, perhaps because they retain closer ties to traditional Middle Eastern dance. Similar to the American Middle Eastern dance writers and dances, Anaheed and Tandemonium notice both traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance versions. However, they address the traditional version in passing. For example, Anaheed recounts that in her traditional Middle Eastern dance she presents a “musical interpretation… [and] a picture of the music…” (Anaheed 30). It is a circulatory process because music comes into the dancer and she then interprets it back out through her movement. Claudia expands the term to include “interpreting either a mood or a piece of music or something. It doesn’t necessarily have to be experimental. It can be a conventional dance form” (Tandemonium 123).

However, Anaheed and Tandemonium predominantly use interpretive dance as a label for their experimental Middle Eastern dance. In their dances, they maintain the traditional element by exploring it in other facets, such as mime, narratives, characters, and/or emotions. For example, in the program notes of her Loïe Fuller dances, Anaheed calls them an “interpretive historic recreation” (Anaheed 2004, 2005b, 2006) because she is not recreating one of Fuller’s dances, “trying to do an exact archeological reproduction of what she did” (Anaheed 98), or limiting herself to one image as Fuller did with her
dances, such as The Flame, or The Serpent, or The Flower. Instead, Anaheed produces “a little more modern interpretation” (Anaheed 96) by employing “the elements of light and fabric the ways [Fuller] did [but] interpret[ing] different music and express[ing] the movement in my own way” (Anaheed 96). In this case, Anaheed interprets Fuller’s concepts and continues Middle Eastern dance’s interpretation of music. Jean and Claudia note, in When the Gods Came Down Off the Mountain (2003), they maintain at times the traditional concept of visually representing the music. In addition, Claudia states that through movement they were “trying to interpret a mood and a feeling about what it was like for these women and how much courage it took for them to take off their veils – this feeling of freedom and being able to dance and then paying the price for it” (Tandemonium 137). Here, Claudia iterates her view of the importance of emotions as a part of interpretive dance.

While Jean and Claudia assert that the terms experimental Middle Eastern dance and interpretive dance can be exchanged, they also note their differences, and therefore, place interpretive dance within the umbrella of experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, Jean states, she “can see where interpretive dance can be experimental, but experimental is past interpretive” (Tandemonium 46). Claudia adds, “[y]ou’re either interpreting a piece of music, poem, a story, an emotion, a situation and experimental can have no meaning at all…. No narrative. No meaning. It doesn’t have to do any of those things” (Tandemonium 46). Here, Claudia is touching upon an important difference between the two. In her view, interpretive dance contains emotional elements, which
experimental Middle Eastern dance can include as well. However, experimental Middle Eastern dance can also be minimal, abstract, and cite no emotions.

**Conclusion to Interpretive Dance**

The continuation of visually representing music through movement and the push of interpretation into other dance elements, such as non-Middle Eastern music, narratives, and various emotions that are not regularly a part of traditional Middle Eastern dance, demonstrates its dominance and strong identification with Middle Eastern dance in general. In fact, a choreographic analysis would reveal that Anaheed and Tandemonium are not the only core EEMED choreographers to maintain and explore interpretive processes. Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna do as well. They just do not label it as such.

The dance scholars not only add to the discussion data about the history of the term, but also information that shows areas of connection and disconnection between turn-of-the-twentieth-century interpretive dancers and turn-of-the-twenty-first-century American Middle Eastern dancers. As discussed in the “Modern Dance” section of this dissertation, connections between interpretive dancers’ and belly dancers’ process of expressing the internal externally and vice versa occur. Even the dances that contain a more objective structure in their experimental Middle Eastern dances rely upon some internal/external circular process – frequently, the expression of music through the body. In addition, the American Middle Eastern dance community has built itself upon an established system of late-twentieth-century and now twenty-first-century women with
strong personas performing, choreographing, directing, producing, and supporting each other, a legacy started by American interpretive dancers.

Although the core EEMED choreographers live in a socio-political environment very different from that of early-twentieth-century interpretive dancers, both groups share a drive to relinquish current dance practices and to look towards outside sources for inspiration. On one hand, early-twentieth-century interpretive dancers reached outwards for inspiration as well as to develop and produce an American form of dance, which was not wholly dependent upon Europe for its identity. On the other hand, the core EEMED choreographers are already situated in a Middle Eastern dance form, although its degree of Americanization can be debated. They, in turn, look outside the Middle East, often back into American culture for inspiration and connection into who they are as American Middle Eastern dancers. One of the main differences between the core EEMED choreographers and turn-of-the-twentieth-century interpretive dancers is that the core EEMED choreographers start from a different movement form and possess access to different technologies and materials.

**THEATRICAL DANCE**

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers employ theatrical dance in a number of ways. The most common of which is to refer to the presentational proscenium space and may contain either experimental or traditional dance forms. This version is what the dance scholars surveyed mainly discuss. The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance
writers, and the core EEMED choreographers also utilize the term theatrical dance to indicate that choreographers employ production elements inside and outside of a theater venue. In fact, the American Middle Eastern dance writers frequently focus on the changes made to a dance’s music, costume, and movement (often through fusion of other dance forms) and the addition of narratives to Middle Eastern dance outside of the theater setting. However, although the core EEMED choreographers acknowledge experimental Middle Eastern dance does not need to be performed on a theater stage, they discuss at length the changes they make to make-up and costumes in order to withstand theater lighting as well as support their dance’s message and purpose. The core EEMED choreographers also comment on their usage of lighting design, sets, and props in order to enhance their dances.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

The dance scholars surveyed note a variety of theatrical dance definitions that include both traditional and experimental genres. For example, Roger Copeland, in “Theatrical Dance: How Do We Know It When We See It If We Can’t Define It” (1985), presents an overview of how the theatrical dance’s definition has changed over time. He also discusses its numerous current meanings that can overlap, including synthesis of dance and production elements, which he calls “‘theatricality’ in dance” (Copeland 174), mimesis, and a setting that constructs a relationship between performer and “non-participating” audience. The dance scholars addressing Middle Eastern dance, such as Şebnem Selişik Aksan, in “Theatrical Dance in the Republic of Turkey” (1998), Judith
Brin Ingber and Giora Manor, in “Theatrical Dance” in “Israel: An Overview” in The International Encyclopedia of Dance (1998), Metin And, in his entry “Turkey” in The International Encyclopedia of Dance (1998), and in Dances of Anatolia Turkey (1959), predominantly focus on the history of ballet, modern dance, and staged-folk dance’s establishment in twentieth-century Israel and Turkey. Therefore, one can infer Aksan, And, Ingber, and Manor define theatrical dance as umbrella term that means a presentational dance performed by professionals on a proscenium stage and includes typical production elements such as sets, props, costumes, and lighting.

And is the only scholar of Middle Eastern dance surveyed in this dissertation who identifies several types of traditional theatrical dances that are not influenced by Western versions. For instance, some, such as “Rustic farces,” which he also calls “dancing plays” (And 1959, 33), are not performed in a theater context but in homes. Others, including orta oyunu (middle play), also known as meydan oyunu (public square play), and oyun kolu, “a three hour spectacle” (And 1959, 37), are not only performed outside, but at times in their own theater venue. And also notes dance holds various roles in theatrical dance. For example, in rustic farces, dances can acquire a representational quality, such as in Arap, where actors perform a regional dance, the halay, in order to represent traveling. In the orta oyunu, when each principle actor first enters the space, he reveals his character through song and dance. While dance in the rustic farces and the orta oyun is integrated into the play, in the oyun kolu, it consists of its own section.

In addition, And presents “Mimetic Dance” as its own category and distinguishes it from “Theatrical Dance.” However, applying Copeland’s definitions of mimetic dance
as a type of theatrical dance, And’s examples could be categorized as theatrical dance. He divides mimetic dance, which he also labels pantomime characters, into four types – “those representing the actions of animals, those representing the daily routine and work of village life; those personifying nature and those depicting combat (with or without weapons)” (And 1959, 40). And in his encyclopedia entry adds a fifth, courtship. Turkish theatrical dances may include costumes and plots in addition to mimetic movements. Unfortunately, And does not connect mimetic dance to the drama or spectacles addressed above. Nor does he comment whether they are performed on a theater stage. In fact, all the photographs in the text are of men dancing outside.

The scholars of Middle Eastern dances focus mainly on traditional and/or established theatrical dance genres. On rare occasions they identify experimental ones. For example, Ingber and Manor note that in Israel during the 1980s, “several independent choreographers experimented in dance theater: Ruth Ziv-Eyal, Oshra Elkayam, Yaron Margolin, and Ruth Eshel” (Ingber and Manor 533) as well as that the establishment of the Suzanne Dellal Center in 1988, “provided space and support for experimental and nonestablishment dance…” (Ingber and Manor 533). In addition, Aksan declares in Turkey, “there is energy and need to seek and experiment” (Aksan 165) and adds it is being fulfilled by “several experimental groups with dancers who contain some exposure to modern dance technique and who experiment and perform at various venues” (Aksan 165). Unfortunately, the scholars do not indicate the ways in which the choreographers “experiment” with dance theater.
The scholars of Middle Eastern dances not only present information on the history of theatrical dance in the Middle East, but also discuss how choreographers and dancers negotiate between foreign and local dance cultures. For example, the section on “Staged-folk Dance” analyzed the development of this particular genre. Additionally, as previously noted in Part 1 of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” many Israeli and Turkish choreographers reproduce American and European forms of theatrical dance. Several dance scholars also noted the addition of local folk dances and/or folk culture into ballet and modern dance. For example, Aksan states, Dame de Valois added folk dance as a means “to create our national ballet…” (Aksan 164).

The scholars of Middle Eastern dances also touch upon some of the politics behind theatrical dance. For example, Shay in Choreographic Politics, asserts that (staged) folk dance companies are presented and understood as nonpolitical, but are in fact, frequently used by governments for symbolic power. In addition, Farida Fahmy notes Reda was not interested in nationalizing the Reda Troupe, but eventually succumbed to the government’s pressure, mainly because of financial issues. Öztürkmen and Aksan also touch upon some of the politics behind theatrical dance in Turkey. They claim that one way for the early Republic of Turkey to modernize and break away from Ottoman traditions was to look towards “its Turkic roots and to the West…” (Aksan 162), including presenting ballet and modern dance. However, Aksan asserts that these presentations as well as their fusions are filled with tension and controversy. In fact, he observes by the late 1990s, blending ballet with Turkish folkloric dance movements is still not a widely accepted practice in Turkey. He acknowledges on one side, people
encourage the fusion process in order to produce a new identity – in this case, the combination of “local” and “foreign” traditional dance forms. On the other side, people resist blending in order to maintain an individual identity.

Similar to the way in which I previously assessed modern dance and post-modern dance, several of the dance scholars reviewed here also attest to a tradition-of-change within theatrical dance performed on a stage by professional dancers. For instance, Copeland claims that the resurgence of American theatrical dance in the 1980s comes as the result of choreographers breaking away from formalism and anti-theatrical sentiments. Aksan, And, Ingber, and Manor also discuss various ways in which the theatrical dance scenes in Turkey and Israel have changed during the course of the twentieth century due to the introduction of umbrella genres and their sub-genres from the United States, Europe, and Russia, such as ballet, modern, and post-modern dance. The scholars of Middle Eastern dances demonstrate an almost one hundred-year “tradition” of experimenting and fusing “Western” and “local” dance forms. Therefore, theatrical dance in Turkey and Israel can also be viewed as a tradition-of-change.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

Similar to the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and choreographers use theatrical dance as an umbrella term that encompasses both traditional and experimental versions. As previously noted in Part One of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” the American Middle Eastern dance writers do not discuss the genres of modern dance or post-modern dance in the Middle East. However,
when they do note traditional and/or well established Middle Eastern dance genres, such as Robyn Friend and Barbara Siegel (Habiba) do in the section on “Staged-folk Dance,” theatrical dance refers to the venue and changes made to the dance to accommodate the new setting. A few, including the International Academy of Middle Eastern Dance (IAMED), based in Los Angeles, and the Jawaahir Dance Company, based in Minneapolis, also use the term theatrical dance to indicate the performance on a stage in a proscenium theater.

As also addressed in the “Staged-folk Dance” and “Belly Dance” sections of this dissertation, many contest the status of the two genres as traditional Middle Eastern dance genres, and therefore, the theatrical dance versions are also open to debate. For some, such as Shira, who in an on-line review of the video Egyptian Folkloric Dances, notes staged-folk dance is not “the original form…” (Shira 2008a), and therefore, is not the traditional form. However, many view it as a change-in-tradition. Claiming some theatrical Middle Eastern dances as traditional dance breaks them away from not only an unchanging distinctive image, but also from needing to be time tested, local, and participatory. For example, Siegel understands Habib, a member of the Ballet Nationale, views the Tunisia’s the Ballet Nationale dances as a modified tradition. Additionally, although IAMED and the Jawaahir Dance Company do not directly label their theatrical dances “traditional,” they do not sell it as innovative or experimental either.

More often, American Middle Eastern dancers and writers employ the term theatrical dance as an indicator of non-traditional Middle Eastern dance. Some, such as the Jawaahir Dance Company perform their non-traditional theatrical works in theaters
and add stories to their dance. However, most American Middle Eastern dancers are not developing what they label as theatrical dance in a theater venue or by adding production elements. Instead, they use it to indicate a break from traditional Middle Eastern dance and/or the addition of other non-Middle Eastern dance forms into Middle Eastern dance. For example, some such as Bellyqueen Dance Theater, a New York City-based company, Hands of Kali, a Seattle based company who calls themselves, “experimental bellydance theatre” (Hands of Kali), and Damage Control Dance Theater, a San Francisco based company, emphasize their fusion of traditional Middle Eastern dances with other dance genres. Hands of Kali also note their use of non-Middle Eastern music and “dance-stories of goddess myths, tarot card magic and other mystical mysteries” (Hands of Kali). Damage Control Dance Theater takes their ideas a step further by declaring on their website that their “revolutionary dance theater company is destroying the boundaries between fine art, folklore, and funk” (Damage Control Dance Theater 2008).

Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

Besides experimental Middle Eastern dance, theatrical dance is the most common name the core EEMED choreographers use for their genre. Similar to the American Middle Eastern dancers noted above, by using the name theatrical dance, the core EEMED choreographers link with the legacy and popularity it holds with the public and help elevate their dance to the status of “high” art in the eye of American culture. Additionally, as will be discussed, the core EEMED choreographers connect to a variety of already established production techniques and practices developed by other theater
genres, such as ballet and modern dance, including sets, props, costumes, and lighting design.

Although all the core EEMED choreographers acknowledge the term theatrical dance in regards to their experimental Middle Eastern dance, it is the members of Desert Sin – Djahari, Elayssa, and Tatianna – who use the term regularly to specifically label their version of experimental Middle Eastern dance. Elayssa even calls it “theatrical Middle Eastern dance” (Elayssa 18). In fact, Elayssa says she uses theatrical and experimental Middle Eastern dance with about the same frequency, although she states theatrical Middle Eastern dance is a more accessible term for the public. Desert Sin members sell their theatrical dance as a fusion of theater and dance, because they focus on spectacle and storytelling. However, the other core EEMED choreographers also state they dance in theaters and add mimetic and production elements such as props, sets, and lighting to their work. Therefore, one could also label their dances theatrical Middle Eastern dance as well.

Similar to the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers and dancers, the core EEMED choreographers assert that different types of theatrical dance occur. However, they frequently focus on defining a theatrical dance as a dance performed on a stage with a distance, seated, and attentive audience. In fact, Anaheed, Tandemonium, and Elayssa also claim that they find and perform traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance genres in the proscenium theater setting. For example, Anaheed notes the Perfumes of Araby in “their theatrical performances”
(Anaheed 42) would perform theatrical presentations of Middle Eastern, including folkloric dance, belly dance, and experimental dance.

Within the genre of theater dance, the line between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance changes depending upon a person’s viewpoint. For example, as previously noted in Part Two of “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” some of the core EEMED choreographers claim that staged-folk dance and classical dance are traditional and/or modified traditional dance, while others do not. In fact, although Elayssa observes a traditional Middle Eastern dancer can “be viewed as creative and theatrical and still remain traditional” (Elayssa 67), she also questions whether a creative choreographer could work “in a way that is still traditional but has a little creative twist on it…” (Elayssa 67). She answers it can happen, but then Elayssa asks, is “it necessarily experimental” (Elayssa 67)? She replies, it is “hard to say” (Elayssa 67). Elayssa concludes performing traditional dance in a theater used to be experimental, but it is not anymore. She then inquires, “when does something become commonplace rather than experimental” (Elayssa 67)? She answers that it depends on “time and the acceptance of a general public” (Elayssa 67).

Anaheed claims that in the theater venue choreographers can develop unique genres, such as the folkloric dance, which Mahmoud Reda developed by altering folk dance for the proscenium stage. In fact, several core EEMED choreographers make a similar claim about the fact that their experimental work changed when they began creating for EEMED’s black box theater and adding theatrical production elements. For example, Elayssa recalls that performing at EEMED began her usage of lighting design
and entertaining ideas about how she can “choose a costume that may or may not be highlighted using that lighting” (Elayssa 12). In addition, Tatianna and Djahari note starting with EEMED, they began to develop and explore their theatrical side and storylines more.

According to several core EEMED choreographers, theatrical dance can also occur outside of the theater setting. In fact, Elayssa comments the two are “not necessarily the same thing” (Elayssa 67), since experimental Middle Eastern dance can be performed outside of the theater, such as at the beach. Outside the theater, she could make changes to traditional Middle Eastern dance without using “aspects that are normally at my finger tips in a theater” (Elayssa 12). Tandemonium identifies festivals, such as Rakkasah (San Francisco) and Bedouin Bazaar (San Diego) and Djahari and Tatianna, nightclubs. They consider these dances theatrical and experimental because choreographers may add a narrative structure, use non-Middle Eastern music, wear non-Middle Eastern costumes, and fuse other dance movements. The result of the changes is that the dance no longer falls within the categories of belly dance, folk dance, or classical dance.

Jean and Claudia not only define theatrical dance as a setting and/or the addition of productions, but also as mimesis. They label When the Gods Came Down From Off of the Mountain a theatrical dance, because at points their moves “were more mime in a way; more acting out rather than dance movements necessarily” (Tandemonium 138). Djahari and Elayssa also claim that in their theatrical dance they fuse dance, drama, and theater production elements in order to create characters and tell stories. In fact, all of
EEMED choreographers at times add narrative, characters, acting, and mimesis into their experimental Middle Eastern dance.

Anaheed utilizes the term theatrical in a different way from the dance scholars and the other core EEMED choreographers; she uses it to indicate that she has taken some kind of liberty. For instance, in *The Lotus and the Cross*, Anaheed comments the male dancer, “a theatricalized version of an accolade or a monk who hasn’t taken vows yet” (Anaheed 76), wears a Cassock or *galabeya*, “a simple long gown with the cross, the sash and the cape is kind of a generic traveling cape” (Anaheed 76). The dance is theatrical not only because it is a narrative and she is presenting it in a theater, but because the movements and costumes are not “a realistic” or “an accurate” portrayal of a monk. In fact, using her previous definition, one could label the monk’s costume an interpretation.

The core EEMED choreographers are following a trend of situating Middle Eastern dance on stage both in the United States and most of the Middle East, but with a unique approach. They are not participating with folk, classical, or belly dancers who “re-locate” these forms on stage or with ballet, modern dance, or post-modern dancers who bring these genres into parts of the Middle East. The core EEMED choreographers do not employ ballet or modern dance as the base of their experimental Middle Eastern dance, although they might incorporate them. Instead, they come from a folk dance, ethnic dance, classical dance, and/or belly dance background. The core EEMED choreographers also demonstrate a tendency to add elements of non-Western and non-Middle Eastern dance forms as well as American non-dance culture.
The core EEMED choreographers do not fuse a traditional Middle Eastern dance with an American theater dance form in order to produce a new genre, although at times they may utilize elements from one or another in their experimental Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers are not producing a complete fusion of dance and theater. For example, dialogue and speech are almost never present outside of lyrics and the rare scream. Instead, they focus on adding “non-speech” element of theater, such as narratives, character development, mimesis, props, and lighting design into their dance foundation. Nor are the core EEMED choreographers pushing the boundaries of narrative.195

Instead, the core EEMED choreographers incorporate American theater dance that accommodates different genres and contains a history of a variety of ideas, practices, and presentations. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers focus upon whichever production elements will best express the intent of their specific dance. However, after almost ten years of performing at EEMED, the core EEMED choreographers have not settled on one way of using the space, lighting design, sets, and props although some of them may possess repeating tendencies. Instead, they continue to produce a sense of play within the theater dance space.

Conclusion to Theatrical Dance

The prevalence of the term theatrical dance to mean a variety of dance genres, both new and old in American dance and American Middle Eastern dance demonstrates its strength and popularity in American culture. Even in the Middle East the term
theatrical dance generally refers to some type of Western dance. However, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers use the term theatrical dance to indicate that a dance is in a new location or is a new genre. They hold differing opinions over whether “traditional” dances on stage are a new form or not. Nevertheless, in the view of American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers, theatrical dance and experimental Middle Eastern dance as closely linked, and sometimes are the same genre.

FUSION DANCE

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers all use the term fusion to describe a process and/or the end result of two or more dance genres or dance and non-dance elements coming together. A few of them utilize the more common theoretical term, hybridity, to label fusion in dance. However, the dance scholars surveyed here do not use fusion dance as a genre label, while the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers do. In fact, it has been gaining recognition in the American Middle Eastern dance community over the past ten to fifteen years. For example, American Middle Eastern dancers add the word fusion to a dance’s name or combine two names. In addition, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers, like the other genres discussed up to this point in Part Two, include both traditional and experimental versions.
**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Previous sections of this dissertation contained Ruth Eshel, Judith Brin Ingber and Giora Manor, Susan Bauer, Şebnem Selişik Aksan, Anthony Shay, and Farida Fahmy’s discussions of fusion processes in Middle Eastern dance. However, they rarely utilized terms, such as fusion or hybrid. Only Shay, in *Choreographic Politics*, labeled Mahmoud Reda’s dance a “hybrid” (Shay 1999, 144). Instead, the scholars of Middle Eastern dances use words, including “blend,” “mix,” “link,” and “adapt” to describe the ways in which Middle Eastern dancers merge dance forms. The infrequency of fusion or hybrid to label and/or describe various genres in the Middle East may be due to the newness of the term in dance scholarship. However, political reasons exist as well. For example, if Farida Fahmy, in *The Creative Development of Mahmoud Reda*, called Reda’s work fusion or hybrid, she would have undermined his purpose of developing a national dance form of Egypt.

Many of the scholars of Middle Eastern dances offer very little choreographic analysis on the process of fusing local dances with European and American ones. They at least note some choreographers fused folk dance into ballet and modern dance while others developed a new genre, staged-folk dance. Shay and Fahmy offer more specifics. For example, Shay indicates that within (staged) folk dance, choreographers construct various degrees of fusion between traditional dance and Western staging techniques. Fahmy offers specific details about the choices Reda made in developing his personal style. For example, she recalls he made decisions about which costumes, jewelry, and movements of a folk dance’s were kept or discarded. Fahmy also presents examples of
the ways in which Reda altered Egyptian folk dance, such as placing them on a proscenium stage, adding line formations, floor patterns, and choreography, and creating costumes and make-up that worked for stage lighting.

Janet O’Shea, in “Unbalancing the Authentic/Partnering Tradition: Shobana Jeyasingh’s Romance... With Footnotes,” (1998), Valarie Briginshaw, in “Hybridity and Nomadic Subjectivity in Shobana Jeyasingh’s Duets with Automobiles” from Dance, Space and Subjectivity (2001), and Joan Erdman, in “Performance as Translation: Uday Shankar in the West” (1987), also offer specific examples of the ways in which fusion processes can work in dance. In fact, they employ several different terms for what I am generically calling “fusion” dance. O’Shea calls Shobana Jeyasingh’s work “fusion” and Briginshaw, “hybrid.” Erdman uses “translation” to label Uday Shankar’s dances. Regardless of which term they prefer, O’Shea, Briginshaw, and Erdman identify elements from different sources coming together to form a new style.

Both O’Shea and Briginshaw describe Shobana Jeyasingh’s dance a “fusion” and “mixture” respectively, of “of vocabulary from contemporary dance and the traditional, Indian classical dance form of Bharata Natyam” (Briginshaw 97). O’Shea and Briginshaw identify several elements that Jeyasingh maintains and changes in Bharata Natyam and those from contemporary dance, such as Cunningham technique, she adds. The result of which is a new dance. In fact, Briginshaw claims that Jeyasingh is able to create a new dance without completely moving away from Bharata Natyam. Briginshaw concentrates not only on how Jeyasingh’s pieces are the result of two dance genres colliding, but also demonstrates the fluidity of cultural boundaries. She explores the ways
in which Jeyasingh develops the notion of an “in-between space of hybridity” (Briginshaw 101) to produce new meanings for both the East and the West. Jeyasingh’s work is not the result of her adding one culture’s dance to another, but connecting the two.

Erdman offers a different perspective of “fusion” dance with her utilization of the term “translation” to describe Uday Shankar’s modern Indian dance in early-twentieth-century Europe. In fact, Erdman makes a distinction between the terms “translation” and “hybridization.” In a footnote, she writes, “[t]ranslation implies moving from one language to another; creolization implies the creation of a mediate language…” (Erdman 84). According to Erdman, Shankar was not trying to produce dance for both European and Indian audiences, which she states is the purpose of hybridity. Nor was he translating an established classical Indian dance onto the western stage. Moreover, Erdman writes, “[s]uch traditions are perhaps untranslatable” (Erdman 84). Erdman emphasizes that Shankar made choices based upon learning and understanding both Indian and European audiences, and therefore, his eclectic and creative endeavors enabled him to translate successfully Indian dance onto the western stage “for the west and in India for westernized audiences composed of elites and aristocrats” (Erdman 86).

As Indian dancers in Europe, although at different ends of the twentieth century, Jeyasingh and Shankar share some similar traits. For example, they both brought Indian dance into new settings and made decisions about which elements to keep or discard. Shankar took it onto proscenium stages of Europe and the United States, while Jeyasingh at times moved dance out of the theater into areas in which one generally does not find
dance, like office buildings. They also altered their music. Shankar modified the rhythm of the music and used various distinctive melodies in order to reach his audiences. Jeyasingh took a more fusion approach by alternating between classical Indian and contemporary British music. Both of them maintained Indian-based costumes in order to signify “Indian-ness.”

Jeyasingh and Shankar also added components of their period’s contemporary modern dance to their concept of Indian dance. For example, inspired by Cunningham’s formalism, Jeyasingh removes the narrative structure and meaning of Bharata Natyam’s abhinaya and implements stoic emotional expressions. She also explores the use of touch and weight between her dancers and their space. Dancers Shankar met in Europe persuaded him to present Indian dance on stage. He learned and then drew on early-twentieth-century western technologies and stagecraft. Although Shankar did not want to use modern dance movements in his Indian dance, he was influenced by its aesthetics of individual creativity and its purposes to present dance not as only entertainment, but as art and communication. In fact, at one point, Erdman calls Shankar’s style “modern Indian dance” (Erdman 73).

Differences between Jeyasingh and Shankar occur in their dance background, but also in how each of them approaches tradition. Jeyasingh was trained in Bharata Natyam, while Shankar drew from several Indian sources which included Indian images of themselves and European concepts of India. Jeyasingh broke away from her strong tradition and mixed in “Western” contemporary dance. Shankar formed his dance by adding “Western” dance production elements with his varied knowledge of Indian dance
and only later decided to study a traditional Indian dance. Their individual development can be observed in how Jeyasingh and Shankar both used mudras, but in different ways. For instance, Jeyasingh abandoned Bharata Natyam’s meaning of mudras in order to create a formalist dance. Initially, Shankar did not use the linguistic meanings of kathakali mudras, but relied upon poses and gestures that his “Western” audiences could read as Indian.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

The American Middle Eastern dance writers show the term fusion is a common label and process in their community. Alexandra King, in “Tradition vs Fusion” (2006), is the only writers surveyed who defines the term fusion dance, while Sharon Moore, in her on-line essay, “The Elusive Definition of Tribal Bellydance,” (written in 2004 and updated in 2007), and Kajira Djoumahna, in her on-line description of the dances forms taught at Tribal Fest 8 in 2008, present examples. They all indicate that fusion is typically a mixture of two or more dance genres.

In their articles, Moore and Djoumahna list several types of non-traditional Middle Eastern fusion dance within the American Middle Eastern dance community. In their examples, one can identify two ways fusion is made known through genres’ names. One is the use of the term “fusion” in the name itself. For example, Moore identifies tribal fusion and fusion belly dance and Djoumahna, tribal fusion belly dance and world fusion belly/dance. However, in the twenty-first century, the American Middle Eastern dance community readily employs only tribal fusion in its lexicon. The second
way is in the joining of two dance genres names. For instance, Moore identifies tribaret\textsuperscript{204} and Djoumahna, Gothic Belly/Dance, Vaudeville-influenced Belly/Dance, and Burlesque-or-influenced Belly/Dance.\textsuperscript{205} Their names indicate that the American Middle Eastern dance community is increasingly revealing and pointing to the fusion process occurring within these dance forms. It can also be noted in the fact that in the late-1990s, the American Middle Eastern dance community started using the term Turkish-American belly dance instead of and/or in conjunction with belly dance to differentiate it from Egyptian belly dance coming into the United States and to refer to its fusion history.

King finds fusion processes in the roots of many traditional dance forms, even though her title indicates that she distinguishes tradition from fusion. In fact, through her examples, King notes dancers in all parts of the world have “experimented” with dance elements from various cultures and which resulted in the creation of a new dance. The genres possess names that do not reference fusion processes, such as Flamenco, Jazz, Rembetika, and Bandar-e. Through historical examples of fusion dance traditions, King is able to establish fusion dance with a sense of legitimacy in the face of American Middle Eastern dance traditionalists who “often abhor the idea of fusion…” (King 55).

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views**

The core EEMED choreographers use the term fusion to describe a process and/or their experimental Middle Eastern dance.\textsuperscript{206} In fact, they define fusion dance similarly to Elayssa – as “taking two separate defined styles and pulling attributes from both to create a new style” (Elayssa 24).\textsuperscript{207} Although the core EEMED choreographers predominantly
mention bringing together two specific genres, they also note it can be more than two. Additionally, Anaheed and Elayssa assert that choreographers can fuse non-dance genres with Middle Eastern dance. For example, when discussing a show that Anaheed, Tatianna, Djahari, Marguerite, and I did before EEMED started, Anaheed recalls we wore angel wings with our bedlah outfits. She states, “we were angelic Christmas belly dancers” (Anaheed 42). In this instance, the dance is a fusion of American belly dance and Christmas themes. While discussing her dance Hypothermia (2002), Elayssa also indicates that fusion can be more than just mixing dance genres. She states, “I didn’t feel so much like I was fusing different styles of dance so much as I was fusing other elements with dance” (Elayssa 150), such as acting and mime.

Anaheed and Tatianna distinguish traditional and experimental types of fusion. In their view, traditional fusion refers to common combinations of dances within the American Middle Eastern dance community. For example, dances mixing Spanish, East Indian, and/or African with Middle Eastern dance are widespread because of the genres’ close connection to each other stylistically, historically, and culturally. In Anaheed and Tatianna’s view, the purpose of experimental Middle Eastern dance is to produce new, different, and challenging works by combining various elements unexpectedly. Therefore, Anaheed says, “[f]usion that we do in experimental dance, I think is edgier, sharper, and sometimes more fearful…. I think it can inspire people to be uncomfortable” (Anaheed 25). It also may not “blend seamlessly” (Anaheed 26). As an example, Tatianna identifies Desert Sin’s Undulating Thru the Cacti, in which they fuse country-line dance and belly dance in the beginning of the dance and burlesque with belly dance
in the middle. She states, “combining the burlesque with belly dance was kind of experimental. I won’t say it was at the top of the experimental boundaries because there had been other dancers I’ve seen combine the two as well” (Tatianna 108). However, the fusion of country-line dancing is not common in the American Middle Eastern dance community.

Djahari perceives fusion dance “as experimental because it’s not traditional” (Djahari 15). However, she also observes gothic belly dance, what she calls “gothic tribal fusion” (Djahari 24), and Nazemi’s Persian ballet fall in between tradition and experimentation. In both examples, Djahari notes these fusion forms were initially experimental, but over time they became a genre and labeled with a proper a name. In fact, she claims that Nazemi has established his style. She says, “he’s not continuing to do new things. He’s been doing this for a very long time” (Djahari 15). In Djahari’s view, Gothic belly dance and Nazemi’s Persian ballet may be too new for her to view them with regards to traditional Middle Eastern dance, but instead, they are established and no longer experimental.

While discussing specific example of fusion in their some of their EEMED dances, Djahari and Anaheed distinguish between fusion and experimental Middle Eastern dance. For instance, in The Lotus and the Cross, Anaheed comments she “was blurring the edges of what was East Indian and what was belly dancing into something that kind of worked as a hybrid” (Anaheed 76) through her costume and movement. She lists her experimental elements as including non-Middle Eastern music, symbols, a message, and a narrative. While talking about Undulating Thru the Cacti, Djahari notes
its fusion elements, such as its seamless fusion between country line and belly dance in the opening and burlesque and belly dance later. However, the whole dance is not seamless. Djahari keeps the different sections separate because the dance is “very much about separation and drawing lines” (Djahari 55). She also perceives Undulating Thru the Cacti as experimental Middle Eastern dance because of elements, such as nudity, statements about nudity, and narrative structure.

Djahari and Elayssa claim that different degrees of fusion exist. For instance, they note Nazemi mastered both Persian dance and ballet, and therefore, is able to join them seamlessly. Nazemi’s fusion is different from Djahari and Elayssa’s element of flair and/or essence, in which they are not trying to create a complete fusion between two forms, but are adding a few fundamentals elements of one dance into another. For example, in Sacramental Skins and Undulating Thru the Cacti, they mix elements that “Western” audiences can read as “Indian,” but are not from a traditional form. For instance, in Sacramental Skins, they would start with belly dance moves and add elements that Djahari and Elayssa associate with India, such as a flat foot on a raised leg, head slides, and hand movements that looked Indian but were not specific mudras. Their flair elements differ from the experimental ones, which Djahari lists as the blue body paint, the non-Middle Eastern music, the goddess characters, and the wide range of emotions.

Although all of the EEMED choreographers refer to fusion in their experimental Middle Eastern dance, only Djahari and Elayssa comment on their choreographic processes. For example, Djahari notes for An Ode to Silent Film, she and Elayssa’s
process was to create “the twenties stylized thing first and then put the Middle Eastern on top of it” (Djahari 108-109). Elayssa also identifies two difference ways of fusing dance – what I label simultaneous and sequential fusion processes. One is “mixing different aspects into one idea” (Elayssa 24), such as “Middle Eastern hips with Indian inspired arm placements” (Elayssa 78). She describes simultaneous movement – when two movements are performed at the same time. The two movements frequently occur in different parts of the body, and less frequently, in the same body part. The other is “switching back and forth” (Elayssa 24). Sequential fusion is when dancers alternate from one dance’s movement to another. Generally, fusion dances combine both sequential and simultaneous processes.

Djahari and Elayssa use the term fusion dance to label and market their experimental Middle Eastern dance work. However, they are reluctant to do so, because as Djahari and Elayssa both assert, it is overused and its meaning is vague. Fusion’s increased visibility is due to the surge in popularity of the term tribal fusion dance in the American Middle Eastern dance community. Additionally, the name does not accurately describe the core EEMED choreographers’ dance, because as Djahari comments, “I feel like I’m not one fusion. If I’m a fusion it’s an ongoing fusion” (Djahari 17). Djahari and Elayssa, along with the other core EEMED choreographers, are not developing a specific type of fusion, such as Persian ballet or gothic belly dance. Instead, they add elements of different forms into different dances at different times and for different reasons. Therefore, the core EEMED choreographers view their work as predominantly experimental Middle Eastern dance with perhaps some fusion elements. Even though
Djahari retains an aversion to the label fusion dance, she acknowledges she utilizes it to brand her work. Djahari says, “I usually say to other people we are a theatrical dance company, Middle Eastern fusion, and if they ask what we fuse it with, I say, ‘with everything’” (Djahari 22). Djahari claims that people understand what fusion dance means and are not as afraid of it as a dance labeled experimental.

**Conclusion to Fusion Dance**

The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers demonstrate different fusion processes. For example, the American Middle Eastern dancers and the core EEMED choreographers may at times fuse two genres that they have mastered together, as Jeyasingh does. However, in many instances, they have not mastered both dances, but instead, add various elements of a dance into their Middle Eastern dance. In addition, when the core EEMED choreographers fuse the same two genres in two different pieces, they tend to mix different elements each time, and therefore, have not developed a personal style as Jeyasingh has. In fact, for the core EEMED choreographers, fusion is often not the focus on their experimental Middle Eastern dance, but instead, it is one of many processes.

More often, the American Middle Eastern dancers and the core EEMED choreographers fuse various elements from a variety dance forms, much like Shankar did. However, unlike Shankar, the American Middle Eastern dancers and the core EEMED choreographers do not look to produce an “authentic” Middle Eastern dance form. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers comment they do not always look towards the
same genres to fuse or maintain the same traditional Middle Eastern dance elements. The American Middle Eastern dancers and the core EEMED choreographers also note fusion elements can come from outside of dance, most notably from theater. Moreover, the fusion of theatrics, particularly the venue and production elements, into Middle Eastern dance is an identifying marker of the experimental Middle Eastern dance performed at EEMED and is how the core EEMED choreographers differentiates themselves from other experimental dances in the American Middle Eastern dance community.

The dance scholars addressed here explore Indian choreographers’ interaction with “Western” culture. Briginshaw, in particular discusses the space Jeyasingh created between the East and West with her hybrid dance form. A similar position can be recognized in the fusion dances of European and American immigrants to Israel and those by core EEMED choreographers and American Middle Eastern dancers. However, unlike Jeyasingh, Shankar, and Europeans and Americans immigrating to Israel, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dancers are not immigrants or travelers producing dance in another nation. Instead, they explore and create in a space that is inhabited by an almost one hundred and fifty year history of Middle Eastern immigration and fusion of Middle Eastern dance with American culture.

**ALTERNATIVE DANCE**

The core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers in the early twentieth-first century took a popular descriptive term and turned it into a genre label for their experimental Middle Eastern dance. In fact, it is the only genre
addressed in Part Two that does not contain a traditional Middle Eastern dance counterpart, in larger part because the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers commonly use it to indicate that a dance is not normal or common, and therefore, not traditional Middle Eastern dance. Additionally, the fact that alternative dance is the only genre term cited in this dissertation that dance scholars discussed here do not employ, once again points to the distance between them and the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

When on the rare occasion the American Middle Eastern dance writers use the term alternative dance, they refer to some type of American tribal dance. For example, in “The Elusive Definition of Tribal Bellydance,” Moore places alternative bellydance/alternative tribal within the sub-genre of tribal bellydance. She defines it as including “slow, tension-filled snakelike movement punctuated by pop n’ lock stylings from breakdancing” and music “from world fusion to dark industrial” (Moore). Additionally, Moore identifies Rachel Brice’s The Indigo Belly Dance Company as a primary example. Although Moore holds a specific vision of alternative dance, she also employs it in a more general capacity. For example, Moore hopes more dancers will use the term Fusion Bellydance, along with Alternative Bellydance and/or Alternative Tribal, as generic labels for dances they are unsure of where they “fit into the ‘grand scheme’” (Moore). Especially, since they leave “the most room for interpretation and exploration
without tethering oneself to a specific stylistic category, and avoids adding to the
terminology confusion which already exists” (Moore).

In her on-line article, “Styles of Belly Dance,” Shira does not use alternative as a
genre label but as a descriptive term in her section on U.S Tribal dance. Nevertheless,
like Moore, in Shira’s view, alternative means not the norm and goes against the
common. She writes,

U.S. Tribal offers dancers the freedom to employ their own creativity and
create their own dance, costuming look, etc. within a loosely-defined framework
that offers an alternative to the ‘glamorous’ image conveyed by beads and sequins… (Shira 2008b).

Tribal’s alternative image is due to in part to its outgrowth of the San Francisco counter-
culture of the 1960s and its continuation by those who factor in their own sense of
creativity and fusion approaches.

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views**

Djahari and Tatianna acknowledge the term alternative dance in order to indicate
that a dance is “not the norm” (Djahari 53, Tatianna 38). They also use it to label their
experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, Tatianna says when Desert Sin first
began dancing in Hollywood clubs, they billed themselves “as an alternative belly dance
group” (Tatianna 56). Djahari remarks she relies upon the public’s familiarity with it as a
part of her marketing campaign for Desert Sin. Djahari states, “[i]t’s a safe word,”
which lets people know “they’re going to see something possibly new…. something that
isn’t the norm” (Djahari 53). In fact, Tatianna and Djahari both comment that when
people see experimental Middle Eastern dance, but do not know what to call it, they use the term alternative dance.

Tatianna differentiates alternative dance from experimental Middle Eastern dance. During her interview, Tatianna comments that she detects different levels of experimentation within EEMED – modern, experimental, and alternative dance. As addressed in the “Modern Dance” section of this dissertation, Tatianna asserts that traditional Middle Eastern dance can be modern – it is not too old or too outrageous. She uses the term experimental Middle Eastern dance in order to indicate that a dancer is “pushing limits or expanding limits” (Tatianna 20) and is producing the unexpected. Tatianna says that alternative dance is edgy, “pulling out the whips, [the] chains, the swords, the nakedness, the aggression, [and] getting people to freak out…” (Tatianna 33). According to Tatianna, similarly to experimental Middle Eastern dance, alternative dance also pushes the limits of Middle Eastern dance, but in more aggressive, dark, and sexual ways.

Tatianna identifies her work as experimental and alternative. She says, “I think it’s experimental because I try to put different things together. I try to combine different costumes [and] different types of music that people might not automatically put together…” (Tatianna 42). Tatianna also views her dance as alternative because of the edgy elements such as sexuality and dark emotion, which she explores. For example, in her solo The Challenge (2003), Tatianna notes the alternative elements are “the stripper side of the song, darker side of the songs, telling the crowd to fuck off, and cutting at myself” (Tatianna 89) and the experimental ones include playing a dual personality and
combining a variety of Gothic songs. In Tatianna’s view, alternative and experimental Middle Eastern dance can occur within the same dance. The difference between the two is a matter of degree. While experimental dance is unexpected, so is alternative dance, but alternative dance focuses on dark, sexual, and/or aggressive themes.

As with many core EEMED choreographers, Tatianna employs whichever name she thinks her audience will understand. For example, Tatianna uses alternative dance when she thinks they will not understand the label experimental dance. However, when Tatianna believes they will understand, then she employs experimental dance. She also says, “I might use the word experiment to describe what I mean by alternative” (Tatianna 11). Here, Tatianna demonstrates the interchangeability of the two terms. Nevertheless, Tatianna contends that she “would rather say that I’m doing an alternative dance than experimental dance” (Tatianna 21), because she thinks of herself as edgy and likes “to put people out of their comfort zone” (Tatianna 21).

**Conclusion to Alternative Dance**

All of the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers surveyed use the term alternative dance in order to communicate something is different from the norm (a.k.a. belly dance). However, what comprises alternative dance differs between the two groups. For example, the American Middle Eastern dance writers refer to alternative dance within the American Tribal umbrella, while Tatianna and Djahari employ it as another name for their experimental Middle Eastern dance, which contains a foundation in American-Turkish belly dance.
Nevertheless, both the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers rely upon the position of the term alternative dance within American popular culture as a marker for something that is not mainstream. For example, alternative rock musicians still associate themselves with rock, a popular music genre, but simultaneously place themselves in opposition to its mainstream version. One can also find this position in the phrase alternative medicine, which people use in opposition to mainstream “Western” medicine. The core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers draw from the impressions that their dance is different, not conventional, out in the fringe, and intellectual, but yet still accessible and connectable to what the general public already knows.

**CONCLUSION TO PART TWO**

Part Two of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” demonstrates that the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers use a variety of pre-existing and new terms, such as interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance, to label their experimental and non-traditional Middle Eastern dance, respectively. Incidentally, the dance scholars surveyed do not use interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and/or alternative dance to label experimental dance. Even the “new” fusion styles are not designated as experimental dance. However, on occasion, they find an experimental dance within one of these genres. The core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers express with these four genres that those which pre-exist, including interpretive
dance, theatrical dance, and fusion dance, contain both traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance versions, while the new one, alternative dance, only includes experimental Middle Eastern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers gravitate to familiar terms, in which they connect with certain ideas, but also communicate what they are doing with the public. For example, by using the term interpretive dance, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dancers employ an uncommon term, but still established in dance scholarship, in a new way – to expand the relationship between improvisational dance and music to include also narratives, characters, and emotions. With theatrical dance, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers connect into the American public’s association of it with a particular setting, production elements, and “art.” They also participate in the construction of the genre fusion dance, which has gained popularity since the late-1990s in the World dance and music market. Additionally, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers link alternative dance’s position in American culture to the idea that something goes against convention and the norm.

The core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers as a group not only use a variety of genre terms instead of experimental Middle Eastern dance, but individual core EMEED choreographers do as well. Part of their usage of multiple terms is due to the negative image the core EEMED choreographers perceive the public having of experimental dance. However, the numerous terms demonstrate that
they are still exploring and developing their dance, and therefore, do not contain a set terminology. While some may interchange one of the four genre terms with experimental Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers also employ interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance as a sub-genre of experimental Middle Eastern dance. With the different terms, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers claim that they are doing a specific version of experimental Middle Eastern dance and incorporate several within the same dance. Additionally, the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers can maintain a sense of individuality and keep experimental Middle Eastern dance unstable, fluid, and moving.

**CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER**

“Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” offers insight into the core EEMED choreographers’ discursive practices of experimental Middle Eastern dance genres and demonstrate the difficulty of labeling new dance. It also shows the fluidity with which the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers surveyed employ modern dance, post-modern dance, interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance, as umbrella terms, genre labels, and/or modifiers. The genres all share common choreographic practices that foster a philosophy of “change.” This chapter also illustrates that although choreographers may work to break away from and/or sidestep their traditions or foundations, they also continue some aspects. Whether a dance is viewed as a
continuation of tradition (change-in-tradition), participating in a tradition-of-change, or forming a new genre, is a matter of degree and a person’s viewpoint.

Part One of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” and Part Two of “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres” share the topic of lines of flight and the formation of new assemblages. In fact, the modern belly dance genres that the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers predominantly discuss here are newer versions of established commercial belly dance and cabaret belly dance discussed in the previous chapter. The focus on continuation of a genre in new ways is different from the modern dancers and post-modern dancers’ rhetoric in which dancers assert that they are producing unique dances, which are not connected to previous genres or styles. The dance scholars also examine what elements do and do not link various dancers within a specific genre term, modern dance and post-modern dance, and first and second period post-modern dance. The scholars of Middle Eastern dance are also interested in the development of new genres. However, they focus on the idea that breaks in modern and post-modern dances in Turkey and Israel predominately come as the result of the introduction of genres and personal styles from the United States and Europe.

In Part Two of “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” the core EEMED choreographers use the genre terms, interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and alternative dance, in order to document their break away from traditional and established Middle Eastern dance genres and to claim they are producing unique dances. They are not using the labels of their current era, as we see with the genres modern dance and post-modern dance. Instead, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core
EEMED choreographers look elsewhere to find terms that express what developing. They rely upon three existing genre terms, interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, and a new one, alternative dance.

The core EEMED choreographers do not settle down long enough to use interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, or alternative dance to regularly label their experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, several American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers do not employ the term alternative dance as a means to refer to a choreographic process, but instead, use it to indicate that they are not creating the common and norm, in their cases, traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers are not producing one version of a break from traditional dance.

Other American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers utilize terms that reference their choreographic processes. For example, some of the core EEMED choreographers assert that they are continuing a prominent traditional Middle Eastern dance trait in new areas. However, they have not developed a particularly stable assemblage of a genre or personal style. The core EEMED choreographers’ definition differs from dance scholars who note a specific version of interpretive dance that developed out of lines of flight at the turn of the twentieth century.

The American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers also acknowledge fusion can develop into an assemblage that sometimes becomes a traditional genre. However, in their experimental Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers use it as a process to create work and not to develop a stable genre or even
personal style. The dance scholars also focus on the fusion of two genres, or in the mixing of ideas from two different cultures, connecting assemblages. Although the scholars of Indian dance do not directly state the fusion results in a genre, they do imply the chorographers under discussion have produced personal styles, and therefore, a fairly stable assemblage. The scholars of Middle Eastern dance produce similar results with their examinations, except for the formation of staged-folk dance genre.

Theatrical dance is a complex and varied umbrella term, and therefore, can be used in a variety of contexts. If one looks at the history of American modern dance and post-modern dance history, modern dancers produced within theater dance. However, many first period post-modern dancers rejected and left the theater, while many second period post-modern dancers have “returned.” The American Middle Eastern dancers and the core EEMED chorographers are connecting into the established assemblage of theater as a venue and/or production elements. In fact, one could call, as many of the core EEMED chorographers do, the dances performed at EEMED, a fusion of Middle Eastern dance and theater dance.
SECTION TWO
CHAPTER FOUR
DEFINING TRADITIONAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE

In the past two chapters, I analyzed terms that the core EEMED choreographers repeatedly used to label their specific traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance genres. However, during their interviews, they predominantly employed traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance as umbrella terms and offered different insights from their discussions of the individual genres alone. The dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers surveyed do not readily discuss the term traditional Middle Eastern dance as an umbrella term. Instead, one needs to examine the ways in which they present specific genres. The next two chapters analyze definitions of traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance, respectively, and continue to contextualize the core EEMED choreographers’ concepts within dance scholarship and the American Middle Eastern dance writings.

The core EEMED choreographers offer a dynamic definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance. For example, in the previous chapters, they present variant and invariant examples of traditional Middle Eastern dance genres. However, when discussing traditional Middle Eastern dance as an umbrella term, the core EEMED choreographers predominantly focus on changes-in-tradition and not invariant images. In addition, although they distinguish traditional and non-traditional/experimental Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers base their definitions upon parameters different
from those of the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers who contrast them primarily with an East/West division. Instead, the core EEMED choreographers differentiate based upon a series of contrasts, including rules/no rules, regulations/no regulations, boundaries/no boundaries, established/not established, and repetition/change.

This chapter then investigates the core EEMED choreographers’ views and concerns of experimental Middle Eastern dance becoming a tradition. On one hand, it explores the core EEMED choreographers’ rhetoric that expresses their interests in preventing experimental Middle Eastern dance from becoming an established genre. On the other hand, the chapter examines their actions, if they have not already, could over time produce a stable definition of experimental Middle Eastern dance as genre. In addition, it analyzes the core EEMED choreographers’ development, or lack of, personal styles.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Though Eric Hobsbawm, in his “Introduction” to *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), does not analyze dance in particular, his different classifications of “tradition” offers terms to do so. Hobsbawm proposes the idea that “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origins and sometimes invented” (Hobsbawm 1). Therefore, he coins the term “invented tradition” in order to include

both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years in some cases – and establishing themselves with great rapidity (Hobsbawm 1)
in post-industrial revolution Europe. Hobsbawm also observes different processes, which
develop invented traditions. For instance, he claims that during “adaption,” practitioners
take established elements and place them in new locations and/or employ them for new
purposes. Hobsbawm also asserts that new traditions can “be readily graphed on old
ones” (Hobsbawm 6) and old ones can be borrowed, modified, and revived, often for
nationalistic purposes. He contends that the continuation of traditional elements is so
strong that practitioners who look to break away from a tradition (a more experimental
rhetorical idea) establish continuity with a past in order to legitimize their actions and/or
produce group cohesion. In other words, for Hobsbawm, everything either is a type of
tradition or contains a strong connection with a tradition.

Hobsbawm also examines differences between “invented” and “genuine”
traditions and observes genuine traditions “were specific and strongly binding social
practices… [while invented traditions] tended to be quite unspecific and vague as to the
nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership they inculcate”
(Hobsbawm 10). Additionally, Hobsbawm differentiates “tradition” from “custom.” He
asserts that the typical image of tradition is of an invariant and fixed culture – a distinct
and static image – while custom is not opposed to change and innovation, as long as it
does not affect or disrupt, but instead, continues precedents already established.
Unfortunately, Hobsbawm does not examine how many elements a custom needs to
continue in order to maintain its precedents. The lack of further investigation is
regrettable, because as shown in the previous two chapters of this dissertation, it was in
ambiguous areas that practitioners produced a variety of shifting meanings and ideologies.

Only a few of the dance scholars surveyed present traditional Middle Eastern dance as a variant tradition by examining its history and social context. For example, Najwa Adra, in “Dance: A Visual Marker of Qabili Identity in Highland Yemen,” and Susan Kenyon, in “Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan,” describe specific variant “dance” traditions that contain long histories, no distinguishable links to an originating form, and even with the modifications, no alteration of its distinctive image.

Scholars of Middle Eastern dance, such as Farida Fahmy, Anthony Shay, Judith Ingber, Giora Manor, Ruth Eshel, Avner Bahat, Naomi Bahat-Ratzon, and Kemal Özturkmen discuss variant aspects of staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance, but do not include them within the traditional Middle Eastern dance umbrella, although they note some practitioners do. These scholars of Middle Eastern dance occasionally call them “invented” traditions, because they observed, if not participated in, the quick development and construction of staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance with foreign influences and roots traceable to “genuine” traditions. In addition, staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance formed in the twentieth century, are supported by an upper class, state, and/or foreigners (as in the case of raqs al sharqi), and contain a wide range of participants, has led to the production of documentation, both written and oral, which emphasizes the development by influential individuals and groups more than genuine and/or original traditional dance genres.
Many of the dance scholars present examples of invariant traditional Middle Eastern dance. Their statements reflect the fact that they have difficulty analyzing alteration made to traditional Middle Eastern dance alterations because of a lack of documentation, recognition, and/or acknowledgement by practitioners for any number of reasons. It may also be because scholars of Middle Eastern do not investigate the history of a traditional dance, but instead, give details on what they see at a moment in time. The information is helpful in introducing readers to current Middle East dance practices through general overviews, such as those by Amnon Shiloah and Lois al Faruqi. However, they also present and continue the image of traditional Middle Eastern dance as invariant and ahistorical.

Kay Campbell, Barbara Sellers-Young, Shay, and Adra define current invariant traditional Middle Eastern dance practices by contrasting them with a variant one, even when they find them within the same context or place them within the same genre category. They also distinguish the two further by factoring in an East/West dynamic. Their examples assert that traditional Middle Eastern dance genres do not contain “Western” or foreign influences, while non-traditional dances do. The result is that Campbell, Shay, Sellers-Young, and Adra differentiate between old and new, but ignore the dynamics within the degrees of traditional continuities and discontinuities in each one. In addition, these dance scholars place “tradition” into an older academic theoretical position and demonstrate a desire to keep traditional Middle Eastern dance pure, old, and genuine. Their actions also imply new genres, such as staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance are not, nor will be, a tradition, and therefore, disregard practitioners’
viewpoints and undermine the complex and fluid temporal construction of traditional dance.

Scholars analyzing American dance define traditional dance in very different terms from their Middle Eastern dance counterparts since they are not concerned with presenting or preserving genres that are old, genuine, or uninfluenced by foreign ideas. Instead, scholars observe American dancers’ push for change and disregard for tradition. Although the use of the term tradition is rare when discussing American modern dance, a few writers, including Sally Banes (via Susan Manning), in “Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric,” Mark Franko, in Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics, and Cynthia Novack, in Sharing the Dance, do so. Banes and Franko assert that “traditions” can develop very quickly in American dance. Banes chooses to use words, such as “institutional” or “consolidation,” instead of “traditional,” during her discussion of post-modern dance in order to indicate that the form took about ten years to be codified, established, and recognized. Franko contends that a choreographer’s personal technique, what he also calls a “tradition,” can develop quickly after an intense experimental phase. Novack claims that modern dance is a tradition of change due to several generations of choreographers breaking away from their predecessors’ practice.

American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views

The American Middle Eastern dance writers predominantly demonstrate a strong drive to maintain traditional Middle Eastern dance forms as they were taught, and therefore, focus on continuity. Carolina Dinicu, Karol Harding, and Robyn Friend
describe dances they personally witnessed or learned in a particular time and place in order to introduce them to other members of the American Middle Eastern dance community. However, they do not historicize their writing or their research, except for Friend who indicates that she saw the *Qashqa’i* in the late 1970s, which is unfortunate since it makes contextualizing their findings much more difficult. Their invariant presentations, like those of the scholars of Middle Eastern dance surveyed, can be due to their own and/or informants’ lack of knowledge or acknowledgement about changes in a dance’s history.

Some American Middle Eastern dance writers acknowledge firsthand experiences with changes in traditional Middle Eastern dance and accept them as long as the dance’s distinctive image remains intact. Nevertheless, they value certain alterations over others. For example, in “The Exquisite Art of Persian Classical Dance,” Friend claims that current classical Iranian dance is capable of incorporating elements from outside its tradition. She writes, “[a]n innovative dancer is able to extend the vocabulary of movements in many directions, while retaining the essential Persian feeling” (Friend 1996, 8). In cases concerning genuine traditions, such as those of Friend who replaces the *Qashqa’i* men’s western clothing with their traditional one in her dance reconstruction and Barbara Siegel who rebuffs the *Cougoues de Zarzis’s* sneakers, the American Middle Eastern dance writers frequently discredit the influx of western and/or foreign additions influences.

Siegel, in “Tunisian Images, In Search of Dance,” does not indicate whether she sees (staged) folk dance as a type of tradition, but acknowledges participants do so to a
certain degree. For example, Siegel reports that Habib and Zohra Trabelsi view their *raks al-Juzur* and *raks al-Maharim* for Tunisia’s Ballet Nationale as “‘tradition polished’” (Siegel 1983, 4) and as remaining “faithful to traditional choreography” (Siegel 1983, 4). Although Siegel does not describe in detail the move of genuine folk dances to the stage, one can conclude from her descriptions that the Tunisian dances maintain many elements of movements, music, costumes, and props from the source material and add ballet’s “grace and agility” (Siegel 1983, 4). Siegel understands that Habib and Trabelsi link their dances to traditional Middle Eastern dance, but that because of their alterations they cannot consider them “genuine” traditional dances. Instead, Habib and Trabelsi qualify them as a type of traditional Middle Eastern dance.

Friend, Djoumahna, and Nugent frequently distinguish and contrast traditional Middle Eastern dance with non-traditional dances based upon an East/West division. However, they present traditional dance as variant, unlike their dance scholar counterparts who in a similar position do not. For instance, in “Dance of Iran,” Friend divides professional Persian dance into traditional dance, including *raqs-e tehrānī* and *Motrebi* (which she considers variant) and non-traditional dance, such as folk dances on stage and “balletic presentations of Iranian epic tales” (Friend 2007b) performed by the European influenced *Sâzmânp-e foklor-e Irân* (The Mahalli Dancers of Iran). Nugent, in “Cairo,” also notices a contrast in Egyptian culture between indigenous *baladi* and foreign and Western influenced modern Egyptian belly dance. However, she observes not only the integration of *baladi* into modern Egyptian belly dance, but also the fact that *baladi* is an adaptable tradition.
The American Middle Eastern dance writers differ from each other with respect to the issue of whether or not they claim Middle Eastern dance in the United States is traditional Middle Eastern dance. For example, Djoumahna takes the contrast that Friend and Nugent put forth a step further. She finds traditional Middle Eastern dance forms from the Middle East in the United States, but calls the ones developed in the United States “innovative” and “fusion,” and not “traditional.” However, King and David, based on their experiences, recognize newer genres, American belly dance and American Tribal Style, respectively, as traditional Middle Eastern dance. King labels American belly dance a tradition because it has been practiced by many people across the United States for many decades and is codified. In her interview, David calls American tribal style a tradition; the dance foundation that she breaks away from with her interpretive dance.

Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

The core EEMED choreographers acknowledge that traditional Middle Eastern dance consists of “a set of rules” (Elayssa 26, Djahari 39), boundaries, and parameters, which distinguish it from other dances. However, these are not always clear and/or stable. For example, Djahari recalls when learning traditional American belly dance floorwork, she was told it should only be performed “at a private party amongst friends” (Djahari 34), and not in public. However, this information conflicts with her knowledge that although floorwork is not as popular as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, it is a part of a professional Turkish-American dancer’s public performance, performed typically during a taqsim. In addition, Anaheed, Tandemonium, and Djahari agree that a traditional
Middle Eastern dance needs to be established, while Anaheed and Djahari add that it should be recognized and identified as such by audiences.

All of the core EEMED choreographers recognize that traditional Middle Eastern dances persist through time. How long the repetition needs to occur for them to consider a dance traditional varies from person to person. Based on her experience and knowledge that American belly dance possesses well over forty years of continual practice and performances, Anaheed states, “I think we can start to label something as traditional when it has existed for maybe more than twenty years” (Anaheed 35). Djahari and Elayssa are not sure about the length of time it takes dancers to produce a tradition, but since they both consider American belly dance to be a tradition, one could argue that their time expectations would be close to Anaheed’s definition.

Jean and Claudia’s views are the closest to those of the scholars of Middle Eastern dance surveyed since they connect traditional Middle Eastern dance to old, genuine, and authentic characteristics. As previously addressed in the “Folk Dance” section of this dissertation, Tandemonium equates folk dance with traditional dance, although Claudia concedes the two are not interchangeable everywhere as they are in Middle Eastern dance. In addition, Claudia thinks it takes at least three or four generations and/or a hundred years for practitioners to establish a dance as a tradition. However, she notes later, “that’s not a hard fast rule” (Tandemonium 44). Jeans replies that she cannot “put a time limit on it” (Tandemonium 41), but later she comments, “folk dance is something that has its roots going back to a particular place and time…. hundreds of years” (Tandemonium 43). Although Claudia and Jean place time constraints into their
definitions of folk dance, these durations and lengths contain fluid and wavering qualities, which leave room for individual interpretations.

Tatianna’s definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance differs from the other core EEMED choreographers. First of all, she associates the term ethnic dance with old and/or ancient. Secondly, Tatianna equates traditional Middle Eastern dance with someone’s personal tradition. She defines it as “what somebody would expect” (Tatianna 22) and has seen many times. Tatianna also considers traditional Middle Eastern dance to be the standard and the norm, which in her view is American belly dance. She acknowledges that ethnic dance can be traditional since it can be the norm for some, but just not for her.

Similar to the scholars of Middle Eastern dance and the American Middle Eastern dance writers, the core EEMED choreographers present some traditional Middle Eastern dances as invariant. Their examples were not the focus of the discussion and addressed only in passing. Nevertheless, in regards to the umbrella term traditional Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers assert that changes occur. For example, while speaking about the production of fusion dances, Anaheed at one-point states, “true tradition is kind of frozen” (Anaheed 35). However, she finds that the static image conflicts with her experiences and understanding of changes. Anaheed immediately ponders her statement and asserts that traditions change, but “certain molds” (Anaheed 35) – distinctive images – do not readily change. Anaheed reiterates the point later on when she talks about her “right” to make changes in Middle Eastern dance. She concedes, “I don’t think traditional Middle Eastern dance is frozen in time and it’s changing

208
whether I change it or not” (Anaheed 107). Similar to Anaheed’s statement, Elayssa asserts, “[d]ance itself has the tendency to want to grow and continue…. It’s the very nature of it…” (Elayssa 31), and therefore, it is not static.

The core EEMED choreographers note modifications in traditional Middle Eastern dances are generally small and do not alter distinctive images. For instance, Djahari recalls that she has seen specifically American belly dancers “throw in a little pieces of experimental and that seems to be widely accepted” by audiences because the additions are “not the focus” (Djahari 51) of the dance. Jean says traditional Middle Eastern dance does not change but “the interpretation constantly changes” (Tandemonium 45). Later, Jean clarifies her point, “you may take your own take and mix your steps up in the dance from say your teacher taught you, but you’re not deviating from that dance itself” (Tandemonium 38). Claudia also contends that when a generation passes down a traditional dance to the next subtle changes occur, which she calls “natural drift” (Tandemonium 45).

Although I do not want to make a blanket statement that all dancers experience change in their traditional dance form, many of the core EEMED choreographers personally experience and alter their American belly dance practices without it becoming innovative or experimental. For example, Elayssa has become more theatrical, while Anaheed has relaxed the rules. In fact, Anaheed recalls, “[w]hen I first started I would be pretty rigid about a solo performance – it had to have certain things in it” (Anaheed 28), such as an entrance, a *taqsim*, and a drum solo. However, at times, she now makes her costumes more thematic and theatrical and develops flexible dance structures. Even
with the modifications, Elayssa and Anaheed still maintain American belly dance’s distinctive image, and therefore, in their view, its status as a traditional dance.

During their interviews, Djahari and Elayssa question their placement of American belly dance within the traditional Middle Eastern dance category. For example, Djahari’s teachers taught her it is traditional, but she also knows belly dance was brought over to the United States and has since changed. Djahari states, “I think that part of the problem is that each person may have a different idea of what traditional Middle Eastern dance is and where to draw the line” (Djahari 32). Nevertheless, Djahari concedes that not only does she consider American belly dance to be a traditional form of Middle Eastern, but that the American Middle Eastern dance community recognizes it as one too. Elayssa comes to the same conclusion, especially when she takes into consideration she is a third generation American Middle Eastern dancer. Djahari, Elayssa, and Anaheed recognize that American belly dance does not fit into the typical definition of a strong and genuine tradition as discussed in “Traditional Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” because it has altered over the past century, and in fact, contains a tradition-of-change as part of its identity. However, American belly dance’s changes do not impede their experiences of it as a tradition.

Jean and Claudia offer a more conservative definition of traditional Middle Eastern dance than the other core EEMED choreographers do, since they do not consider American belly dance to be one. Claudia does not think that American belly dance is old enough, even though she acknowledges it goes back a century and traces it to “roots in the ghawazee’s dances” (Tandemonium 40). Part of Tandemonium’s position comes
from their assertion that traditional Middle Eastern dance can only occur in the Middle
East. In fact, they are the only core EEMED choreographers who do. Jean claims,
“American belly dance today has nothing to do with the society that came out first and
started creating these moves” (Tandemonium 43). In addition, Claudia notices it no
longer has any parameters. She states,

> there really aren’t any rules…. You really can do what you want…. even though a
few years ago, it was part of the rules that you had to do a ten minute entry piece,
then you had to do a ten minute taqsim, you had to do floorwork [and] then you
had to get up and do a drum solo. That’s all gone now. (Tandemonium 43)

Therefore, she concludes, American belly dance is not a traditional Middle Eastern
dance.

Occasionally, Anaheed and Tandemonium navigate differences between old and
new traditions by qualifying the newer one. For example, although Anaheed calls
American belly dance a tradition, at one point she labels it “a new tradition” (Anaheed
36). Claudia notes, and Jean agrees, over the decades since the move of Central Asian
dance to the stage under Soviet rule during the 1920s and 1930s, choreographers
produced a “new tradition… [It] is now considered Uzbek traditional dance, even though
in its early years it wasn’t” (Tandemonium 38). Tandemonium does not consider this
dance a traditional form because it is constructed and traceable to genuine traditions.
However, they understand some people consider Central Asian dance traditional dance.

Several core EEMED choreographers give insight into the ways in which an
experimental form can develop into a distinctive image, if not a tradition, and therefore,
offer insight into experimental Middle Eastern dance and EEMED’s future. For example,
Djahari comments that she can comprehend Nazemi’s Persian Ballet Company as once
being an experimental Middle Eastern dance company, but that it is no longer one
because Nazemi has established his style and has been practicing it for over thirty years.
Additionally, Jean and Claudia identify the Blue Man Group and Cirque du Soleil as once
being avant-garde but no longer, because Claudia states, “they’ve been around a long
time,” and Jean adds, “[t]hey’ve copied themselves” (Tandemonium 102), and other
people have as well.

The question that concerns the core EEMED choreographers is whether
experimental Middle Eastern dance will become an established genre, if not a tradition.
They are not producing a genuine tradition with old and “untraceable” practices or
creating changes of customs by any definitions of the dance scholars, the American
Middle Eastern dancer, or the core EEMED choreographers. In fact, experimental Middle
Eastern dance contains traceable foundations, Western influences, known purveyors, and
documentation of its creation and growth.

The core EEMED choreographers do not claim to be producing an invented
tradition as Hobsbawm puts forth, since their purpose is not to create a tradition. They do
not take a particular established tradition and modify it, adapt it to a new location or
purpose, or graph it onto new traditions. The core EEMED choreographers do not present
themselves as developing, promoting, or representing a national identity or as supported
by an institution.

All of the core EEMED choreographers believe experimental Middle Eastern
dance is still developing. Therefore, it is not, and they hope, will not become, a tradition.
In fact, they do not think it even contains a distinctive image or is a genre. For example,
Elayssa contends that experimental Middle Eastern dance is too new and contains too many variables, because “it is a little bit hard to pin point…. There are an infinite amount of things you can change to make something stand outside of what is traditional, and because it is infinite, it’s hard to categorize all of them” (Elayssa 36). Claudia and Jean make these points as well as and add that experimental Middle Eastern dance is too individualistic. They do not perceive it as a genre, but instead, Jean labels it a “trait” (Tandemonium 83), and Claudia, “an action” (Tandemonium 83). Tatianna does not believe experimental Middle Eastern dance is becoming a tradition, but she is the only core EEMED choreographer who seriously considers, “you could create a tradition of trying to experiment with things” (Tatianna 38) – a tradition-of-experimentation.

Even though the core EEMED choreographers hope experimental Middle Eastern dance does not become a tradition, they consider that it may stabilize. However, it would take time and need to be widely disseminated throughout the American Middle Eastern dance community by choreographers performing in various locations and in shows like EEMED. In fact, Anaheed claims that experimental Middle Eastern dance is not “fully disseminated to the Middle Eastern community at large” (Anaheed 58), or has grown beyond a few individuals’ practice. In addition, the American Middle Eastern dance community would need to recognize experimental Middle Eastern dance and its name. In the end, the core EEMED choreographers assert that experimentation goes against tradition, and therefore, if experimental Middle Eastern dance were to becomes a tradition, then as Djahari states, “you have got to take the word [experimental] out of it” (Djahari 65). In other words, according to Djahari, the two are not mutually exclusive.
The core EEMED chorographers note some of frameworks and actions that could assist in the identification of experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, Tandemonium note when a traditional Middle Eastern dance setting, such as an IAMED show, Cairo Carnivale, or Rakkasah, includes experimental Middle Eastern dance, audiences could at least differentiate experimental Middle Eastern dance from traditional Middle Eastern dance. Anaheed contends when a producer supplies program notes or announcements, an experimental Middle Eastern dance wields a better chance at a positive reception, or else it may “catch the audience off guard” (Anaheed 62), and therefore, the audience may not understand and/or enjoy the dance. Djahari claims that the title of the show, An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance, helps audiences recognize the dance form since it labels what they are going to watch. EEMED’s framework invites audiences to detect how choreographers maintain, re-organize, change, remove, and/or add numerous dance elements from inside and outside Middle Eastern dance. The title also requests the audience to engage in an open concept of Middle Eastern dance that includes non-traditional dance forms. One could also note the term’s usage on websites.

Tatianna and Tandemonium do not think experimental Middle Eastern dance is easily recognizable. However, they, along with the other core EEMED choreographers, acknowledge that some in the American Middle Eastern dance community may call it, “new,” “different,” “fusion,” “alternative”, “theatrical, “modern,” and/or “non-traditional” dance. In fact, Djahari notes, “I think the only time I really hear “experimental” is within the venue of EEMED, because people have already been
exposed to the word” (Djahari 60). Tatianna and Elayssa also do not believe the general public recognizes experimental Middle Eastern dance. Actually, Elayssa asserts that the term confuses the public. She recounts, “[t]hey hear experimental and they hear Middle Eastern dance and they’re not sure how you experiment with dance” (Elayssa 29). Elayssa then explains to them “when you experiment it means you’re steeping outside of these general rules and the general practices that have been done forever” (Elayssa 29). In other words, it is not traditional Middle Eastern dance.

The difficult of achieving recognition of the genre term experimental Middle Eastern dance by the American Middle Eastern dance community is due not only to the newness of the genre, but also to the fact that the practitioners call their work by a variety of names. As discussed in the “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres” section, the core EEMED choreographers employ terms, such as interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, alternative dance, and therefore, do not completely agree on what to name it. In fact, Tandemonium recalls that in the early 1990s they made up the term “twisted gypsy,” which they no longer use, to label their work because at the time, there were no names for it. In addition, Djahari realized and admitted during her interviews that she did not normally use the term experimental Middle Eastern dance to describe Desert Sin because she felt “experimental” was EEMED’s term, but also she did not want people to expect her always to use Middle Eastern dance. However, over the course of her interviews, Djahari decided that she would start employing it, because she recognized Desert Sin is “an experimental Middle Eastern dance group” (Djahari 138), and Middle Eastern dance is her base and always in her dances.
Although the core EMEED choreographers notice that experimental Middle Eastern dance is not always recognized as such, they observe an increase in experimentation happening in the American Middle Eastern dance community. For example, Djahari notes that she has not come across another show like EEMED, but she, along with Tandemonium, assert that more dancers participate in it. The core EMEED choreographers also identify concerts that focus primarily on traditional Middle Eastern dances contain at least one experimental Middle Eastern dance. In addition, Tatianna and Djahari detect traditional Middle Eastern dancers add experimental elements into their dances. The result of such choreographic processes, Tatianna observes, is that audiences “are more comfortable” (Tatianna 55) with experimentation, and Jean adds, “there’s also an audience for it now” (Tandemonium 122). In addition, Anaheed claims that experimental Middle Eastern dancers continue to explore and push experimental Middle Eastern dance because they are more comfortable.

Tatianna, Djahari, and Elayssa believe the increase in experimental Middle Eastern dance due in part to the influence of EEMED and even wonder if the show will develop or encourage the dance form to be a tradition. For example, although Tatianna asserts that EEMED is not a traditional Middle Eastern dance show, she acknowledges a history of the show, and therefore, contemplates, “[m]aybe that’s how traditions are started” (Tatianna 38). Claudia notes danger in others copying EEMED, because when something “catches on and too many people start doing it then it kind of loses its edge” (Tandemonium 103). In fact, Djahari and Anaheed warn that the solidification may already be occurring. For instance, Djahari observes more people want to be involved in
EEMED and “it has become more respected within the dance community” (Djahari 72), which could eventually lead to limitations and stabilizations. Anaheed claims EEMED sets a benchmark and standard for experimental Middle Eastern dance, and therefore, indicates the possibility of it developing a distinct image of experimental Middle Eastern dance. In addition, Tandemonium and Djahari acknowledge some audience members hold expectations about EEMED. Jean and Claudia recount encounters with admirers who expected them to perform a comedy each year. Claudia comments, “I don’t know where they get these ideas because we try and do something different every year” (Tandemonium 103). Djahari also recalls that for the first few years after the 2001 EEMED, audiences assumed there would be nudity in Desert Sin’s dances. Tandemonium and Djahari’s statements demonstrate people’s need for repetition and familiarity even at an experimental Middle Eastern dance show.

The core EEMED choreographers assert that EEMED is not a tradition, because as Djahari voices, texts and choreographers change year to year. Jean observes some years are emotionally dark, Claudia adds others are more humorous, and Elayssa notes some include lots of storytelling, while others are very emotional or lighter in timbre. Elayssa also observes, “people have gotten more innovative” (Elayssa 48) and the core EEMED choreographers keep “upping the ante” (Elayssa 48). In fact, they resist letting EEMED become a tradition by not fulfilling audience expectations and by creating new dances for each year, and therefore, undermining the stabilization process. Elayssa also considers it may take many decades for people no longer to think of EEMED as experimental, but she hopes it continues without becoming traditional.
If the increase in experimental Middle Eastern dance continues in the American Middle Eastern dance community, then the core EEMED choreographers are going to need to negotiate with other people’s missions for it. The more exposure a dance form obtains, the more recognizable it is, and the closer it is to becoming a tradition or a distinctive image. In fact, Djahari suspects that because of the interest, “it will start to stabilize and become something” (Djahari 49), and contemplates that practitioners may find “there are some limitations” (Djahari 66), but she thinks practitioners will take years for limits to find the limits. As the core EEMED choreographers contend, if EEMED were to produce an established genre, distinct image, or tradition, it would be based in a theater venue with theatrical productions. In addition, even though many of the core EEMED choreographers produce abstract dances, the trend in the American Middle Eastern dance community is to associate experimentation with narrative structures. However, it may become more difficult for the core EEMED choreographers to continue producing a tradition-of-experimentation and a tradition-of-the-new in the fringe of the American Middle Eastern dance community.

Another question is whether the core EEMED choreographers are developing personal traditions. The fact that the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers all employ various names for what I call experimental Middle Eastern dance – interpretive dance, theatrical dance, fusion dance, alternative dance – indicates they may also be developing their own personal styles. However, the core EEMED choreographers also comment that their repertoire does not always contain one or the other, but can be mixture of them, which undermines the development of a
personal style.

In addition, several core EEMED choreographers claim that the annual opportunity to perform at EEMED helps them to develop their experimental Middle Eastern dance skills and styles.\textsuperscript{220} In fact, Elayssa recognizes EEMED as “a place to return to continue experimenting past that first jump” (Elayssa 44). She also notes choreographers figure out what does and does not work and hone their skills. In addition, Djahari acknowledges that by performing at EEMED, she has not only becomes aware of what she could create, but has also become “much more relaxed and much more willing and able to try new things” (Djahari 72).

One could claim that because all the core EEMED choreographers were experimenting before the first EEMED, the idea of creating dances that are not traditional dance is no longer a new concept for them. For example, according to her personal history, Anaheed began creating experimental Middle Eastern dance in the 1980s, over twenty years ago, at the Perfumes of Araby Annual Concert, and therefore, completes her claims that a tradition needs at least twenty years of practice. However, Anaheed does not identify experimental Middle Eastern dance as a tradition, a distinct genre, or a personal tradition, as she does with American belly dance. Her position is impacted by the fact that during these twenty years, Anaheed has not had a continuous or exclusive practice of performing or teaching experimental Middle Eastern dance, unlike that of traditional Middle Eastern dance. Tandemonium certainly does not consider experimental Middle Eastern dance to be a personal tradition, even though they possess over fifteen years experience. Similar to Anaheed, it is not their only dance focus nor do they partake in a
continuous practice of it. In addition, their experiences do not fulfill their definition of
traditional Middle Eastern dance.

Elayssa is the only core EEMED choreographer who claims to be an experimental
Middle Eastern dancer. Although Djahari and Tatianna do not readily acknowledge
experimental Middle Eastern dance as their personal tradition, they made it their primary
form. In fact, even though Tatianna claims American belly dance as her personal
traditional Middle Eastern dance, one could argue that because she rarely performs it, and
instead, focuses on experimental Middle Eastern dance and states she feels stronger as an
experimental Middle Eastern dancer than as a traditional Middle Eastern dancer,
experimental Middle Eastern dance is becoming, if it is not already, her norm and her
personal “tradition.” In addition, Djahari asserts that by working in the experimental
Middle Eastern dance arena for over ten years, she has become more secure and grown in
her confidence and understanding of experimenting. In fact, she uses some traditional
sounding rhetoric to assert that Desert Sin is taking on “more shape and becoming
stronger” (Djahari 64) and becoming more theatrical and narrative driven.

The core EEMED choreographers perceive that several factors limit their
development of a personal tradition. For instance, the core EEMED choreographers claim
they still focus on stepping out of traditional Middle Eastern dance parameters. In
addition, their texts change as well. For example, since the mid-2000s, Djahari asserts
that she has moved away from concentrating on adding “sexual overtones” (Djahari 64)
to belly dance and Elayssa comments that she is moving away from one of her earlier
themes of emotional purging. In addition, none of them teach experimental Middle
Eastern dance on a regular base or developed a codified system to pass onto or for the next generation to break away.

This is not to say that if the core EEMED choreographers developed a personal style they would no longer be able to push the limits of Middle Eastern dance. However, by presenting their personal style of dance as unstable, the core EEMED choreographers hope to keep the genre of experimental Middle Eastern dance unstable. As the dance scholars observe in modern dance, when a choreographer codifies his/her style, others can then break away from its parameters as if it were a tradition. In addition, stable personal styles offer scholars an opportunity to examine what elements connect various choreographers together and to a particular genre, and therefore, participate in the stabilization of the genre’s parameters.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER

The core EEMED choreographers share with scholars of Middle Eastern dance and American Middle Eastern dance writers many concepts about traditional Middle Eastern dance, including its repetition of elements, boundaries, and rules over time in varying degrees of solidification. The dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers do not present examples or information of strong traditional Middle Eastern dances developing. However, they do so for “newer” genres that they call “traditions,” “invented traditions” or “new traditions,” and/or describe them as established genres depending upon their focus and values.

The core EEMED choreographers, through their practices of experimental Middle
Eastern dance, offer insight into how traditions and established genres can develop. They all entered into a traditional Middle Eastern dance genre that was well established. However, over time, the core EEMED choreographers noted in their interviews that they began to feel constrained by the traditional Middle Eastern dance practice and needed to express other aspects of their lives through their dance. Through acts of breaking away from traditional Middle Eastern dance practices the core EEMED choreographers learned many sets of Middle Eastern dance’s rules, regulations, and parameters. Additionally, by resisting experimental Middle Eastern dance from becoming a traditional dance or a genre, the core EEMED choreographers understand the processes by which dances can go through to become stable and codified.
CHAPTER FIVE

DEFINING EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE

In “Experimental Middle Eastern Dance Genres,” the core EEMED choreographers brought up several dance terms – interpretive dance, theatrical dance, alternative dance, and fusion dance – which they interchanged, or used instead of, experimental Middle Eastern dance. Sometimes they employed one of the terms in order to indicate they perform a specific form of experimental Middle Eastern dance or to easily and quickly communicate what they perform. However, as this chapter will demonstrate that the core EEMED choreographers utilize the term experimental Middle Eastern dance in a broader manner to label any dance that is not traditional and/or established Middle Eastern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers share many experimental dance traits with modern dancers and post-modern dancers. Their overlap is not the result of a direct relationship between the two genres as it is from the influence of American culture on both of them, such as an emphasis of innovation and originality. The core EEMED choreographers are influenced by an American consumer market that looks for the next new thing to sell. The core EEMED choreographers not only produce for the general public market, but also for the American Middle Eastern dance community that promotes tradition as its primary selling point. As participants in the American Middle Eastern dance community, the core EEMED choreographers are aware of their partial reliance on tradition not only for source materials, but also for an already established audience.
However, in EEMED’s theatrical venue, a space that ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance helped develop, the core EEMED choreographers continue pushing their experimental Middle Eastern dance outside of traditional Middle Eastern dance.

**Dance Scholars’ Views**

Scholars of American dance predominantly define experimental dance as twentieth-century forms that contain breaks and revolts against traditions and/or a predecessor’s personal style, aesthetic, and foundation. For example, Linda Tomko, in *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920*, and Sally Banes, in “Early Modern Dance,” describe interpretive dancers Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Loïe Fuller with such terms as “innovative,” “radical,” and “experimental.” Tomko and Banes also identify them as commencing a pattern of rupture in early-twentieth-century America, which has culminated over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through modern dance and post-modern dance into what I call a “tradition-of-experimentation.” Tomko and Banes assert that Duncan, St. Denis, and Fuller produced a new dance form, especially by moving away from ballet and popular dance conventions. Although Tomko and Banes indicate where the dancers drew their inspirations from and how they fused various dance and non-dance sources, the dancers themselves promoted their work as original and possessing no standard dance foundation.

Cynthia Novack, in *Sharing the Dance* (1990), observes a “modern dance tradition…. of continuing revolution” (Novack 22). In fact, she claims, “[i]n a dance genre like modern dance, which is innovative by definition, movement styles change
rather quickly, so allegiances to different forms coexist in the same time period” (Novack 138-139). In other words, it participates in the development of a tradition-of-experimentation in American dance. Similarly, John Percival, in Experimental Dance (1971), and Mark Franko, in Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics, examine the cycle of tradition and experimentation by tracing the legacy of modern dancers and post-modern dancers’ reliance upon their predecessors’ work as source material to formulate and inform their ideas, but also as sites to reject.

A few dance scholars take into account choreographers’ continuation of certain elements in order to connect and define the boundaries of the modern dance genre. For example, Franko not only links Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Douglas Dunn through their experimentation, but also through their explorations of subjectivity and expression. Novack connects a “wave of experimental dance” (Novack 23) in the 1960s and 1970s, which includes contact improvisation, Judson Church Dance Theatre, and physical theater, to modern dancers in 1920s and 1930s. She writes these two “experimental movements” (Novack 23) were not initially formalized but were centered on a shared set of ideas and principles including, radicalism and social awareness, producing work on the margins, and struggling with making a living while maintaining their “artistic independence” (Novack 23).

Percival and Novack claim that the legacy of American experimental dance has culminated in choreographers fixating on producing new dance. For instance, Percival contends since the 1970s, American dance contains so many choreographic options “nothing is clear. Every theory held by any practitioner is contradicted by another; every
attempt towards one objective is matched by another in the opposite direction” (Percival 150). Such choreographic processes and goals led to a situation where “the only view held in common by every serious creative artist is that change of some sort is necessary” (Percival 150). Percival’s statement goes along with his definition of experimental dance that includes any dance genre providing it uses “dance in a new way or a new context” (Percival 7). According to Novack, in the 1980s, “perhaps for the first time in American history, avant-garde dance [postmodern dance] was being marketed as culturally dominant. To present something ‘new’ was no longer antibourgeois; instead, ‘newness’ constituted a selling point for a cultural product” (Novack 229). The post-modern dance method results in an American dance that formed a legacy of articulating “new” as a choreographic goal and marketing tool.

Similar to Percival and Novack, Judith Mackrell, in “Post-Modern Dance in Britain,” and Susan Manning, in “Modernist Dogma and Post-Modern Rhetoric,” observe some choreographers in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, practice the idea that only a continuation of change and experimentation exists, which one could read as an end to tradition. However, both Manning and Mackrell place the new dance forms within historical contexts, which show that the choreographers’ rhetoric did not match up with their actions and eventually lead to developments of specific genres. For example, Manning acknowledges Banes claims, in her second introduction to Terpsichore in Sneakers, that post-modern dance broke the cycle of “revolution and institution” (Manning 32, Banes 1987, 5). Banes recognizes that time has demonstrated their repeating pattern in fact continues, especially with the advent of second period post-
modern dance. Mackrell asserts that New Dance also has been defined as encompassing any experimental dance, but once again, reveals that over time many choreographers and dancers moved away from specific ideas that identify New Dance’s aesthetics and developed post-modern dance.

Modern dance and post-modern dance in Israel and Turkey parallel their counterparts in the United States throughout the twentieth century. Ruth Eshel, Judith Ingber, Giora Manor, and Susan Bauer focus on late-twentieth-century dance, which on rare occasions is called experimental dance. However, they, along with Metin And, Şebnem Aksan, and Kemal Özturkmen, trace a history in both countries of dancers breaking away from their predecessors by exploring and/or importing genres or styles from the United States and Europe. Choreographers maintain the integrity of the genre, but more often, they, as And or Aksan write, blend, merge, and add local dance elements without changing the dance’s distinctive image. Scholars of Middle Eastern dance note many Israeli and Turkish choreographers follow Euro-American trends to the extent that change has become a focal point as well – a tradition-of-experimentation.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

As addressed previously in the dissertation, the usage of the term experimental dance within the American Middle Eastern dance community is rare, but has been growing since 2005. Social networks, including My Space and Tribe, show that about a hundred dancers use experimental Middle Eastern dance as a descriptive word and/or a genre name. By 2009, a few American Middle Eastern dance companies and soloists also
utilize it as a label for their work on their websites. They promote their dance as new, different, and original, but yet still connect it to traditional Middle Eastern dance.

When American Middle Eastern dancers employ the term experimental Middle Eastern dance, one can see the ways in which they establish its parameters in specific ways. For example, self labeled experimental Middle Eastern dance groups, such as Hands of Kali and Chovexani, associate themselves with the term theatrical dance. In fact, Hands of Kali call themselves “Seattle’s experimental bellydance theatre” (Hands of Kali). Hands of Kali and Chovexani identify their work as theatrical and experimental because they add characters, narratives, and/or performance art. For example, Hands of Kali assert that they “blend in veil work, sword play and fire dance to tell dance-stories of goddess myths, tarot card magic and other mystical mysteries” (Hands of Kali).

However, Hands of Kali and Chovexani predominantly perform at nightclubs and Middle Eastern dance festivals, and not in theater venues, and therefore, maintain the time-tested role of providing accessible entertainment. Except, in 2006, Zan Asha, the director of Chovexani, took her dance to the theater with her show, Night of 1000 Goddesses. Like EEMED, the show presents a collection of vignettes with a variety of dancers, but Zan Asha expects choreographers to create pieces around a central theme – goddesses.

These experimental Middle Eastern dancers share some other traits. Most of them are based in American Tribal Style, Tribal Fusion, and Gothic tribal dance, which contain roots in American belly dance and Middle Eastern folk dance. The dancers not only fuse various Middle Eastern dance forms, a choreographic process that is a part of the American Middle Eastern dance tradition, but also dances from outside the Middle East.
In fact, Hands of Kali describe their dance as a collection of various styles, including Egyptian cabaret, American tribal, Turkish, and East Indian, while Chovexani perform “Near and Far Eastern works combined with the bold brash concepts of Gothic/tribal (American Tribal Style), gypsy and experimental performance theater” (Chovexani 2009a). Their experimental components extend also into their choice of music, which is frequently non-Middle Eastern, including electronic, industrial, and club genres. For example, Hands of Kali state that they perform to music ranging from “from traditional dumbek and tabla to modern goth/industrial and electronica” (Hands of Kali). These experimental dancers also tend to follow American tribal costume trends – black material with coin tops and belts and their hair adorned with shells and yarn locks.

Not all experimental Middle Eastern dancers perform on a stage or connect to theatrics, such as a dance collective known as PURE (Public Urban Ritual Experiment); a non-profit project founded in 2004 by Kaeshi and Darshan226 in New York City. According to the PURE website, their experimentation centers around the group’s goal to foster a social movement based on healing and bringing peace. They perform in non-traditional Middle Eastern dance settings – public spaces, such as streets, parks, and subways – although in their videos they do not seem to interact with the space itself or their audiences.

Although PURE uses the term experiment as part of its name, it consists of a distinct image since the creators Kaeshi and Darshan developed and codified a vocabulary, choreography, costume, and performance settings for practitioners to repeat in various locations across the United States.227 According to Erin Crouch, in “PURE
Dynamics” (2007), dancers take workshops from Kaeshi and Darshan to learn PURE’s fundamental choreography, which like the other experimental Middle Eastern dancers mentioned above, includes a foundation in American Tribal and fuse movements from various sources, “including Middle Eastern, Chinese, Romani gypsy, Israeli folk, Flamenco, [and] Indian dance…” (PURE). The dancers perform most of the movements, as presented through pictures and video clips on the website, in unison and shift among various line formations and circles.

The United States is not the only non-Middle Eastern country to explore and develop experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, Mihrimah Ghaziya, a dancer and teacher in Germany, and Afra Al-Kahira, a dancer and teacher in England, state on their websites that they perform this type of dance. Similar to their American counterparts, Ghaziya and Al-Kahira typically use non-Middle Eastern music and fuse movements from different genres into their belly dance foundation. However, since they possess a foundation in belly dance, their work looks different from their American Tribal fusion counterparts. For instance, Ghaziya states on her website in her Experimenteller Tanz (Experimental dance) description that she fuses ballet and modern dance into her Middle Eastern dance and “mix[es Middle Eastern dance] with other influences without losing its roots” (Ghaziya). Unfortunately, Ghaziya does not indicate where she draws her line.

Al-Kahira states in her on-line essay, “What Follows is My Personal Vision of What ‘Experimental’ or ‘Dance Theatre’ Means to Me in Relation to Middle Eastern Dance,” adds another example of a dancer connecting experimental Middle Eastern
dance and theater dance. She presents a definition of experimental Middle Eastern dance, a rare occurrence in the community. Al-Kahira first asserts it is something that does not “really fit into the category of Middle Eastern Dance or fusion” (Al-Kahira). She defines Middle Eastern dance as an encompassing term, mainly referring to belly dance and its related forms and fusion dance as “a mix of dance styles, i.e. Flamenco/Arabic or the basic fusion of belly dance movements with non mid-eastern music” (Al-Kahira). Al-Kahira recalls that she used to employ the term fusion dance “as a kind of catch all word for anything that wasn’t Egyptian oriental…” (Al-Kahira). However, she no longer utilizes the label because it does not encompass “numbers that might tell a story, have strong dramatic elements, a sociopolitical message, use unusual props or portray things that fall outside the normal parameters of belly dance,” (Al-Kahira)

which in her view the term experimental dance does.

Since the United Kingdom does not produce a lot of experimental Middle Eastern dance, Al-Kahira wrote her essay in order to help people understand what it is, and therefore, allow her to “push the envelope much more” (Al-Kahira). Just as the core EEMED choreographers also note in their definitions, Al-Kahira uses experimental Middle Eastern dance to inspire audiences and herself to go beyond the norm. She writes, “[y]ou need to be able to challenge yourself in order to challenge your audience” (Al-Kahira). In fact, Al-Kahira observes some people love her work, but others do not because “for them, it has nothing to do with the art of Middle Eastern Dance…” (Al-Kahira). However, Al-Kahira claims that experimental Middle Eastern dance is Middle Eastern dance, because Middle Eastern dance is her foundation and source material.
Core EEMED Choreographers’ Views

All of the core EEMED choreographers define experimental Middle Eastern dance by stating that it is not traditional Middle Eastern dance. Instead, they present experimental Middle Eastern dance as choreographers breaking traditional Middle Eastern dance rules in a variety of ways. In fact, Djahari notes, “Experimental dance does not have a strict rule of what costume, what style of music, what venue you dance in, and it does not have to be purely Middle Eastern movement” (Djahari 35). Additionally, she does not think experimental Middle Eastern dance includes boundaries about “what kinds of expression there can be” (Djahari 35). Tatianna states that it is also about “pushing limits, expanding limits, or expanding visions” (Tatianna 20) of Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers assert that they produce something new, and as Anaheed states, “something that has not been done before…” (Anaheed 25). In addition, she claims, as does Tatianna, that experimental Middle Eastern dance needs “to have some element of challenge or controversy in it” (Anaheed 24) in order to communicate new experiences and ideas to audiences. However, during the interview, Anaheed softens her position somewhat because she acknowledges not all of her EEMED pieces are about challenging people as they are about “the unexpected, keeping the audience off balance…. [getting them] to ask themselves questions, to be surprised, [and] to experience a sense of wonder” (Anaheed 30).

In order to move away from traditional Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers claim that experimental Middle Eastern dancers, like themselves, need what Anaheed and Elayssa call, a “base” (Anaheed 35, Elayssa 27) and Djahari and

232
Tatianna, a “core” (Tatianna 121, Djahari 41) in traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, their traditional Middle Eastern dance’s foundation is not stable or singular for them. For example, as previously noted, the core EEMED choreographers contend that tradition accommodates change, and therefore, their base contains some amount of fluidity. Experimental Middle Eastern dance also includes dancers from a variety of traditional Middle Eastern dance backgrounds, knowledge, and experience. For instance, Elayssa recognizes, “an intermediate level traditional Middle Eastern dancer could reach out, try new things, and actually find something stronger on the other side” (Elayssa 28). Additionally, all of the core EEMED choreographers allow for the possibility that a dancer with a non-Middle Eastern dance foundation could also produce experimental Middle Eastern dance. Tatianna offers the case that after taking two months of belly dance a dancer based in ballet could create an experimental Middle Eastern dance. Nevertheless, Anaheed considers traditional Middle Eastern dance so important that she stresses experimental Middle Eastern dance “should be an encouragement to dancers coming up in the field; not a way to enter the field” (Anaheed 31).

Each core EEMED choreographer states she continues some type(s) of Middle Eastern dance tradition in her experimental Middle Eastern dance, because it is her foundation and source material. Nevertheless, they no longer present a traditional dance as a whole, but instead, break it down into various elements. The core EEMED choreographers may discard traditional elements, keep them as they are, push and explore them, reference them, and/or mix them with other traditional Middle Eastern dance, non-Middle Eastern dance, and/or non-dance elements. For example, during their interviews,
the core EEMED choreographers predominantly highlighted individual movements they maintain and some costume pieces. Anaheed adds that she carries on spatial pathways, body engagement, and maintenance of musical expression from traditional Middle Eastern dance, while Djahari notes that she continues a connection to music as well as interaction and communication with audiences. The specifics and number of elements modified by a core EEMED choreographer changes from dance to dance.

The core EEMED choreographers define experimental Middle Eastern dance as doing more than continuing some traditional Middle Eastern dance elements. For example, Jean and Elayssa comment that they require what all dancers need, including physical strength, technique, rhythm, timing, a critical eye, and, as Elayssa states, “an ability to understand how to express oneself through movement” (Elayssa 28). In addition, the core EEMED choreographers all contend experimental Middle Eastern dancers ought to be able to approach dance in new ways, see things differently, and as Anaheed says, “combine things in unusual ways” that are not normally joined together. Djahari asserts that a good experimental Middle Eastern dancer needs to know what she is doing, what direction she is taking the dance, how and when to push past her limits, and be able to defend her choreographic decisions and choices. Tatianna adds a dancer should not be afraid of what people may think of her, while Claudia notes she ought to be able “to take a chance” (Tandemonium 56).

In the core EEMED choreographers’ view, they do not limit their sources of outside inspiration. The core EEMED choreographers not only fuse movements, costumes, and make-up from non-Middle Eastern dances, such as Bharata Natyam,
Flamenco, 1920s flappers, gothic, country-line, and stripping, but also employ music from any number of sources, including new age, gothic, rock, classical, film, and other dance genres. They bring in ideas from outside of dance, such as movies, books, myths, and personal life. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers explore formalism with new structures, create narratives, characters, and symbols to make socio-political or personal statements, and present various topics such as murder, repression, spirituality, and unity as well as numerous emotions including anger, frustration, love, and humor. At EEMED, the core EEMED choreographers include the use of proscenium stage and its theatrical production elements, such as lighting design, props and scenery, and expect a fairly quiet and attentive audience.

An ambiguous part of the core EEMED choreographers’ definition of experimental Middle Eastern dance is the role of the theater setting. Anaheed and Elayssa explicitly state that experimental Middle Eastern dance can be performed outside of a theater. However, only Anaheed offers personal examples, such as when she performed Loïe Fuller in a garden at twilight for a Wiccan wedding. Other core EEMED choreographers perform at festivals, restaurants, and nightclubs, which may include stages, but these settings certainly do not provide theater production elements. Although the core EEMED choreographers do not directly define experimental Middle Eastern dance as needing a theater setting, they all discuss its impact on their work with respect to supplying lighting design, a sitting and attentive audience, and a stage crew to help with costumes, sets, and props. In fact, Elayssa and Djahari call their type of experimental Middle Eastern dance theatrical Middle Eastern dance.
The core EEMED choreographers do not define experimental Middle Eastern dance as one type but, in fact, as Elayssa notes, “there are varying degrees” (Elayssa 65) of experimentation. For instance, Anaheed contends some EEMED dances are very edgy and challenging, while others are more moderate in their departure from the expected. In addition, as discussed in the “Alternative Dance” section of this dissertation, Tatianna observes that EEMED contains a three-tier continuum and differentiates modern, experimental, and alternative forms of experimental Middle Eastern dance. Modern dances are strongly based in traditional Middle Eastern dance, experimental dances are expanding limits and producing the unexpected, while alternative dances are more aggressive, dark, and sexual.

Tatianna and Tandemonium discuss the edges of experimental Middle Eastern dance. For instance, Tatianna thinks some of the EEMED choreographers do not push their dance far enough to affect the audience’s comfort zone or produce something unexpected. For example, she comments Anaheed’s Loïe Fuller “was more of a traditional piece” (Tatianna 30) because it was not edgy and did not make people feel uncomfortable. In addition, Tatianna perceives Tandemonium’s Delirium Awakens the Sacred Spirit is not experimental because she understood from overhearing them talk about it backstage, it is “a dance that’s done in another country and [they’re] just re-doing it here” (Tatianna 47). However, she comments, “I haven’t seen any strict traditional in any EEMED” (Tatianna 47). In fact, Tatianna justifies these “traditional” experimental Middle Eastern dances by claiming they serve a purpose in EEMED. For instance, the juxtaposition of them with stronger experimental Middle Eastern dance pieces “help set
the control” and “help show how the other pieces are experimental” (Tatianna 44). She also comments that “traditional” experimental Middle Eastern is good for the audience because they do not need to be “sitting on the edge of their seats the entire night. It’s kind of nice to give them something they can relax with” (Tatianna 49). In other words, EEMED contains ebb and flows of experimental degrees and intensities.

Claudia acknowledges that even though Tandemonium deals with non-traditional subject matters, such as murder, suicide, and slapstick humor, she knows at times they are perceived as “more traditional than the other groups that perform there” (Tandemonium 101). Jean and Claudia think their identity forms because they do not fuse modern dance into their work and they sometime use traditional Middle Eastern movements and costumes. In fact, while discussing Delirium Awakens the Sacred Spirit, Claudia recounts that she heard EEMED audiences, including friends whom they had told ahead of time, had read their dance as traditional and authentic.  

The placement of their dance within the framework of EEMED did not make viewers, even Tatianna, question: how a “traditional” dance could be included in an experimental Middle Eastern dance show? While some may look for the experimentation, Tatianna came up with her own answer – “there’s really nothing experimental about it other than you wouldn’t expect to see it at a belly dance show” (Tatianna 47). Although Tandemonium’s dance may not have been read their intended way, it does express the concept that “tradition” can be invented and constructed and also demonstrates how powerful tradition is – a dance looks traditional, people frequently read it as such, even within the confines of an experimental Middle Eastern dance show.
Tandemonium claims that some of the core EEMED dances, including Elayssa’s Hypothermia, Anaheed’s Loïe Fuller, and my Unknown (2005), went too far, and are no longer Middle Eastern dance, but instead, modern dance. However, all of the core EEMED choreographers assert that they place traditional Middle Eastern dance in their experimental Middle Eastern dances, although Elayssa, Tatianna, and Djahari comment at times it may be difficult for people to perceive. Their statements indicate that for some of the core EEMED choreographers a line between Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern dance exists, which EEMED dances can cross. For example, Tatianna claims, “I wouldn’t say our experimental Middle East dance is Middle Eastern” (Tatianna 33). Claudia also says experimental Middle Eastern dance is “not Middle Eastern in a cultural sense, but it is taking elements of Middle Eastern dance and reinterpreting them” (Tandemonium 69). Tandemonium distinguishes dance developed in the Middle East and dance in other areas that are “inspired” by Middle Eastern dance.

Anaheed, Elayssa, and Djahari present much more inclusive definitions of experimental Middle Eastern dance than Tandemonium and Tatianna do, and indentify any dance that contains any amount of Middle Eastern dance in it as a Middle Eastern dance, including those outside the Middle East. In fact, Elayssa is surprised by the idea that some people do not consider experimental Middle Eastern dance as a part of Middle Eastern dance. Initially, Djahari was not sure if experimental Middle Eastern dance is Middle Eastern. However, when asked about the criticism leveled against EEMED dances not being Middle Eastern, she said, “I think it is Middle Eastern dance. I mean how can it not be? It uses Middle Eastern dance” (Djahari 48). However, she speculates
that because experimental Middle Eastern dancers mix in various styles, people may no longer acknowledge it as Middle Eastern dance. Regardless whether the core EEMED choreographers think experimental Middle Eastern dance is Middle Eastern or not, they all agree it contains Middle Eastern dance elements.

An area that the core EEMED choreographers and American Middle Eastern dance writers show little knowledge about is experimental dances in the Middle East. For example, Tatianna and Elayssa acknowledge that some type of experimentation occurs in the Middle East, but they are not sure what kind. Jean and Claudia are the only core EEMED choreographers to cite specific examples. Jean comments Uzbekistan dancers are “changing their costuming to be more belly dance like and incorporating hip movements which they don’t have in their traditional dance” (Tandemonium 67) for the tourist industry. Claudia recalls, “a ballet dancer who started doing Uzbek dance in toe shoes” (Tandemonium 67). In addition, Claudia considers the possibility of a history of experimentation in the Middle East when she describes the move of Uzbek dance from the court to the stage. In fact, she asserts, they “would have been considered experimental in their time” (Tandemonium 38). Nevertheless, the core EEMED choreographers all agree the experiments in the Middle East are probably not along the same line as the type they create. Tatianna states, “I don’t think you would find women in the Middle East willing to show their body naked, cut it up with swords, [or] walk on glass like we do here when we say experimental Middle Eastern” (Tatianna 35). In addition, their few examples iterate their position that experimentation in the Middle East is isolated and not part of a trend or movement.
The core EEMED choreographers do not connect to modern dancers, post-modern dancers, or ballet dancers in the Middle East, even though they share an interest in fusing each other’s dance genres. This may also be due in part to the fact that core EEMED choreographers can access modern dance, post-modern dance, or ballet without needing to study it through Middle Eastern dance. Nevertheless, the core EEMED choreographers once again demonstrate how, unfortunately, the American Middle Eastern dance community focuses on traditional dance forms to the extent that even they are disconnected from those pursuing similar interests in the Middle East.

The core EEMED choreographers connect with the broader American modern dance and post-modern dance community’s drive to keep creating and selling new dance. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers fulfill Percival’s definition of experimental dance since they perform in new contexts and developing new dance. Similar to American modern dancers and post-modern dancers, the core EEMED choreographers, along with other “experimental” Middle Eastern dancers, also break away from a strong, although varied, traditional practice, assert that their experimental dance is new and not the norm, and acknowledge their dance backgrounds. They also share the ability to draw ideas and inspiration from a number of sources both inside and outside their disciplines.

In addition, Anaheed and Elayssa recognize connections to an early American modern dance tradition of experimenting and producing new dance. The core EEMED choreographers also tap into a legacy of experimentation in the American Middle Eastern dance community. For example, some of the first Middle Eastern dancers in the United States adapted their dances to be entertainment/anthropological attractions at the
Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (1876) and the Columbian Exposition (1893). During the mid-twentieth century, while Middle Eastern diaspora communities maintained many of their traditional dances and their contexts, American women, many of whom were of non-Middle Eastern descent, began fusing various forms of Middle Eastern dance they were seeing in Middle Eastern nightclubs with other forms they knew, such as ballet, flamenco, and modern dance to produce American-Turkish belly dance. Some also infused it with various types of second wave feminism and spirituality to create Goddess belly dance. During the 1960s, other non-Middle Easterners in the United States became interested in studying and performing Middle Eastern folk dance and followed a trend occurring in the Middle East of placing them on stage. Although in American today, belly dance includes a distinctive image, American Middle Eastern dance dancers continue modifying it. In the past twenty years, the community has produced American Tribal Style with its codification and subsequent splinter into various forms, including American Fusion, Gothic belly dance, and Tribaret.

Since the core EEMED choreographers began developing their experimental Middle Eastern dances in the same venues as other experimental Middle Eastern dancers, they share some characteristics. For instance, they often use non-Middle Eastern music and fuse various dances from inside and outside the Middle East. Additionally, experimental Middle Eastern dancers may alter their movements and costumes in order to fit with their new music and sometimes add themes, characters, and/or narratives. Although the core EEMED choreographers and other experimental Middle Eastern dancers do not come from a legacy of ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance, they
all share in the expectation that choreographers will take various dance elements and keep them, discard them, play with them, and/or mix them with other dance forms or non-dance elements in order to explore and construct dances.

One of the main differences between core EEMED choreographers and other experimental Middle Eastern dancers is that the core EEMED choreographers for the past ten years predominantly develop a form within the parameters of the theater setting, while the other dancers for the most part cultivate their experimental dance in the nightclub and festival circuit. The core EEMED choreographers tap into what has been developed in theater productions, including using lights and technology, maintaining and/or breaking the fourth wall (already a part of traditional Middle Eastern dance), focusing the audience’s gaze, rehearsing on stage, and securing help from a stage crew. The core EEMED choreographers may not always push the boundaries of theater as they are adding production elements into Middle Eastern dance. Additionally, the core EEMED choreographers may not question the meaning of “dance” as modern dancers and post-modern dancers do, but the core EEMED choreographers do question what Middle Eastern dance is.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER

The core EEMED choreographers express the difficulty as well as their resistance to defining experimental Middle Eastern dance. Their stance is partially due to their continuing exploration and production of the genre. Dance scholars come across similar problems with modern dance and post-modern dance. For instance, Manning writes, “[i]t
is the historian’s bias that we cannot fully understand a period until it is past. That is why
the larger contours of dance modernism are only now coming into view” (Manning 38).
The difficulty of defining experimental Middle Eastern dance is also due to the rhetoric
of the core EEMED chorographers who include within its parameters anything that is not
traditional or an established Middle Eastern dance genre. They also claim that with
experimental Middle Eastern dance they resist restriction, codification, standardization,
and institutionalization, and instead, pursue change, diversity, originality, and
individualism.

Although the core EEMED chorographers readily discuss their lines of flight out
of traditional Middle Eastern dance, they offer insight into the construction of their new
assemblages. For example, the core EEMED chorographers enter into theater dance’s
assemblage, especially with their EEMED dances, and incorporate various ideas from
outside of Middle Eastern dance. However, as dance scholars ascertain with experimental
dances that developed into modern dance and post-modern dance, the core EEMED
chorographers are going to need to recognize that the genre will stabilize. The
solidification occurs as dancers produce personal styles through their repertoire, scholars
look for connections among dancers, EEMED and other similar shows regularly take
place, and more and more dancers label themselves and others with the term. If the
history of American dance is any indication, experimental Middle Eastern dance will
eventually become associated with a certain time period and area.
CHAPTER SIX
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
TRADITIONAL AND EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE GENRES

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the core EEMED choreographers conceive of the relationship between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers not only express their ideas indirectly in how they label and define various genres and the umbrella terms traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance, but also directly in their discussions of the two’s connections and disconnections. The core EEMED choreographers acknowledge several types of relationships that the dance scholars and the American Middle Eastern dance writers surveyed do, including changes-in-tradition, “progress” away from a strong tradition, cyclical process, and fusion, which frequently result in new genre formations. However, the core EEMED choreographers also bring up a number of their own.

The work the core EEMED choreographers produce is different from other forms of Middle Eastern dance. It is not a “genuine” tradition dance, an invented tradition (like staged-folk, classical, and belly dance), or ballet, modern, or post-modern dance transported to another region that either continues as it is or incorporates some local flair. Based upon American experimental dance traits, one would expect the core EEMED choreographers to reject or disavow their traditions and foundations, but they do not. In fact, many of them still practice traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, the core EEMED choreographers are not trying to continue some type of tradition either. In
addition, one may suppose that the core EEMED choreographers focus on creating a dance by fusing two forms, as scholars of Indian dance observe. Instead, they continually draw inspiration from numerous sources for different dances and expand what Middle Eastern dance is.

Dance Scholars’ Views

When scholars of Middle Eastern dance examine strong traditional Middle Eastern dances, whether they analyze them as invariant or variant, they focus on their continuity. For example, Anthony Shay, Najwa Adra, Kay Campbell, and Barbara Sellers-Young present invariant traditions as standing on their own and as not impacted by the world around them. In the cases of variant traditions, whether they indicate changes are part of the dance’s identity historically or are recent additions from outside influences, scholars of Middle Eastern dance acknowledge traditions/customs can adapt, but their distinctive image remains intact, and therefore, the majority of elements continue to dominate the dance’s identity. The dance scholars do not label these types of transformations as “innovations” or “experiments.”

The scholars of Middle Eastern dance who examine staged-folk/folkloric dance, classical dance, and (cabaret) belly dance demonstrate the difficulty of defining a “new” genre. For example, some use a new genre term, such as folkloric dance or cabaret, to differentiate the new form from the old one. However, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance may not employ new or modified genre labels, and therefore, need to describe differences. They do not claim that the “new” genres are the results of dancers rejecting
traditions, but instead, are the products of modifying strong traditional Middle Eastern dances with new locations, movements, and costumes. Nevertheless, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance do not label staged-folk/folkloric dance, classical dance, and (cabaret) belly dance traditional dance, since they can trace them to strong traditional Middle Eastern dances and foreign influences.²⁴⁴

Although the scholars of Middle Eastern dance do not consider staged-folk/folkloric dance, classical dance, and (cabaret) belly dance as traditional Middle Eastern dance, they acknowledge many practitioners do. In fact, Judith Brin Ingber and Giora Manor note some staged-folk dances reached the point of preservation.²⁴⁵ In these cases, the dance scholars demonstrate that they place a higher value on their understanding of a dance than those of practitioners. However, the scholars of Middle Eastern dance offer some reasons for why the genres are viewed and experienced as traditional by practitioners and audiences, and therefore, present some examples of the relationship between tradition and experimentation and the ways in which a dance may shift from being a new dance to a “traditional” one. For example, Shay briefly states that in Egypt and Turkey (staged) folk dances are frequently read as representing “genuine” or “in-the-field” traditional dances, and therefore, are viewed as a cultural progression that tie people together as well as to a common past. In addition, he notes (staged) folk dance used a continuous practice for many decades, was formalized through teaching and training, and used as a part of developing a national identity. Avner Bahat, Naomi Bahat-Ratzon, Ruth Eshel, Ingber, and Manor also discuss the socio-political production of an “Israeli folk dance tradition” (Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon 539) during the first half of the
twentieth century. Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon contend it includes rare and revived traditional folk dances as well as newly constructed ones. In fact, Ingber, Manor, and Eshel maintain that during the 1940s, choreographers, such as Gert Kaufmann (Gurit Kadman), asserted and promoted the idea that in order to create Israeli folk dance, choreographers and practitioners needed “to break with the traditional view that folk dance takes generations to create” (Ingber and Manor 530). Bahat and Bahat-Ratzon, along with Eshel, indicate that many Israelis accept them as traditional dance in order to link themselves with a collective common past and a continuation of an ethnic/national identity. In addition, the practitioners predominantly downplay modifications choreographers made to create stage folk dance and play up its continuation of traditional dance elements, and therefore, maintain their discourse within traditional rhetoric.

Both Felicia Hughes-Freeland and Janet O’Shea present strong examples of in-depth research on the socio-political construction of traditional classical dance in Indonesia and India, respectively. They observe the process of invented traditions comes about through acts of restricting, standardizing, codifying, and formalizing. Hughes-Freeland and O’Shea indicate that choreographers and dance scholars contemplate, examine, experiment, and choose certain dance elements, however short or long lived, in order to produce and promote their social, economic, and political perspective. As practitioners decide, they frequently deny or cover up their actions of choosing, and therefore, produce and push for an invariant image and maintain an association with tradition in order to establish lines of continuity, commonalities, and legitimacy.
Farida Fahmy presents firsthand accounts and examples of the ways in which Egyptian choreographer Mahmoud Reda negotiated between tradition and innovation. She recounts that when learning folk dances, Reda kept elements he saw as traditional, and frequently discarded “foreign” ones. Although Reda values Egyptian traditions, the purpose of his research was not to preserve the dances but to use them as source material. Fahmy acknowledges Reda created dances based upon his training in ballet, ballroom, and Egyptian folk dance, and therefore, calls his dance “innovative.” In fact, she writes, “[h]e explored, experimented, and merged different elements into one performance” (Fahmy 27). Although she does not label the Reda Troupe “traditional,” she mentions some traditional dance characteristics. For instance, Reda quickly established and codified his vocabulary and style that choreographers continued to perpetuate into at least the mid-1980s. In addition, Fahmy contends that Reda was aware of the need to downplay a “Western” foundation and emphasize an Egyptian one by presenting his work as “a natural progression” (Fahmy 64) of Egyptian dance and traditions. In this capacity, Reda relied upon the strong value placed upon of tradition in Egyptian society to promote his innovative new dance form.

Only a few of the scholars of Middle Eastern dance surveyed here, Sellers-Young and Shay, discuss versions of Middle Eastern dance that developed outside of the Middle East. In these cases, Sellers-Young and Shay employ a different vocabulary palette. For example, they use stronger terms, including “inventing” and “experimenting” to describe Middle Eastern dance forms in the United States. In fact, Sellers-Young and Shay call American Tribal and Spiritual belly dance, “imaginative inventions” (Sellers-Young and
Shay 16). However, they utilize more moderate terms, such as “adapt,” “combine,” “replace,” “borrow,” and “negotiate” to describe Egyptian cabaret during the twentieth century.

Mark Franko, Sally Banes, John Percival, and Cynthia Novack are not concerned with “authentic,” “genuine,” or “indigenous” traditions. Instead, they present the twentieth-century American modern dance and post-modern dance canon as a continual cyclical relationship between tradition and experimentation, institution and revolution, and/or stabilization and innovation. While Franko, Banes, Percival, and Novack observe the cyclical pattern in modern dance, Banes in her first introduction to Terpsichore in Sneakers, asserts that post-modern dance broke from the cycle. However, in her second introduction, Banes observes the cyclical process within post-modern dance and categorizes it into three eras – the breakaway years (1960-1973), the consolidation period (mid to late 1970s), and the resurgence of content (1980s). One could read her statement as examples of quick shifts from an experimental phase, to a distinctive image/established genre phase, and back to an experimental phase.

Although American dance contains a cyclic pattern in its history, some dance scholars attempt to mark its starting points. For example, Percival, Novak, Franko, Tomko, Manning, and Banes generally place interpretive/early modern dance as its beginning. They notice these dancers frequently positioned themselves as not needing training or an established dance foundation, but instead, as new and original, and therefore, established experimentation as prior to tradition. However, the dance scholars
acknowledge some of the interpretive/early modern dancers’ training and that they indeed had some amount of a dance foundation/tradition to break away from.\textsuperscript{247}

The scholars of American dance predominantly focus on change and innovation in American modern dance and post-modern dance, but they also note moments of solidification in the cyclical pattern that resulted in personal styles/traditions. For example, Novack acknowledges choreographers, such as Merce Cunningham, Anna Halprin, and Eric Hawkins, “claimed to make radical changes in modern dance” (Novak 25), but they also developed schools in order to train dancers for their companies, which led to a codification of personal techniques and choreography and a dissemination of dance practices. Franko observes a similar pattern with Graham and Cunningham’s work. He labels their formative years “experimental,” but their later ones “traditional.” In fact, when Franko compares Douglas Dunn and Cunningham, he slips Cunningham’s work under the traditional dance umbrella since it is stable enough for another choreographer like Dunn to break away.

Franko and Manning study continuity across the American dance cycle. For example, Franko examines a pattern in choreographic concepts and processes that the next choreographer maintains from their processor. He also analyzes the elements that maintain a genre’s integrity. For instance, Franko notes Duncan, Graham, Cunningham, and Dunn exemplify modern dance’s patterns of rejecting contemporary and classical influences, exploring subjectivity, and presenting dance as an art form. Manning finds modern dance contingencies in post-modern dance, but she also asserts that as post-modern dance caries on, in some cases, modern dance continuities no longer exist.
However, she finds the cyclical pattern in the fact that second period post-modern dancers “re-introduce” formerly rejected modern dance elements such as virtuosity and theatricality.

According to Novack and Percival, in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, the cyclical practice of American dance led to a culmination of continual change where the production of “the new” was the focus. Manning and Mackrell come upon this ideology as well, but they choose to locate and define the pluralistic and inclusive genres. For example, Mackrell examines Fergus Early’s experimental dance rhetoric in which he uses New Dance as a term for any kind of non-mainstream work in England. However, Mackrell demonstrates that over time many choreographers and dancers moved away from New Dance’s aesthetic elements and developed post-modern dance. Discerning a cyclical solidification and experimentation, Mackrell defines New Dance within a historical context.

The cyclical pattern of standardization and fluidity that dance scholars find in American modern dance and post-modern dance can also be observed in those genres in Israel and Turkey. Choreographers encompass almost a century-long history of following European and American trends to produce new dance. However, the cyclical process in Israel and Turkey is a bit different since choreographers immigrated, bringing European and American genres with them or imported them as a product of Westernization. In either case, the dances were already well developed with distinctive styles and techniques when they entered the new location. For example, Eshel notes in the mid-1970s, Israeli
choreographers became tired of the repeated usage of Graham technique that led them to look for new dance ideas in the way of post-modern dance, and then later, *tanztheater*.

Scholars of Indian dance, Valerie Briginshaw, Janet O’Shea, and Joan Erdman, offer different terms and perspectives on the relationship between tradition and innovation. They do not focus on the cyclical elements or indicate that Jeyasingh and Shankar break away from tradition. In fact, Briginshaw and O’Shea contend that traditional Indian dance continues in spite of choreographers, such as Jeyasingh, who questions its role in current society. Instead, Briginshaw, O’Shea, and Erdman view Jeyasingh and Shankar as producing fusions, hybrids, and/or translations, respectively, and examine their choices about what elements from traditional and contemporary dances and European and Indian cultures to keep, discard, mix, blur, and juxtapose in order to develop new dance that expresses their positions within European urban society. In fact, Briginshaw indicates that Jeyasingh chooses to “extend and develop traditional classical Bharata Natyam vocabulary with contemporary inflexions” (Briginshaw 109). However, Jeyasingh and Shankar approach their interconnectivity differently. Although both employ Indian dance as a foundation and fuse it with “Western” dance and stage techniques, Shankar underplays the “Western” elements in order to strive for an image of authenticity, while Jeyasingh acknowledges the Western elements.

While at times scholars of Middle Eastern dance focus on the cyclic process of modern dance and post-modern dance in Israel and Turkey, at other times, they emphasis the role of “fusion” in the production of new dance. Frequently, choreographers mix in local culture, but do not alter the distinctive image of the dominant dance form. For
example, Metin And and Şebnem Aksan observe the addition of folk dance into ballet and modern dance in Turkey. Neither And nor Aksan use the term “experimental” or “innovative” to describe the fusion process, but instead, settle on “blending,” “merging,” and “adding” in order to downplay the radical elements. Some fusion processes in the early to mid-twentieth century led to the formation of a new genre: staged-folk dance.

**American Middle Eastern Dance Writers’ Views**

The American Middle Eastern dance writers place much more emphasis on learning and preserving traditional Middle Eastern dance forms than experimenting. Their position is made more apparent by the numerous articles in which writers, such as Carolina Dinicu, Karol Harding, Barbara Siegel, and Robyn Friend present limited variations of a dance and/or promote an invariant distinctive image. In these cases, dances are shown to repeat over long periods of time. If American Middle Eastern dance writers, like Friend and Siegel indicate change has occurred, even as a part of the traditional dance’s characteristics, they do not contend change as modifying the dance’s recognizable distinctive image. In fact, the draw to present Middle Eastern dance as traditional leads them frequently, but not always, to discount and/or discredit modifications that Friend and Siegel identify as “outside” influences.

Unlike the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, American Middle Eastern dance writers are more inclined to view newer dance forms, such as staged-folk, classical, and belly dance, as traditional dance because they work and learn from practitioners who practice them as a continuation, although perhaps a qualified version, of their traditions.
Frequently American Middle Eastern dance writers, such as Alexandra King, note staged-folk, classical, and belly dance are traditional because people practiced them for several decades. In addition, American dancers often begin learning Middle Eastern dance by entering into already established genres, and therefore, experience them as traditions. However, like the scholars of Middle Eastern dance, some American Middle Eastern dance writers do not consider staged-folk, classical, and belly dance to be traditional, especially when they compare them to strong/genuine traditions and acknowledge their “outside” influences.

A few American Middle Eastern dance writers touch upon the cyclic process. Those who present new genres as traditional observe a pattern of tradition becoming experimental and then solidifying into a new tradition. For example, King claims that two traditional dances can fuse and over decades of practice may become a tradition. However, those who assert that established fusion dances are not traditional dances acknowledge a slowdown or perhaps even a stop in the traditional-experimental cycle, since an “experimental” dance can solidify into a distinctive image or established genre, but not become a tradition.

For the most part, the American Middle Eastern dance writers do not label a new dance as breaking away from tradition. Instead, they examine the fusion of cultures and resulting genre formations. For instance, Marilee Nugent argues that the development of modern Egyptian belly dance is based on the adaptation of baladi to a new location and purpose and the inclusion of outside influences. Unlike Adra, Sellers-Young, and Shay, Nugent offers a positive view of its changes. She also observes varying degrees of
movement by modern Egyptian belly dancers away from their baladi foundation. For example, Nugent describes Soher Zaki who “retained a very traditional baladi style of dance, performing precise, tight hip isolations largely in place” (Nugent 9) and Samia Gamal who “showed her ballet training and Hollywood-star quality” (Nugent 9). Nugent does not identify modern Egyptian belly dance as a tradition, even though it is an established genre with well over eighty years of practice, because of its relationship with baladi, a strong tradition. In addition, she asserts that modern Egyptian belly dance continues to experiment and create “their individual style and formal innovations” (Nugent 11).

American Middle Eastern dancers who promote their dance as “new,” “innovative,” and/or “experimental” connect to traditional Middle Eastern dance’s prestige and legacy in the American Middle Eastern dance community. Even when dancers and dance companies, including Kajira Djoumahna, Afra Al-Kahira, Hands of Kali, and Chovexani fuse, innovate, and/or experiment, they identify some type of traditional Middle Eastern dance as their foundation. In fact, in her interview with Desirée, Frédérique David notes her training in “traditional ATS” (Desirée 39). They also frequently cite in their descriptions the specific traditional Middle Eastern dance elements they continue.

Traditional rhetoric can also be observed growing within experimental Middle Eastern dance as several American Middle Eastern dance writers attempt to define, standardize, codify, and contain the fluid terminology of emerging dance forms, especially by those in American tribal dance. For example, Sharon Moore acknowledges
that the dances she is attempting to label and define are still in process of formation. However, she hopes her efforts will aid in the demarcation of the dances. Djoumahna, who is committed “to educate all about the importance of proper dance terminology” (Djoumahna 2008), distinguishes and defines various American Middle Eastern dance forms for her Tribal Fest participants.

While the American Middle Eastern dance community assigns a lot of value to traditional Middle Eastern dance forms, it is also influenced by American culture to produce and sell new and original dances, which the experimental Middle Eastern dancers in the United States and Europe play up. For example, David recalls the changes she made to ATS with her first dance company, Romani (1999-2004), including

using electronic music, took down the large headdresses, wore smaller skirts and unifying costume colors; we added some glitter and not all of our jewelry was Afghani. And the most important element of change was that we began choreographing! (Desirée 39)

Other American Middle Eastern dancers, such as Hands of Kali and Chovexani promote their fusion of Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern dance, although they rarely identify specifically which elements they mix. The American Middle Eastern dancers also note their influences from outside of Middle Eastern dance, such as non-Middle Eastern music, typically electronic and club music and the occasional addition of narratives or concepts.

It is difficult to tell from their descriptions whether the American Middle Eastern dancers maintain continuous change as their primary goal. For example, some, such as David, indicate that they sustain the same elements, and therefore, present a description of their personal style. Others, such as Djoumahna, state that they are not always
consistent with their continuations of traditional, and therefore, present a more fluid exploration of dance. However, without further dance analysis, one cannot examine elements which may or may not make up their personal style.

**Core EEMED Choreographers’ View**

The core EEMED choreographers definitely state traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance are two different genres. For example, Anaheed points out that she divided and labeled the Perfumes of Araby Annual Concert\textsuperscript{251} into experimental and traditional halves. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers contrast the two. They identify traditional Middle Eastern dance as containing rules, regulations, boundaries, and repetition plus being established, expected, and the norm, and experimental Middle Eastern dance as containing no rules, no boundaries, and change (not repetitious) plus being new (not old), not the norm, and unexpected. Nevertheless, the core EEMED choreographers spend much of their interviews discussing and describing how the two interact and connect.

The core EEMED choreographers also recognize several types of relationships between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance as noted by the dance scholars and American Middle Eastern dancers. For example, the core EEMED choreographers on occasion acknowledge change-in-traditions, both new and old. They also see a progress of tradition to experimentation. For example, in order to know what experimental Middle Eastern dance is, the core EEMED choreographers need to define traditional Middle Eastern dance first – to define something as unexpected, one needs to
know first what is expected. The core EEMED choreographers also generally position traditional Middle Eastern dance as prior to the construction of experimental Middle Eastern dance, except for Elayssa, who at first states this and then changes her mind and places experimentation first. The core EEMED choreographers’ use of temporal hierarchy is due to the fact that like most American Middle Eastern dancers, they entered into a discipline that was already established. However, several of them describe a cyclical pattern at work; especially those who view American belly dance as a traditional Middle Eastern dance genre discuss ways a tradition or traditions become experimental and innovative when re-located or fused, and overtime become a tradition.

During their interviews, the core EEMED choreographers present a variety of metaphors that express the ways in which traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance connect and disconnect. Their descriptions indicate that traditional Middle Eastern dance is predominantly self-reliant, but also holds the potential to connect outside of itself, such as with other dance form and non-dance culture. The core EEMED choreographers also assert that experimental Middle Eastern dance goes beyond traditional Middle Eastern dance’s foundations and limits. In fact, they discuss the fact that they began to separate from traditional Middle Eastern dance because of its inability to provide space and forums for them to express certain ideas. The core EEMED choreographers also participate in the continuum between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance, but affirm at some point (which is different for each dancer) a dance is either one or the other.
Anaheed and Tandemonium place traditional Middle Eastern dance at the center of Middle Eastern dance and as a point of departure and experimental Middle Eastern dance in its fluid edge.\textsuperscript{252} Even though experimental Middle Eastern dance is in the edge of tradition Middle Eastern dance, and therefore, a part of it, Anaheed and Tandemonium also find it outside as well. The apparent paradox is due in part to the fact that they claim traditional Middle Eastern dance defines its boundaries; consequently, traditional Middle Eastern dance demarks what is outside of itself – experimental Middle Eastern dance. Anaheed and Tandemonium also connect to the American Middle Eastern dance community and continue traditional elements in experimental Middle Eastern dance.

Tandemonium’s ideas are reflected in their description of the Venn diagram and ripples in a pond. They put traditional dance at the center of Venn diagram sets and the center of ripples in a pond and experimental Middle Eastern dance where either the Venn diagram sets or the ripples overlap. However, Tandemonium present some discrepancy between the two metaphors, which demonstrates their desire for a strong center but acceptance of limited change in tradition. For example, in the Venn diagram, Tandemonium asserts that the fluid, dynamic, and overlapping experimental edges do not influence the centers. The Venn diagram differs from the ripples in the pond in which Claudia and Jean claim that ripples can come into the center of tradition and cause change, especially as Jean notes, if one is not careful. For instance, Claudia especially asserts that Persian dance as “being a little bit more fluid in the center” (Tandemonium 225). However, Jean also emphasizes that the ripples take a long time to reach the center.
As Anaheed also observes with the center and the edge metaphor, Tandemonium asserts that dancers can decide where they reside as well as move between places. For example, Jean claims that some dancers stay inside a traditional center and only perform choreographies that their teachers taught them. Jean and Claudia come from a traditional Middle Eastern dance center and move out from it, but they can also return. In fact, Jean claims, “[w]e don’t have experimental center and move outward, pulling in traditional elements” (Tandemonium 222). In other words, they have not developed an experimental center in which they bring in traditional dance. Other dancers, Tandemonium note, situated in non-Middle Eastern dance centers, can incorporate traditional Middle Eastern dance. Jean adds that a dancer can also move from one center to another. For instance, she recalls Carolyn Krueger started in a modern dance center but “eventually all of the skills of Uzbek became the new center” (Tandemonium 222). However, Tandemonium does not discuss what Krueger brought into traditional Uzbek dance as she transitioned to it from modern dance or how much of her modern dance training she had to discard.

Both Tandemonium and Tatianna present metaphors in which they do not place traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance in a center and periphery relationship. For instance, Tandemonium’s use of the Mobius strip shares with their Venn diagram and ripples in a pond images an acknowledgement of two different genres. However, the Mobius strip is different from the two other two metaphors, because even though one side may dominate the other, the two sides are co-dependent, while the Venn diagram and ripples indicate traditional Middle Eastern dance can stand on its own, but experimental Middle Eastern dance relies upon traditional Middle Eastern for its existence. With the
Mobius strip metaphor, Tandemonium ties the two sides intimately together into a shared ongoing cyclical process of experimentation and tradition.

While discussing how traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance relate, Tatianna began using the metaphor of a tree in which traditional, experimental, alternative, and fusion Middle Eastern dance connect into a self-reliant organism. She establishes traditional Middle Eastern dance as its roots, experimental Middle Eastern dance as its trunk, and fusion dance and alternative dance as its branches that can spread out into any direction providing they still connect to the trunk. In her metaphor, Tatianna acknowledges that not only does traditional Middle Eastern dance impact experimental Middle Eastern dance, but the reverse is true as well since the roots feed the branches and the branches sustain the roots. Although Tatianna’s tree metaphor expresses her ideas of traditional Middle Eastern dance as a base out of which experimental, alternative, and fusion dance come, it does not help articulate her view that dancers from other genres can become a part of experimental Middle Eastern dance. She also considers and hopes different traditional, experimental, and Desert Sin trees exist. In her metaphor, Tatianna moves away from the placement of traditional Middle Eastern dance as the dominant and central force in Middle Eastern dance and replaces it with experimental Middle Eastern dance.

Djahari and Elayssa’s metaphors also indicate that they find a fluid outside and a solid inside relationship between experimental and traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, they differ from Anaheed and Tandemonium’s metaphors because Djahari and Elayssa acknowledge experimentation passes through, or can be inside tradition,
respectively. For instance, Djahari asserts that experimental Middle Eastern dance is branching through and out of the traditional Middle Eastern dance sphere. She states, “you branch out one way and you’re trying something and from there you get another piece and you branch out in another direction” (Djahari 179). Although the two interconnect in her metaphor, Djahari also places them in opposition to each other. For example, she does not think traditional Middle Eastern dance could be branchlike “because I feel like the moment it’s going to become branchlike it become experimental” (Djahari 180), and says the opposite is true for experimental Middle Eastern dance. In fact, she worries about experimental having boundaries, but concludes, if experimental Middle Eastern dance did become spherical, it would branch out again.

Elayssa introduces the metaphor of a house and space as a way to describe her relationship with traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance. The house represents traditional Middle Eastern dance and is where Elayssa grew up, and therefore, feels comfortable and familiar. Elayssa also asserts that other houses exist and represent other dance forms. Elayssa’s passion for learning and discovering has led her outside into experimental Middle Eastern dance space – the place of “creativity and the unknown – the unknown creativity” (Elayssa 167). In fact, Elayssa attests the more she creates and travels in experimental space, the more she is comfortable being there. So much so, that even when Elayssa goes to some place new, she is no longer scared but inspired.

Although Elayssa perceives traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance are different, she reiterates interconnections. For example, the house is inside space and “one of those houses could have a painting in it of the stars that are out there” (Elayssa
She also contemplates the cyclical process and which one came first. At first, Elayssa says the house did, because that is what she learned first. However, Elayssa then changes her mind and claims that space came first because experimental dances solidify into traditional dances/houses. Elayssa does not imagine herself building a new house for experimental Middle Eastern dance, although she states, “I feel like I’m creating a strong place for the idea of the house to be made and eventually with enough time, I don’t know how long… a foundation might be laid” (Elayssa 167). Elayssa even considers maybe she is constructing “a floating space ship” (Elayssa 167).

Examining the core EEMED choreographers’ perceptions of the ways experimental Middle Eastern dance relates to the American Middle Eastern dance community presents more insight into the relationship between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance. As the core EEMED choreographers and American Middle Eastern dance writers note in their definitions of American belly dance, the development and change of American belly dance over the past fifty years, and the growth of American Tribal Style and its offspring in the past twenty, indicate that the majority of American Middle Eastern dancers accept a certain accessible level of change and experimental Middle Eastern dance. In fact, all of the core EEMED choreographers assert that they for the most part receive positive feedback and support for their experimental Middle Eastern dance. For example, Djahari notes she hears how creative she is, that her dances are “new and different,” and she “inspires them” (Djahari 59).
However, core EEMED choreographers are aware, or are made aware, that they transgress certain boundaries in the American Middle Eastern dance community. For example, all of the core EEMED choreographers comment on the criticism EEMED received from MECDA’s (Middle Eastern Culture and Dance Association)\textsuperscript{254} board and a few of its members in 2001 about Desert Sin’s Undulating Thru the Cacti, which was their first dance with nudity as well as EEMED’s.\textsuperscript{255} The core EEMED choreographers divided the comments into two types – problems with associating belly dance with nudity/stripping and claiming that experimental Middle Eastern dance is Middle Eastern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers note that many in the American Middle Eastern dance community were battling for decades to distinguish belly dance from nudity/stripping, and as Anaheed assesses, they saw Undulating Thru the Cacti as an affront to their cause.\textsuperscript{256} Actually, Djahari was surprised by the response. She recalls that several of the critics had not seen the show, and those who had attended the show, ignored most of the dance and its message. In addition, Djahari was taken aback because the dance was about a personal issue regarding her treatment by other women over the course of her life and expressing it in a more general way “about women oppressing other women” (Djahari 59). Djahari saw the critics reinforcing the actions that she was critiquing.

The second set of criticisms charged that experimental Middle Eastern dance is not Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers, such as Anaheed and Tandemonium, read the critics as accusing EEMED, in particular, for “representing” all
of Middle Eastern dance, and as Jean comments, “they think there’s some violation of the culture or the true essence of the dance” (Tandemonium 114). Djahari states, they think once a dancer “mixed other styles into it, it’s no longer Middle Eastern…” (Djahari 48). Jean and Claudia also recount some of their own experiences they had with a couple of dancers in the American Uzbek community who were not happy and/or supportive of what they are doing with experimental Middle Eastern dance. Jean gleaned one woman “felt that [it] was a dilution of tradition” (Tandemonium 214), and therefore, unacceptable.

However, several of the core EEMED choreographers contemplate the idea that the experimental Middle Eastern dance they produce is not Middle Eastern. For example, Claudia states, “it’s not Middle Eastern in a cultural sense but it is taken element of Middle Eastern dance and reinterpreting them” (Tandemonium 69). Claudia means that experimental Middle Eastern dance is not found in the Middle East itself. Instead, she uses elements from dances found there. Additionally, Claudia’s statement does not discount the fact that they observe experimentation has occurred in the Middle East. Djahari makes a similar statement, “I think it uses Middle Eastern dance, but I don’t per se know that it’s Middle Eastern in itself” (Djahari 48). However, when confronted with the notion that people have used the argument that experimental Middle Eastern dance is not Middle Eastern dance, Djahari shifts her ambivalence to the affirmative and states, “I think it is a form of Middle Eastern dance” (Djahari 49). Djahari’s comments demonstrate tensions with defining the term Middle Eastern dance and who holds ownership of it.
The core EEMED choreographers do not view themselves as disavowing traditional Middle Eastern dance, although they may be frustrated with it. In fact, Djahari notes that she does not want to completely leave traditional Middle Eastern dance because it is “kind of a safe place to be” (Djahari 180), while Elayssa states, “right now, I am totally comfortable with having two separate worlds that I go back and forth” (Elayssa 168). Nor do the core EEMED choreographers perceive themselves or want to greatly change, “update,” or put traditional Middle Eastern dance into a new context, and therefore, produce a change-in-tradition. They gain valuable training and materials from traditional Middle Eastern dances and do not want them to disappear. Actually, Anaheed and Tandemonium share with some in the American Middle Eastern dance community a mission to protect, practice, and pass on their traditional forms, which from their observations are quickly and substantially changing, and therefore, in danger of disappearing. For example, Claudia claims that her Classical Uzbek dance teacher, Qizlarkhon has “got to teach it to somebody or it’s going to die (Tandemonium 215),” because Uzbeks are not readily interested in learning it.

MECDA’s and core EEMED choreographers’ positions demonstrate some of the power struggles over who decides what comprises Middle Eastern dance. People in a position to control what type of information can be printed and read in the American Middle Eastern dance community show firsthand how those in the center can work to exclude what they do not deem traditional, and thus, Middle Eastern dance. In fact, Djahari realizes from their responses, “that I’m toying with other people’s idea of this dance and that there’s a whole community out there who feels strongly… to the
separation of experimental and traditional” (Djahari 64). Djahari’s statements demonstrate that she understands and is aware of the impact her dances have on others and on the power struggles over Middle Eastern dance ownership.

Some of the core EEMED choreographers acknowledge they feel some social pressure from the American Middle Eastern dance community, but they do not let the community control their decisions. For all of them, the fringe is not a place of banishment, but one they invigorate with a sense of agency, choice, and freedom based on a belief of artistic expression. In fact, Jeans says, “[w]e go there willingly” (Tandemonium 228). However, they carry out some self-censoring. For example, Tandemonium addresses several times during the interviews that they would not perform their experimental Middle Eastern dances in front of their Uzbek dance teachers, because the teachers are protective of their culture. Tandemonium’s statements indicate that they participate in a strong tradition, which at times conflicts with their American dance position of focusing on change and personal expression.

By dancing in the fringe, the core EEMED choreographers have become more aware of the American Middle Eastern dance community’s boundaries. Before EEMED, Djahari notes, she sensed some restrictions, but did not possess a need to break them there. To bypass some of the issues, several of the core EEMED choreographers performed outside the community. For example, Tandemonium danced at Pagan festivals and Desert Sin at non-Middle Eastern nightclubs. It was only when the core EEMED choreographers began producing dances for EEMED and pushing Middle Eastern dance further that previous restrictions and censorship become apparent.
Although the core EEMED choreographers may position themselves in the fringe of Middle Eastern dance, they are not completely excluded. For example, the core EEMED choreographers obtain opportunities to perform experimental Middle Eastern dance outside of EEMED. The American Middle Eastern dance community has always had openings at festivals, such as Rakkasah and Cairo Carnivale, and producers, such as Anaheed at Café Beledy, who in their shows provide space for a limited number of experimental dances, within certain parameters. In addition, over the past several years, a few of the core EEMED choreographers have been invited to perform in concerts that promote primarily traditional Middle Eastern dance. In these situations, the producers ask, or the choreographers decide, to present something unusual and different, but not extreme or controversial.

The core EEMED choreographers also offer insight into how much traditional Middle Eastern dance allows back in from the fringe into Middle Eastern dance. On one hand, Anaheed, Djahari, and Elayssa state an experimental Middle Eastern dance could be successful at a traditional Middle Eastern dance venue when it is close to traditional Middle Eastern dance with respect to presenting abstract shape, beauty, and/or humor. For example, Anaheed thinks her own Loïe Fuller would do well because of “its sheer beauty” (Anaheed 62), audiences do not have to think about it, and “it’s so much like the taqsīm part of the belly dance” (Anaheed 63). On the other hand, Tandemonium asserts that the experimental Middle Eastern dances may not do well in traditional Middle Eastern dance events because of the limited production elements and the audience’s expectations of seeing traditional forms of Middle Eastern dance. Djahari and Anaheed
also contend that the esoteric, controversial, and dark emotions choreographies do not or would not work, because as Anaheed notes, audiences may not be open-minded enough and would need to work too hard to understand some of EEMED’s dances. She says, that doesn’t mean there shouldn’t be pieces that take work to understand, but I think you have to have a majority of the piece really reach people rather than the majority of the piece be too intellectual or too esoteric for people to comprehend… (Anaheed 62).

In other words, Anaheed proposes the idea that experimental Middle Eastern dancers should reach out and would have more success with traditional Middle Eastern dance audiences by adjusting the degree of experimentation.

For traditional Middle Eastern dance venues, the core EEMED choreographers frequently create new dances, modify an EEMED dance, or decide not to perform their EEMED dances at all. For example, in Between the Shadows, There is Steam (2003), Claudia smokes a cigar rather than a small pipe. Their modification slightly changes the point of the dance, which is about two Afghani farmers who become happy after smoking homegrown opium, but it does not change the overall happy and entertainment value of the dance. However, Jean and Claudia state that they will not perform When the Gods Came Down From Off the Mountain (2003) at traditional Middle Eastern dance events, because Claudia says, the audience would not “appreciate me stabbing somebody to death on their stage” (Tandemonium 100), and Jean adds, “[t]hey wouldn’t understand it without a program note” (Tandemonium 100). Additionally, Tandemonium did not want to perform such a poignant, depressing, and meaningful piece when the audience is too distracted with shopping and talking. Tandemonium cannot make subtle changes to the dance without completely changing its point.
Before EEMED, Desert Sin did not perform at Middle Eastern dance festivals. However, in 2004, Desert Sin danced a version of Sacramental Skins entitled Kali on Rakkasah’s huge proscenium stage, but they had to make concessions in order to do so. For example, Djahari recalls, “when we performed Kali we toned down some of the overly sexual moves we had in there…. because we knew they would shut us down [if we did not]” (Djahari 56). They also added gold tops and made their skirts longer. Making changes to the dance was not an easy decision for either of them, because as Djahari states, she knew “there was a level of compromising my art…” (Djahari 56). Djahari and Elayssa made them anyway because they wanted to reach more people with the idea of experimental Middle Eastern dance. Nevertheless, Djahari asserts that even with their alterations, “it was still a pretty racy piece for Rakkasah standards” (Djahari 56). Despite the modifications, Kali was well received at Rakkasah. In fact, in all the years I attended, Desert Sin’s performance was the first and only time I saw a standing ovation and the lighting technician change the stage lighting wash to accommodate the strikingly different costume and make-up.

Elayssa comments that she makes “safe” experimental Middle Eastern dances that tend to be more entertainment and less emotionally driven for traditional Middle Eastern dance venues. For IAMED shows, she has performed a couple of theatrical experimental Middle Eastern dances. One was an Indian and belly dance fusion (2003). Another, Cleopatra (2004), Elayssa based on the black and white theme she used for The Silent Era and An Ode to Silent Film, including using a narrative structure, playing a character, wearing body paint, and employing props. She comments, “[i]t was definitely outside of
what is traditional” (Elayssa 34), but nonetheless, a piece to which the audience could still relate. Elayssa chose to portray Cleopatra because she is an iconic figure the public would know, and she made it into a comedy, which she says, “was really cheesy and over the top” (Elayssa 134). However, Elayssa worried about performing experimental Middle Eastern dance outside of the EEMED setting. For instance, she had some time to rehearse in the Ford amphitheater in Hollywood, but Elayssa did not receive time to work with the lighting designer. Therefore, she could not create the illusion of being in a film as she had done at EEMED. Additionally, the theater had a sandy colored floor and sides with a live plant backdrop, which once again, detracted from her black and white theme. Elayssa says, “I couldn’t control the lights. I couldn’t control the color of the ground,” and therefore, had “to let go” (Elayssa 63).

Even when core EEMED choreographers happen to not experience any contextual problems at a traditional Middle Eastern dance venue, they still need to release control over lighting design, having rehearsal time, and many times, an attentive audience. On rare occasions, they find theater events in which they obtain some control over their environment and audience. For example, dancers may get time to rehearse in the space, such as at the Perfumes of Araby Annual Concert or when they arrive there, like Café Beledy, before it starts. More often a dancer has the opportunity to plan only when the lights came off and on during her entrances and exits.

While some in the American Middle Eastern dance community try to keep experimental Middle Eastern dance outside of Middle Eastern dance, some of the center expands in order to incorporate the new form. For example, from a traditionalist
viewpoint, experimental Middle Eastern dancers performing in a traditional Middle Eastern dance show a way for the center to restrict and reconfirm its control of the fringe by letting back in selected elements. From an experimentalist viewpoint, their performances are a way to reach out and introduce an emerging form to an audience that may not be completely expecting or open to it. Even with their modifications, the core EEMED choreographers note they still push and break the boundaries of American Middle Eastern dance. In addition, they question and challenge the primacy of traditional Middle Eastern dance and question why experiment and play are not equally established and employed as an identifying marker for Middle Eastern dance. The result of which is an opening up the definition of Middle Eastern dance.

Due to the restrictions the core EEMED choreographers face at other venues, they all express a sense of freedom in performing at EEMED. The core EEMED choreographers receive personal satisfaction from being able to act and express what they want. In fact, Elayssa comments, “being in EEMED spoils me because I do get all this control” (Elayssa 64). In addition, Djahari says at EEMED, “I don’t feel like I’m catering to a client” (Djahari 84). EEMED is unlike other events in which Desert Sin is hired to perform “a particular piece they’ve already seen” (Djahari 85) or to create a piece that fits a theme and often comes with specifics requests and/or restrictions. Nor does Djahari feel the need at EEMED to “bring up the audience and get them into a party mode” (Djahari 87). Djahari and Elayssa contend EEMED holds room for dances to be more than just pure entertainment, and therefore, they can present more serious and darker themed dances.
Although the core EEMED choreographers generally claim that no restrictions exist in regards to the topics or statements they can express with experimental Middle Eastern dance, they find some theater limitations in EEMED’s venues, such as the lack of a second story floor to the stage, the way the backstage area limits sizes of prop and costume, the difficulty of wearing black or using black props in a black box theater, the limited special lighting, spot light, and special effects resources, and the ability to suspend from the ceiling. Nevertheless, the core EEMED choreographers do not identify these as a problem with EEMED per se. For example, Tandemonium does not believe the problems restrict their creativity. Claudia says, “if we had other options we would use them, but I don’t think these are going to limit us” (Tandemonium 98). Instead, as the core EEMED choreographers do with any other performance, they produce work within the confines of the venue. As a result, Anaheed asserts, “you have to be flexible and adapt your concept to the staging availabilities” (Anaheed 52).

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER

The core EEMED choreographers participate in a diverse community filled with many Middle Eastern dance genres and venues. In fact, Middle Eastern dancers work to negotiate between adapting dances to new situations, creating new ones in order to embody new ideas, and/or protecting and continuing traditional Middle Eastern dances. The core EEMED choreographers’ concepts of the relationship between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance develops in large part because of their ability to move between the two.
The core EEMED choreographers’ ability to construct and dance in the fringe comes in part from the fact that as non-Middle Eastern descendents they do not possess deep connections to the Middle East. For example, the core EEMED choreographers were not brought up in a strong traditional dance, except for Elayssa, and she is coming through American belly dance, and not a strong traditional dance form developed in the Middle East. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers have not lived in the Middle East, and therefore, do not always possess the cultural understanding or responsibility of dancers who are brought up in a particular culture.

Dancers in the Middle East can form fringes as well. For example, the dance scholars, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers noted several cases of Middle Eastern dance choreographers experimenting with tradition and resulting in new genres. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers are not the only dancers entering from “outside” to learn another culture’s dance form. Several dance scholars examine the roles of ballet, modern dancers, and post-modern dancers in Israel and Turkey. Paralleling many of the develop of Middle Eastern dances in the United States, ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance has entered into other cultures through diaspora groups and import. Additionally, some of the Middle Eastern ballet dancers, modern dancers, and post-modern dancers continue the genre, while others fuse various genres together.

The core EEMED choreographers who are influenced by American idealism envision themselves as individual artists and frequently work against social norms. Initially, they practice Middle Eastern dance was a way for them to move against their
own norm. However, over time, Middle Eastern dance became the core EEMED choreographers’ standard with which they then felt a need to break. In addition, experimental Middle Eastern dance became a means for them to explore, connect, and express themselves with elements from inside and outside of Middle Eastern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers live in the fast-paced and global urban landscape of Los Angeles, which allows them quick and easy access to various types of materials, costumes, music, and movement from around the world. In addition, they connect with professionals, many whom are their friends, who are knowledgeable about productions elements, such as music and video editing, set and prop construction, and costume and lighting design. In fact, the growth of technology such as the internet and accessible music editing systems has offered the core EEMED choreographers new avenues to create dance. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers draw on Los Angeles’ numerous small independently run theaters and the audiences that support them.

The core EEMED choreographers express they are moving away from a central space that they label traditional Middle Eastern dance. The core EEMED choreographers enter and produce a fringe that seems to be filled with infinite possibilities, while simultaneously participate in traditional Middle Eastern dance. Their actions and reactions demonstrate the complex and changing dynamics between the two. Some of the core EEMED choreographers work to keep the two different, while others find themselves practicing more and more experimental Middle Eastern dance and less traditional Middle Eastern dance. Many are working to bring experimental Middle Eastern dance into traditional Middle Eastern. The core EEMED choreographers do so not because they want
to destroy or corrupt traditional Middle Eastern, but in order to expand the concept of Middle Eastern dance beyond tradition/established genres.
SECTION THREE
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I concentrated on the core EEMED choreographers’ use of genre and umbrella terms during their interviews in order to examine their development and naming of experimental Middle Eastern dance via EEMED. Scholars of Middle Eastern dance surveyed in this dissertation frequently did not address practitioners’ perspectives and terminology. Therefore, they produced data that was based upon their categories and offered different insights than if they had focused on those of the practitioners. The American Middle Eastern dance writers presented their own viewpoints, and therefore, those of practitioners. However, when conducting research on dances outside of their own practices, they participated in the dance scholars’ approach of ignoring, silencing, and/or neglecting voices of others. When the scholars of Middle Eastern dance or the American Middle Eastern dance writers recorded practitioners’ voices, they frequently discounted and then covered those voices while emphasizing their own positions and/or theories.

In this dissertation, I presented the core EEMED choreographers’ individual and collective ideas, statements, and positions, thereby demonstrating the importance and insightfulness of their discursive practices. Equipped with their ideas and concepts, I explored the core EEMED choreographers’ connections and disconnections with those scholars of American dance and the American Middle Eastern dance community. I also
contextualized the core EEMED choreographers’ theories of practice within other supporting theories, such as the rhizome and Thirdspace.

**FORMATION OF THE EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE “GENRE”**

The core EEMED choreographers present an interesting dilemma for genre theorists. They claim that experimental Middle Eastern dance is not a genre and/or a distinct image. Instead, several of them state experimental Middle Eastern dance exists as an action and/or a trait, and not as a genre. By taking such a stance, the core EEMED choreographers work to prevent experimental Middle Eastern dance from becoming codified, fixed, defined, recognized, and therefore, an established genre or a tradition. They also resist discursive practices and inclinations put forth by dance scholars and American Middle Eastern dance writers to label and categorize Middle Eastern dance into genres. Nevertheless, the core EEMED choreographers use experimental Middle Eastern dance and other terms to label their non-traditional Middle Eastern dance work. In this conclusion, I will continue to hold onto the contradiction evident in the core EEMED choreographers’ desire to communicate what they create without wanting to name it. I will analyze how the core EEMED choreographers employ the contradiction and what it achieves for them. In addition, I examine the ways in which the core EEMED choreographers relate experimental and traditional Middle Eastern dance “genres.”

Amy Devitt, in *Writing Genres*, and John Frow, in *Genre*, emphasize that texts and genres contain a reciprocal relationship, and therefore, every text participates in
genres. In fact, Devitt observes that both contemporary literary and rhetorical genre theorists subscribe to the notion “genre is inescapable” (Devitt 166). However, Devitt and Frow, drawing from Jacques Derrida’s “The Law of Genre,” acknowledge that texts only participate in genres and that they do not belong to them. Every text participates in genres, regardless if it challenges or accepts them, because of the socially pervasive practice of using genres as organizational principles.

Even though the core EEMED choreographers partake in textual/genre relations with their use of experimental Middle Eastern dance terms, I cannot ignore their statements and actions that defy genrification of their dances. My method of interviewing, listening, and analyzing the core EEMED choreographers’ speech, ideas, concepts, and terms for traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance “genres” corresponds with the research method of genre theorists Amy Devitt, John Frow, and Carolyn Miller. They also focus on and discern the ways in which practitioners use and define genres. For example, Devitt writes, “labels [are] given by the people who use the genres…genres are named as people use them…” (Devitt 8). Devitt and Frow also cite in their definitions of genre Miller’s “Genre as Social Action.” In this article, Miller claims that people construct and establish genres not only by classifying texts, but also through “typified rhetorical actions based in recurring situations” (Miller 31). With social action comes a reciprocal relationship between genres and recurring situations. By taking the approach of placing practitioners’ statements, perspectives, and actions at the center of their research, the genre theorists are able to explore practitioners’ values and outlooks.
The core EEMED chorographers resist genrification of their dances on a textual level when they claim that as a whole their “experimental” Middle Eastern dances contain too many constantly changing dance elements for them to categorize. A way the core EEMED chorographers maintain multiplicity is through a rhizomatic approach to choreography. They predominantly use a choreographic process of taking elements from various traditional Middle Eastern dances and connecting them to any number of rhizomes and assemblages outside of Middle Eastern dance. Which elements they employ, and from whence they draw them, changes from piece to piece. The core EEMED chorographers also play with degrees of experimentation and how far they reach out of Middle Eastern dance. For example, some of the assemblages the core EEMED choreographers connect are already intertwined with Middle Eastern dance historically and culturally, such as Flamenco and West African dance, while others, such as Butoh, are not. The core EEMED choreographers may also reach into non-dance assemblages. In the end, the rules and structures they use to create an individual dance are temporary. Therefore, the core EEMED chorographers do not regularly note components that continue or recur, but instead, recount the uniqueness of each dance and the discontinuous aspects among their dances.

Although the core EEMED chorographers emphasis that their choreographic processes create difference, one can also read them as producing recurring convergences and actions. This position can lead to their EEMED dances being labeled a genre. Devitt would call this conforming to genre expectations. For example, the core EEMED chorographers’ goal to not produce traditional Middle Eastern dance, but instead, unique,
different, and new dances, is a common ideology and practice. The choreographic process that combines elements from various sources and permits their texts to be unique, can also be viewed as a common characteristic, and therefore, a foundation for a genre definition. Another common trait occurs when the core EEMED choreographers maintain some amount of continuity, although to varying degrees, with traditional Middle Eastern dance genres. For example, they predominantly present dance as a visual representation of the music and as bodily expression. Further commonalities could be uncovered in analyzing their choreographic processes of their EEMED dances.

Devitt leaves room for some genres, such as experimental Middle Eastern dance, to value variation and creativity more than others. For example, Dewitt claims, “[v]ariation is permitted to the degree that it does not negate either function or appropriateness” (Dewitt 149) of a genre. However, she contemplates the idea that if a genre promotes too much variation it can become unintelligible and unusable – a “failed” genre. However, if a genre is too stable, then it declines “into arhetorical formulae…” (Devitt 135). In other words, long lasting and usable genres need to balance between stability and flexibility. The question arises whether or not the term experimental Middle Eastern dance will become too fluid to have much meaning or usage or become too codified to maintain its fringe status.

The core EEMED choreographers resist discursive practices to codify their texts as participating in genres by not defining experimental Middle Eastern dance in its own terms. Instead, they describe it as not being traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, genre theorists, such as Frow, could incorporate the core EEMED choreographers’
statements back within genre construction by claiming that a genre can be defined by what it is not. In fact, he claims it is in the action of disrupting a genre’s expectations that new ones develop. However, the core EEMED choreographers’ contrast between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance results in ideas that experimental Middle Eastern dance is neither well defined nor possessed of a high intensity of consistency, continuity, structure, rules, or boundaries. By placing experimental Middle Eastern dance in the position of being “not-traditional-Middle-Eastern-dance,” the core EEMED choreographers elude the need to set parameters and definitions for experimental Middle Eastern dance – or for what they are creating.

According to Devitt, Frow, and Miller, for a genre term to develop and become standard practitioner’s actions and terms need to repeat. However, the core EEMED choreographers resist codification by creating lines of flight away from the experimental Middle Eastern dance term. For example, several of them do not readily call their work experimental Middle Eastern dance because of their own and other peoples’ association of “experimental dance” with “bad” or “convoluted” dance. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers frequently employ other terms, such as interpretive, theatrical, fusion, and alternative dance to label their work. In fact, some even resist using these terms consistently. For example, Djahari acknowledges that at times she produces fusion dance. She also comments the name is accurate and helps her communicate what she is doing. However, Djahari, at other times, replies she does not like to use the term fusion in part because it is a common and over used term in the American Middle Eastern dance community. The core EEMED choreographers continue to disrupt “genre” formations by
frequently labeling their EEMED dances with not one genre term, but several, and to varying degrees.

The genre theorists assert that texts can participate in several genres at a time and that genres can overlap. However, the core EEMED choreographers present a more complicated situation. Their employment of the terms interpretive, theatrical, fusion, and alternative dance undermines the term experimental Middle Eastern dance in several ways. As sub-genres of experimental Middle Eastern dance, interpretive, theatrical, fusion, and alternative dance terms disrupt the cohesion of experimental Middle Eastern dance by fragmenting and producing differences within it, and therefore, developing multiplicity. In addition, at times, the core EEMED choreographers distinguish interpretive, theatrical, fusion, and alternative dance from experimental Middle Eastern dance, and thereby, deny a hierarchal relationship among them. Regardless of how the core EEMED choreographers define the relationship between experimental Middle Eastern dance and these four genres, they develop and classify specific territories within the vast landscape of traditional Middle Eastern dance’s fringe. These terms also provide vocabulary the core EEMED choreographers can refer to their personal positions and continue promoting their experimental Middle Eastern dances as special, unique, and different. Rather than developing one genre on the fringe of traditional Middle Eastern dance and making it their new center, the core EEMED choreographers construct their fringe with fluid and multiple genres. Their actions result in an acentered fringe.

Devitt, Frow, and Miller perceive that practitioners develop genres not only by finding convergences and common elements among a group of texts, but also through
constructing reciprocal relationships with recurring actions and situations. The formation of experimental Middle Eastern dance as a genre occurs through the core EEMED choreographers’ repeated use of the term during their interviews and in descriptions on their websites. EEMED also influences the standardization of the term experimental Middle Eastern dance in its advertisements, programs, and title. Additionally, EEMED’s recurrence and “popularity” increased the visibility of the term experimental dance in the American Middle Eastern dance community. As a result, more dancers employ it as a description of their work on websites, discussion groups, flyers, and video clips. This dissertation also partakes in the codification of experimental Middle Eastern dance by examining and placing it into academic discourse.

A few of the core EEMED choreographers consider that because EEMED (at the time of the interviews) recurs every year, it could become a “tradition.” The importance of EEMED to the development of their experimental Middle Eastern dance cannot be ignored, especially since several of the core EEMED choreographers note the show helped shape their experimental Middle Eastern dance through providing elements such as, lighting design, stage space, and choice to create what they want. In addition, their participation in EEMED, a recurring show in a black box theater with lighting design, crew support, attentive audiences, fixed performance and audience spaces, and framework may be producing levels of continuity and convergence in their dances. EEMED also develops an audience and fan base with its own set of expectations and experiences.
Devitt, Frow, and Miller observe that people develop new genres when they encounter new situations. In fact, as several dance scholars cited in the dissertation attested, it is difficult to change the meaning of a genre term once it is well defined and in broad circulation. In fact, I examined the push by several dance scholars to modify and broaden terms, such as ethnic dance, tribal dance, and folk dance, to incorporate their fluid characteristics. However, many, such as the core EEMED choreographers, find it easier to construct new genre terms instead. For example, the core EEMED choreographers commented traditional Middle Eastern dance did not contain room for all of their self-expressions. Therefore, they began to look for, and, simultaneously, created new situations and structures. In turn, the core EEMED choreographers developed more situations. They did not find terms in circulation to use, and therefore, began describing and calling their new dances by various terms, some of which they no longer employ, such as Tandemonium’s “twisted ethnic.”

According to Devitt, Frow, and Miller, people construct new genres for new contexts and situations based upon antecedent genres. Devitt writes, “[t]he existence of prior known genres shapes the development of new or newly learned genres” (Devitt 28). The core EEMED choreographers participate in this development in order to communicate with others what they are creating. For example, to construct the term experimental Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers draw from two areas. They retain the term “Middle Eastern dance” in order to demonstrate their membership in the American Middle Eastern dance community and to emphasis their dance foundations. An exception to the membership may be Djahari who notes she does
not always want to use or associate her work with the term Middle Eastern dance. However, in her 2005 interview, Djahari concedes that, at least up to that point in time, she always employed some amount of Middle Eastern dance in her experimental Middle Eastern dance.

The core EEMED choreographers also use an uncommon term “experimental,” which several scholars of American dance surveyed use on occasion to label modern dancers and post-modern dancers and/or early moments in a choreographer’s career. Therefore, the core EEMED choreographers are able to co-opt the term experimental for their own dance needs. The core EEMED choreographers do not readily connect to modern dance and post-modern dance with regards to dance elements. However, they do link with modern dance and post-modern dance’s rhetoric and actions of rejecting and breaking from their foundation or from what came before them and goals of creating something new and unique.

Frow notes, and Devitt agrees, “the categories of genre are subject to constant redefinition” (Frow 139), which is what the core EEMED choreographers accomplish for their other “experimental” Middle Eastern dance terms. For example, they repurpose an uncommon traditional Middle Eastern dance term – interpretive dance; change the name of a process into a proper noun – fusion dance; expand the scope of a common term in American culture that means “not-popular” – alternative dance; and associate with an established umbrella term based on their settings and/or production elements – theatrical dance. By redeploying these terms for new situations, the core EEMED choreographers
undermine genres’ areas of stability and continuity in order to promote multiplicity, fluidity, and deviation.

**FORMATION OF THE EXPERIMENTAL MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE FRINGE**

The core EEMED choreographers present an ideological struggle not only with genre designations, but also with traditional Middle Eastern dance genres. The scholars of Middle Eastern dance, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the core EEMED choreographers that I surveyed in my dissertation, present traditional Middle Eastern dance as an assemblage of various genres. They place ethnic dance, folk dance, tribal dance, and religious movement ceremonies as strong dominating presences at the center of Middle Eastern dance. Rarely do the core EEMED choreographers, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and/or the scholars of Middle Eastern dance indicate lines of flight into these four strong traditional genres. Rather, they identify these traditional genres as amateur, local, and participatory forms, with invariant characteristics. The core EEMED choreographers, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the scholars of Middle Eastern dance employ ethnic dance, folk dance, tribal dance, and religious movement ceremonies as the prototypes, the roots, and the predecessors of other genres, such as staged-folk dance, classical dance, and belly dance.

Many traditionalists deny entry of other genres into the Middle Eastern dance’s center. For example, the core EEMED choreographers, the American Middle Eastern dance writers, and the scholars of Middle Eastern dance acknowledge ruptures and
changes exist in dance genres in the Middle East, with the experimentation and development of staged-folk dance, classical dance, and cabaret belly dance. They describe the well defined boundaries of these genres and tout their deep connections into strong traditional Middle Eastern dance genres. However, many deny entry of these three genres into the traditional Middle Eastern dance genre, even after a minimum of sixty years of practice. By creating strong boundaries around traditional genres these core EEMED choreographers, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and scholars of Middle Eastern dance look to protect traditional Middle Eastern dances from changes that are the result of Western influence and domination. Their statements imply that traditional Middle Eastern dance cannot adapt new and/or foreign concepts into traditional parameters and/or construct new traditions.

Core EEMED choreographers, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and scholars of Middle Eastern dance who include staged-folk dance, classical dance, and/or belly dance within the traditional Middle Eastern dance genre recognize Middle Eastern dance’s ability to accommodate discontinuities and changes. They generally develop and present complex relationships between the Middle East and foreign cultures, especially with regards to national and post-colonial dynamics. These scholars of Middle Eastern dance, American Middle Eastern dance writers, and core EEMED choreographers also indicate spaces exist in-between Middle Eastern dance and foreign culture that enable the production of fusion identities. They examine how and why practitioners can shift between innovative and traditional discourses within an individual genre depending upon the socio-political stance they need to construct.
The usage of the term experimental Middle Eastern dance questions the boundaries of Middle Eastern dance itself. For example, some practitioners and audiences protect Middle Eastern dance by claiming that dances choreographed by ballet, modern dancers, and post-modern dancers in the Middle East are foreign, and therefore, are not Middle Eastern dance. In their restrictive position, they protect “local” dance boundaries. However, others expand the concept of Middle Eastern dance to accommodate ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance.

Similar positions are taken in the American Middle Eastern dance community, where some protect traditional Middle Eastern dance by denying entry of American belly dance and America Tribal Style into their genre. However, the majority accept American belly dance as Middle Eastern because of its close ties to belly dance in parts of the Middle East. American Tribal Style holds a much more ambivalent status as Middle Eastern, since as a genre, it is not found in the Middle East. Experimental Middle Eastern dance, as further distant from the traditional Middle Eastern dance center maintains an even more nebulous position. As a result of their denied entry, the core EEMED choreographers are pushed out of the American Middle Eastern dance community or at least into its fringe.

Those who accept ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance in the Middle East and American belly dance, America Tribal Style, and experimental Middle Eastern dance in the United States as Middle Eastern dance question the ability of dancers to own a “foreign” dance and to negotiate between local and global identities. They challenge
those in power in the American Middle Eastern dance community and American dance scholarship over who decides what is and is not Middle Eastern dance.

By claiming their experimental Middle Eastern dance exists as a part of Middle Eastern dance, the core EEMED choreographers expand, at least for them, what comprises the Middle Eastern dance’s genre. Thereby, they create a new discourse of Middle Eastern dance. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers participate in developing what Edward Soja labels as Thirdspace. In Thirdspace, Soja discusses it as a place for difference, otherness, and new types of politics. The core EEMED choreographers, starting in the traditional Middle Eastern dance assemblage, choose to move away from it on what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in A Thousand Plateaus, call lines of flight to its fringes. Many of the core EEMED choreographers’ lines of flight rely upon the ruptures, deviation, mutation, and instability of repetition, which they find in current Middle Eastern dance genres. Devitt, Frow, and Miller notice similar practices in the development of new genres as well, especially since a situation never completely repeats exactly, and, therefore, leaves room for ruptures.

In the fringe, the core EEMED choreographers develop new situations and new dances. In addition, for some of them, the fringe became their Middle Eastern dance center. The fringe creates a new type of center; one that is difficult to recognize and therefore, control. Even though the core EEMED choreographers construct experimental space as open-ended, infinite, without boundaries, and filled with endless possibilities, they do not necessarily completely dominate, understand, or put all the elements into play. Their constructed experimental space is not knowable at a glance or even through
years of working and forming it. Too many variables exist for differences to become sameness.

By constructing the fringe for their own missions and purposes, the core EEMED choreographers begin to de-center traditional Middle Eastern dance. In fact, experimental Middle Eastern dance accommodates dancers who do not possess a traditional Middle Eastern dance foundation. For example, several EEMED choreographers are in fact ballet or jazz dancers who add Middle Eastern dance into their genre. In addition, American Middle Eastern dancers now hold the possibility of starting in genres, such as American tribal style and tribal fusion, which are newer, and therefore, do not need a foundation in what many in the American Middle Eastern dance community claim to be traditional Middle Eastern genres, such as folk dance, classical dance, and/or belly dance. However, many American Middle Eastern dancers see American tribal style and tribal fusion as established genres, and therefore, their foundation and initial centers.

The Thirdspace that the core EEMED choreographers create includes their movements among different locations and layers, various degrees of newness and sedimentations, and traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance genres. Their ability to move between the center and periphery holds a privileged capacity. The core EEMED choreographers participate in a traditional home, but also travel to different locales and play with various structures. In fact, many of them still practice and protect traditional Middle Eastern dance genres, while others remain more often in experimental genres. This dissertation examines the lines and levels of interconnectivity between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance genres in the images that the core
EEMED choreographers describe, such as the Mobius strip, house and space, tree, ripples in a pond, and branches coming from and going through centers. The dissertation also notes that several genres, such as interpretive, theatrical, and fusion, contain dance examples of both traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance genres. The placement of these three genres within traditional or experimental Middle Eastern dance genres depends upon which side a choreographer chooses to emphasize.

The notion of Thirdspace does not ignore or discount the fact that traditional Middle Eastern dance still wields much power, based upon Othering divergent practices at its margins. Its powers can be observed in the ways in which experimental Middle Eastern dance practitioners are “punished.” For example, dance scholars and American Middle Eastern dance writers silence experimental Middle Eastern dance practitioners by not presenting any of the practitioners’ perspectives and/or by discrediting and undervaluing their experiences of change, effectively characterizing them as uninformed due to Westernization. Another way in which several scholars of Middle Eastern dance and American Middle Eastern dance writers “punish” experimental Middle Eastern dance practitioners is by denying their entry into Middle Eastern dance.

The de-centering of traditional Middle Eastern dance in the early 2000s has not, and probably will never, be completed. I say this because the core EEMED choreographers do not ask for a complete disavowal of continuities and traditions, but rather that continuities and traditions be questioned. Although the core EEMED choreographers are expanding the concept of Middle Eastern dance, they are not radically changing their ideas of traditional Middle Eastern dance. One can see the importance of
traditional Middle Eastern dance in the core EEMED choreographers’ experimental Middle Eastern dances. They, along with those practicing “newly” developed Middle Eastern dance genres, find it necessary to not only acknowledge their traditional backgrounds, but also to continually trace and to establish their connections to some type of stable traditional Middle Eastern dance genre. The core EEMED choreographers’ statements and actions result in an attempt to legitimatize their experimental Middle Eastern dance. In addition, many of the core EEMED choreographers still practice it and present it as a safe home base and a foundation. Their continued connection to traditional Middle Eastern dance also provides them a foundation to which they not only can come back, but also one that they can reject or move away from at any time.

The core EEMED choreographers are not the only ones producing lines of flight out of traditional Middle Eastern dance. For example, construction of the “new” contains existing rhizomes in the American Middle Eastern dance community with its history of individuals who adapt and transfer Middle Eastern dance forms established in the Middle East to new settings and situations, especially to the stage. In fact, American Middle Eastern dancers made Middle Eastern dance their own to such a degree that some genres exist in the United States and not in the Middle East. Within parts of the Middle East, staged-folk dancers, classical dancers, cabaret belly dancers, ballet dancers, modern dancers, and post-modern dancers have and many still are producing lines of flights as well.

The core EEMED choreographers develop different lines of flight from those taken by staged-folk dancers, classical dancers, cabaret belly dancers, ballet dancers,
modern dancers, and post-modern dancers in the Middle East. For instance, the core EEMED choreographers are forthright about their processes of experimentation and engage with tradition by bringing instability and mutation into tradition’s “hidden” sedimentation processes. They work to prevent a stable assemblage from forming by using a variety of chorographic processes that draw elements from numerous sources inside and outside the Middle East. The core EEMED choreographers not only situate themselves in the fringe of Middle Eastern dance, but they also bring lines of flight back into tradition. In addition, the core EEMED choreographers challenge those in power in the American Middle Eastern dance community and American dance scholarship over who decides what is and is not Middle Eastern dance.

CONCLUSION OF THE DISSERTATION

In the dissertation, I explored how the core EEMED choreographers create an emerging dance form of experimentation. However, questions still arise. Will experimental Middle Eastern dancers be able to develop the fringe in such a way that it will produce subjects for whom tradition is and never was a center? Will the core EEMED choreographers be able to maintain experimental Middle Eastern dance’s instability and flexibility? As the core EEMED choreographers continue to practice and create experimental Middle Eastern dance, they will need to take into consideration and to deal with its own types of repetition: a tradition-of-experimentation and a tradition-of-the-new. The core EEMED choreographers may find themselves developing personal styles. They also have to contend with the ways EEMED participates in becoming a
tradition-in-the-fringe through its annual recurrence and recognition in the American Middle Eastern dance community.

What has yet to be revealed is how much of a defined genre experimental Middle Eastern dance will become and/or if it even will sustain its status as a genre. Experimental Middle Eastern dance’s rhetorical actions – its verbal and published statements by and about its dancers, productions, and creators – undermine its construction as a strong definition. A few of the core EEMED choreographers concede that only in vague terms could experimental Middle Eastern dance be considered a tradition: a tradition-of-experimentation. According to how the core EEMED choreographers and the American Middle Eastern dance writers view and employ genres, in order for experimental Middle Eastern dance to become an established genre, practitioners would need to practice it for a long time, at least several decades. For it to become accepted into the American Middle Eastern dance community, people in numerous cities would have to practice it. If experimental Middle Eastern dance deals successfully with new situations, it may become common and routine. It is therefore in danger of defeating its purpose of resisting normative and codifying practices. In fact, the core EEMED choreographers voice their fear that solidification will occur.

The core EEMED choreographers add new ways of thinking about Middle Eastern dance; ways that are not based upon the image of continued tradition. They express complex ways in which discontinuation and continuation, and tradition and experimentation, can interact. The core EEMED choreographers maintain a base in traditional Middle Eastern dance genres while drawing on an American post-modern
dance ideology of inclusivity, continuous change, and a pattern of breaking away, but not completely, from one’s foundations. Their practices emphasize uniqueness and hybridization rather than repetition and solidification and create a fluidity of movement through numerous borders.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The dissertation opens up areas for future work. For example, future projects suggested by this dissertation might continue to unpack the core EEMED choreographers’ unique theories of dance practice and choreography and examine the relationship of traditional and experimental Middle Eastern by analyzing the core EEMED choreographers’ choreographic processes and dances. In addition to interview material, researchers might use Cecily Dell’s A Primer for Movement Description (1977), Valerie Preston-Dunlop’s Looking at Dances (1998), and Susan Foster’s chapter “Reading Choreography” in Reading Dancing (1986) as guides. For example, Dell’s concise and organized presentation of Laban Movement Analysis offers vocabulary and tools for describing in words the movement portion of dance. Preston-Dunlop offers a comprehensive look at dance by presenting terms for not only describing movement, but also music, venue, gaze, emotion, content, and meaning. In addition, she includes perspectives from different positions, including that of the dance, the performer, and the audience. Foster presents another guideline to examine “choreographic meaning” (Foster 1986, 59) via five interconnected areas: frame, mode of representation, style, vocabulary, and syntax. Even though the three texts are helpful, the authors concentrate on ballet,
modern, and post-modern dance, and therefore, one needs to consider the limits of what their analytical texts can detect in Middle Eastern dance.

With data produced from choreographic and dance analysis, future projects could focus on specific EEMED dances. By examining various dance elements, such as movements, costumes, music, structure, and lighting design, it would be possible to understand which traditional Middle Eastern dance(s) the core EEMED choreographers draw from and what elements they maintain. Additionally, a future project might explore the core EEMED choreographers’ influences by non-Middle Eastern dance sources. It could include inquiries into elements a choreographer never changes, always changes, or sometimes changes. By assessing this information, one could demonstrate whether or not patterns within the core EEMED choreographers’ dances develop a “genre,” or within an individual’s work produce a personal style.

Any of the areas of research previously mentioned could be examined by integrating descriptions of movement and choreography with specific theories, including Thirdspace and rhizomes, and fields of study, such as gender, post-colonial, space, history, and socio-economics. These projects could explore a dance’s construction and meaning and further evaluate a dance’s cultural contexts. Traditional Middle Eastern dances also could be explored for their experimental processes in order to understand if, and how, the two produce and control each other. Other non-traditional Middle Eastern dances in various parts of the United States and Europe, including non-concert stage performances, such as those found at festivals, restaurants, nightclubs, homes, and outdoor, could be examined for other experimental Middle Eastern dance definitions and
processes. One could also examine whether different experimental processes helped create specific genres. Other interesting areas for both researchers and performers would be a comparison and contrast of experimental Middle Eastern dance processes in the United States and the Middle East, as well as within the Middle East. These lines of research could lead to cultural understanding of the ways in which tradition and experimentation develop in specific groups of people in various times. They also could examine tensions between individual agency and ideology/structure and development of hybridity and fusion cultures.
WORKS CITED


------. Program. Los Angeles. 28 Sept. 2007.


Undulating Thru the Cacti. EEMED program 2001.


-------. Personal Letter sent to the author and to MECDA. 2001.


APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Background

How do you identify yourself?

Does this identity change? (if so, how? where? when? why?)

How old are you?

What is your ethnicity (ancestral background)?

What is your nationality?

What is your gender?

What is your sexual orientation?

What is your class status?

What is your religious, spiritual, or philosophical system?

What is your education background?

What is your current profession?

Dance Background

What is the name of the type of dance you do?

Why do you employ this term rather than another term?

Could you please define or describe this dance?

Geographically where does this dance reside?

When did you start this type of dance?

Who and where did you study? How long?

What styles did/do you study?
What other styles of dance did/do you study?
What styles did/do you perform?
Where did/do you perform?
What contexts are you practicing and performing this dance?
Why did you start this dance? How did you get interested in this dance?
What has this dance done for you?
What are your future dance goals?
How do you plan to achieve these goals?

**General Application of “Traditional” and “Experimental Middle Eastern” Dance**

Do you classify various dance styles of the Middle East? If so, how?

How do you differentiate what EEMED does from other styles of dance?

What do other people call this dance?

Do you use terms such as traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance? If so, why?
If not, then which ones do you use?

Do you think there are difference(s) between traditional and experimental “Middle Eastern” dance?

Are they appropriate terms?

How would you define or describe traditional Middle Eastern dance?

Can you give examples of traditional Middle Eastern dance that you do, or have done?

What makes this traditional?

What is its role of traditional Middle Eastern dance in society?

What is the role of traditional Middle Eastern dance in your personal life?
Do you think you are a strong traditional Middle Eastern dancer? If so, in what way? If not, then why not?

Do you have to be a strong traditional Middle Eastern dancer to be a strong experimental Middle Eastern dancer? Why, or why not?

Are there other criteria for being a strong experimental Middle Eastern dancer?

What are your criteria for being a good dancer? Please give examples.

What are your criteria for good choreography?

When describing your non-traditional Middle Eastern dance style, what name(s) do use?

How would you define experimental Middle Eastern dance?

Is experimental Middle Eastern dance, Middle Eastern? If so, how? If not, then why not?

Several critics have argued that the work at EEMED is not Middle Eastern dance. How do/would you respond to them?

What are the similarities and differences between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance?

How you see traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance working/connecting or not working/connecting with each other? Please give examples.

Do you find traditional Middle Eastern dance within experimental Middle Eastern dance, and vice versa? Please give examples.

How does experimental Middle Eastern dance treat traditional Middle Eastern dance? And vice versa?

Does experimental Middle Eastern dance expose the workings of traditional Middle Eastern dance? And vice versa? If so, how? If not, then why not?

What makes your work experimental?

What is the intent of your experimental Middle Eastern dance work?

Do you maintain traditional Middle Eastern dance in your experimental Middle Eastern dance? If so, please give examples.
Does your experimental Middle Eastern dance work affect traditional Middle Eastern dance? If so, how? If not, then why not?

Are you asked to perform experimental Middle Eastern dance in mainstream Middle Eastern dance concerts?

Do you change your work for this context? If so, how? If not, then why not?

How do you think traditional Middle Eastern dancers view your experimental Middle Eastern dance work? Please give examples.

Should all Middle Eastern dancers be performing experimental Middle Eastern dance? If so, why? If not, then why not?

Is experimental Middle Eastern dance easily recognizable?

Is experimental Middle Eastern dance a distinctive style? If so, in what way?

Is experimental Middle Eastern dance becoming a tradition? If so, how? If not, then why?

What other experimental shows are there?

**EEMED**

What is **EEMED**?

What is the purpose of **EEMED** and experimental Middle Eastern dance?

What is the purpose of traditional Middle Eastern dance?

What is **EEMED**’s goals?

What are traditional dance forms’ goals?

What is the purpose and, or function of **EEMED** and experimental Middle Eastern dance?

What is the purpose and, or function of traditional Middle Eastern dance?

Does **EEMED** have a distinctive dance style?

When and how did you become involved with **EEMED**?

Why did you become involved with **EEMED**?
How has EEMED changed through the years?

What is your role(s) in EEMED?

What does EEMED do for you?

How does your work add to the identity of EEMED?

Has EEMED helped you realize your present and future goals? How?

How has your worked changed through the years of EEMED?

Do you think there are regulations or restrictions on the type of Middle Eastern dance you can perform at EEMED?

What is your audition process?

Is there a social hierarchy within EEMED?

How do the participants work with each other, or not?

How do you work with other participants?

Where do you receive financial support to perform at EEMED?

How does money affect what kind of work you do at EEMED?

What financial benefits do you receive from performing at EEMED?

What other kinds of benefits do you receive from performing at EEMED?

How is EEMED different from other performance contexts you have participated? Please give examples.

Are there differences between experimental work done for EEMED and those done in other venues?

Does the venue affect the type of experimental work you do?

How do you see EEMED functioning in the American-Middle Eastern dance community?

How do you see EEMED functioning in the broader American dance community?
Has the show impacted the larger Middle Eastern dance community? If so, how?

Has the show impacted the larger dance community? If so, how?

Has the show impacted the greater society? If so, how?

Does EEMED have a distinctive dance style?

Do you think all of the pieces performed at EEMED would be done been as experimental if done in another concert setting like an IAMED show? If so, why? If not, then how would they be labeled?

Do you think experimental Middle Eastern dance will be able to survive without EEMED?

Who is EEMED’s audience?

What do you think EEMED’s audience gets from EEMED?

**Choreographic Process and Structures**

Which experimental work(s) do you think are your best, or have the most impact? Why?

**Specific processes**

What is this piece about?

What are its influences (texts, artists, culture?)

How do these works express you as a person?

How is its purpose/intent expressed in the choreography and, or structure?

Are there traditional elements in this piece?

What are the traditional elements in this piece?

What are the experimental elements in this piece?

What are the fusion elements in this piece?
How did you choreograph this piece?
How did you construct this piece?
How did you begin?
What was its inspiration?
Did you show it to others?
Did you work with someone? If so, how much did she, or he contribute?
What is the structure of this piece?
Is this piece choreographed or improvised? Or both?
What kind of movement vocabulary did you use?
How did you use movement?
How did you decided to use the movements you did?
What does your movement express?
How did you choose music?
How did you work with music?
Does the music affect the way you move?
Does the space affect the type of work you do?
How does EEMED’s space affect the work?
How did you use the stage space?
How did you use lighting design?
How did you choose costumes?
How did you use bodies on stage?
What kinds of bodies did you use on stage?
What kind of relationship did you have with the audience?

What types of relationships did you explore on stage?

How did you choose dancers?

Are there differences between group and solo work?

Did you choreograph for specific dancers?

How much did the dancers add to the choreography?

What was your performing experience of these works?

What did you learn from this piece?

What did you want the audience to get from this piece?

Have you worked with other EEMED choreographers? In what capacity?

Was it your piece or their?

Did you choreograph with them?

What and how much input did you have in the piece?

**General processes of work as a collective:**

Are there specific elements, which always change in your work in EEMED? If so, which ones?

Are there specific elements that sometimes change in your work in EEMED? If so, which ones?

Are there elements that never change in your work in EEMED? If so, which ones?

How to you decide what traditional elements to change?

When they are changed, where do you get your ideas?

Do you connect to other non-Middle Eastern dance forms? If so, which ones? And how?

What types of topics do you explore in your EEMED work?
If you have performed in drag? What are you motives?

What kind of research did you do for your dances?

**Political Impact**

Does your work affect social change? Please give specific examples. If so, how? If not, then why not?

How far into society does your work reach?

In terms of American society and the American-Middle Eastern dance community, where does your work lie or connect?

Do you see your work as political? If so, how? If not, then why not?

What gives you the “right” to change traditional Middle Eastern dance?

Do you think about or express the history of “western” colonialism and imperialism in your work? If so, how?

Do you think about or express racial dynamics in your work? If so, how?

Do you think about or express class dynamics in your work? If so, how?

Do you think about or express gender dynamics in your work? If so, how?

Do you think about or express sexual orientation dynamics in your work? If so, how?

Has the Unites States government’s involvement with various nation-states within the Middle East impacted your work? If so, how?

Has 9/11 and resulting aftermath impacted your work? If so, how?

Have other American engagement in the Middle East (the first Gulf War, Iran Hostages, etc) impacted your work? If so, how?

How do you “sell” your work? What kind of image(s) do you present to the audience?

Some critics may say you, (as a white, middle class American woman,) are appropriating Middle Eastern dance for your own usage. How do your respond to them?
Have you received other criticism? If so, what. How did you respond to them?

Have you been punished or reprimanded for your experimental Middle Eastern dance or for performing at EEMED? If so, how? From whom? And to what extent?

Do you feel social pressure?

What kind of decisions does EEMED open up for your work that you do not get at other settings?

Do you feel a sense of freedom through performing experimental Middle Eastern dance or for performing at EEMED? Or do you fell constricted? Or both?

In relation to traditional Middle Eastern dance, what kind of space does your experimental Middle Eastern dance create and, or occupy?

Does it create or does it occupy? Or both?

Are you “forced” into this space? If so, by whom? And how?

Do you want to be in this space?

Is there anything you would like to ask me about this project?
The term “Middle East” encompasses a dynamic and large discourse of which this dissertation touches upon only a few of its debates. For example, the examination of experimental Middle Eastern dance predominantly brings up concerns and questions over ownership and who has the power to decide what is and is not Middle Eastern dance. As this dissertation demonstrates, there are very few debates within the American Middle Eastern dance community and dance scholarship regarding the legitimacy of traditional dances within the confines of the geographical Middle East as Middle Eastern dance. However, concerns and questions arise when one studies or practices a Middle Eastern dance outside of the Middle East, such as in the United States, Germany, England, Brazil, Japan, or Australia. Dances brought with immigrant and diaspora communities are generally not part of the debates, unless practitioners have fused them with non-Middle Eastern culture. Instead, disputes focus on genres, such as American belly dance, American Tribal, and experimental Middle Eastern dance, which did not develop in the Middle East, per se, but practitioners still claim ownership and roots in the region. As this dissertation will also examine, scholars of Middle Eastern dance also have varying positions regarding the status of ballet, modern dance, and post-modern dance in the Middle East as Middle Eastern.

In 2007, Elyssa separated from Desert Sin and began Elysium Dance Theatre. However, since at the time of the interviews, Elyssa was in Desert Sin, she is included as a member of the company.

While at University of California, Santa Barbara, Anaheed learned American belly dance from a former student of Diane Webber. In 1972, Anaheed started with Webber and joined the Perfumes of Araby the following year.

Aisha Ali, Feiruz, Jenaeni, and Abdollah Nazemi were at the time teachers and performers in Los Angeles. Aisha Ali has produced videos, recordings, and articles about the dances of North Africa, especially the Egyptian Banat Mazin ghawazee with whom she performed in the 1970s. Feiruz started Middle Eastern dance in 1967. She helped established MECDA (now called the Middle Eastern Culture and Dance Association) in 1977. Jenaeni is a teacher, performer, and the mother of Ansuya. Abdollah Nazemi started performing with the Iranian National Academy of Ballet in Tehran in 1954 and later taught at the Iranian National Academy. He founded Pars National Ballet Company in 1966 located in Los Angeles. Morocco, Ibrahim Farrah, Serena Wilson were at the time teachers and performers in New York City. They were also some of the first American Middle Eastern dancers to publish articles about Middle Eastern dance in the 1970s.

Diane Webber was as a ballet dancer and a pinup girl. She studied with Faruu, a Turkish-Armenian immigrant and in turn trained many belly dancers in the Los Angeles area during the 1970s and 1980s.

Anthony Shay is a teacher, performer, and scholar in Persian and Central Asian dance. In addition to establishing the Avaz International Dance Theatre in 1977, he was also co-creator with Leona Wood and director of the Aman Folk Ensemble (1963-1977). He received his PhD in dance history and theory at UC Riverside in 1997.

Carolyn Krueger is a performer and teacher of Middle Eastern and Central Asian dance. She founded Gulistan Dance Theater in 1994.

Ixchel Dimetral-Maerker was a principle dancer in Avaz. Laurel Victoria Gray is a teacher, performer, and writer on Persian and Central Asian dance. She directs the Road Dance Company Silk Road Dance Company in Washington D.C. Robyn Friend is also a teacher, performer, and writer on Persian and Central Asian dance based in Los Angeles. Viloyat Akilova is a teacher and performer as well as part of a legendary Uzbek dance family. Kizlarkhon Dustmukhamedova is a legendary teacher and performer of Uzbek dance. Qadir Muminov is a teacher and performer of Uzbek dance. He has directed companies such as the famous Shodlik Ensemble and his own company, Ensemble Uzbekistan.

American Tribal Style, known more commonly as ATS, is an American form of Middle Eastern dance. Barbara Sellers-Young, in “Body, Image, Identity: American Tribal Belly Dance,” and Zenuba, in “American Tribal Style Belly Dance,” trace its origins to Bal Anat, Jamila Salimpour company’s performances at the Californian Renaissance fairs during the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, ATS became codified by the San Francisco group, Fat Chance Belly Dance, directed by Carolena Nericcio. They standardized the costume with their usage of coins, tassel belts, Indian cholis, vests, full skirts, large North
African and Afghani jewelry, turbans, and North African facial tattoos. Fat Chance Belly Dance also developed its foundation of group improvisation in which dancers move in unison and changes are indicated by a temporary leader through visual cues. Since about 2005, many genres have splintered off from what is now becoming a “traditional” genre. The most prominent is Tribal fusion, which is predominantly a solo form of ATS. Urban tribal fuses ATS with hip-hop and urban dance culture. Tribaret is an older term that used to refer to the “gypsy” style, which choreographers such as Desert Sin learned. It combined belly dance with ethnic dance and/or folk dance. In the 2000s, Tribaret came to mean a mixture of belly dance and ATS. Gothic belly dancers fuse gothic aesthetics (gothic music, black costumes, and dark emotional expression), but rarely gothic dance movements with ATS.

10 Kamaal is a teacher and performer in Los Angeles. He started Middle Eastern dance in the early 1980s. 11 Anaheed, along with two other women, began producing Perfumes of Araby Annual Concert (1981-1994), but eventually Anaheed took it over completely. It is during these concerts that Anaheed started to create what she labels experimental Middle Eastern dance. In 1998, Anaheed began Café Beledy (in 2007 she changed the name to Cabaret Beledy), a showcase for dancers to perform with musicians, which happens several times a year. She also bi-annually produces the Perfumes of Araby Swap Meet, an event for dancers of any level to perform and for local vendors to sell their wares.

12 In 2004, Desert Sin produced their first full-length show, Musée des Femmes at The Ivar Theater in Hollywood. They modified it and had a second run in 2005. In 2006, Desert Sin produced their second full-length show, Sita’s Fire. In 2007, Djahari moved to New York where she and Cassandra (who joined Desert Sin in 2001) continue to produce new Desert Sin work, such as a version of Musée des Femmes (2008) and Twitchers (2010).

13 For example, Anaheed took Hawaiian, Tahitian, tap, ballet, ballroom, and drill team as a child and modern dance in summer school during college. Jean took ballet and jazz as a child and sang in high school and college. Claudia is unique among the core EEMED choreographers since she began studying dance, starting with Polish and Balkan dance in her late twenties. As a child, Djahari took ballet, jazz, and modern dance classes and West African and Bharata Natyam in college. She also studied tango, flamenco, and modern dance. Elayssa has taken some ballet and modern dance classes. Growing up, Tatianna took dance classes in ballet, tap, and jazz and hip hop and modern dance while in college. She later studied ballroom and swing dance.

14 For example, Anaheed that notes her mother was of English descent with some Welsh and Scottish and her father, an immigrant to the United States, was Italian and Greek, with perhaps a little Armenian. Jean was adopted by a father of Italian descent and a mother of Swedish descent. However, Jean believes she is half Swedish and the other half is a mixture of Scottish, English, and Irish. Claudia is the only core EEMED choreographer born outside of the United States, in Rotterdam, Netherlands. She immigrated with her parents to the United States when she was two. Claudia claims Dutch, Indonesian, Chinese, French, German, Scottish, English, and Swiss ancestry. Djahari recollects that her father is of German ancestry and her mother is of German and Scottish ancestry. Elayssa asserts that her mother is mainly Irish, with perhaps some English, German, and French ancestry and her father was Russian gypsy. Tatianna’s father is of Scottish and Norwegian descent. Her mother was adopted, but Tatianna thinks she may be of German decent.

15 Since the beginning, EEMED employed a few male performers in the role of a company dancer and not a choreographer. 2004 was the first time EEMED had a dance choreographed and performed by a male dancer.

16 For example, although Anaheed was raised Catholic, she has her own take on spirituality with a theory of Interconnectedness in which “we are born as separate entities. And it is through our nurturing that we find connection…. the feeling that of you are a part of that whole” (Anaheed 2). Jean recalls she was raised Catholic but disowned it in fourth grade. As an adult, she “got into ancient religion and paganism” (Tandemonium 12). She then married a Jewish man and converted to Judaism when she had her son. Claudia recounts that she was raised “mainstream Protestant” (Tandemonium 12) and, in fact, wanted to become a minister. Now she is a Wiccan Priestess and an ancient Egyptian priestess. Djahari declares herself to being “pretty much an atheist” (Djahari 11). Although Elayssa dislikes organized religion, she does believe in a “greater energy that’s around me” (Elayssa 6). Tatianna does not agree with the concept

327
dance is predominantly improvised, dancers should be able to get up and perform anywhere at any time. It

The "no need to rehearse" practice comes from the expectation that because traditional Middle Eastern
dances need to maneuver. The larger American Middle Eastern dance community's theater shows

20 EEMED’s multi-night run is rare within the American Middle Eastern dance community with its
standard one-time events. The multi-night run allows the core EEMED choreographers to experience the
ways in which a dance can change night to night, not only from their own actions, but also from how they
interpret the audiences’ responses. The time also offers them the ability and luxury of making slight
alterations to the dance, if needed.

21 2000 had a Friday and Saturday evening show (August 11-12). 2001 had a one weekend run show,
Friday through Sunday (September 28-30). 2002 had an evening show on Fridays and Saturdays and a
matinee and evening show on Sundays (September 20-22). 2003 had evening show Thursday through
Sunday (September 4-7). In 2004, EEMED established its two-week run with shows Friday through
September 28-30 and October 5-7, 2007; and October 17-19 and 24-26, 2008).

22 Black box theaters are rarely used by those in the American Middle Eastern dance community.

23 Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica (2000, 2001); Two Roads Theatre in North Hollywood
(2002); Secret Rose Theatre in North Hollywood (2003); Electric Lodge Theatre in Venice (2004, 2005,

24 EEMED’s venues differ from those found in the American Middle Eastern dance community. For
example, the American Middle Eastern dance community’s theater shows typically seat between three and
five hundred people and the American theater dance’s seat up to several thousands. American Middle
Eastern dancers predominantly perform at festivals, restaurants, and nightclubs, which may contain a small
dance floor or a small free-standing raised platform and house parties, which may contain a very small
open area. In addition, restaurants, nightclubs, and homes are filled with furniture and (moving) people that
dancers need to maneuver. The larger American Middle Eastern theater dance shows also follow a
minimalistic trend by having on occasion a cyclorama. They, along with festivals, more often include a
solid dark backdrop, or less often, a painting of an Orientalist looking architectural structure or a set
upstage comprised of fabric pieces, vases, and carpets.

25 In the American Middle Eastern dance community, the standard time limit for a performance at a
festival or showcase in the late-2000s is seven to eight minutes for solos, duets, and trios and ten or twelve
minutes for groups.

26 The “no need to rehearse” practice comes from the expectation that because traditional Middle Eastern
dance is predominantly improvised, dancers should be able to get up and perform anywhere at any time. It
also comes from a legacy that showcases the abstract dance form through movement, music, costume, and occasional small and portable props, and therefore, keeps lighting design and sets minimal and unobtrusive. 27 Desert Sin in 2004 began developing their own full-length productions, and therefore, EEMED is no longer the only event that the core EEMED choreographers explore lighting design.

28 For the first two years of EEMED, request for submissions were sent out into the American Middle Eastern dance community via email and Middle Eastern Culture and Dance Association’s (MECDA) Happenings (a monthly calendar in the Los Angeles area). The show was dominated by those who eventually became the core EEMED choreographers – Anaheed, Amara (and Ya Helewa!), Desert Sin (Djahari and Tatianna) – and Marguerite. The second year included these same dancers along with Tandemonium, Elayssa, Marula (a dancer and teacher from San Diego), and Jheri St. James (a dancer and teacher from Laguna Beach). The audition process began with the third EEMED when submissions outnumbered the dance openings in the show.

30 The core EEMED choreographers may not always submit a video. In fact, Tatianna, Elayssa, and Anaheed have not submitted videos. Desert Sin has only presented videos for An Ode to Silent Film and Fairytale, because they had performed them at another event. Tandemonium typically present videotapes of their audition pieces. The core EEMED choreographers all go through some writing and discussion process.

31 “This show contains nudity, cross-dressing, spirituality, and expression of feelings” (EEMED 2002 advertisement). Since 2003, the warning reads, “This show contains nudity and other content which may not be suitable for all audiences” (EEMED 2003 advertisement).

32 The EEMED flyer is not redesigned every year. Elayssa has only resigned it once, in 2006. 33 Elayssa has designed two post cards, the first in 2004 and the second in 2007.


35 In 2003, Ana Berna was co-owner along with Scott McClure of Offworld Entertainment. She later formed her own business, Rox-a-lot Entertainment.

36 By 2008, the EEMED website included a mission statement, current project details, information about the audition process, photo galleries, video clips, a store to purchase videos and t-shirts, participants’ links, articles and reviews, and bio of the producer. It also includes details about X-MED, a workshop series developed by Anaheed, Djahari, Elayssa, and I on experimental Middle Eastern dance.

37 Programs are rarely given out at American Middle Eastern dance shows. However, they are becoming more common as printing costs decrease.

38 In Los Angeles, theaters with more than ninety-nine seats are required to hire union crews.

39 In 2000 and 2001, tickets were $16 (set by Highways’ staff). In 2002, tickets were $20. In 2003, EEMED set its current ticket price at $25.

40 Unfortunately, it is rare for Middle Eastern dancers to be paid for a concert show. In the first few years when there were not a lot of dancers, crew costs, and low theater rentals, the dancers received a small honorarium.

41 One of the biggest expenses for EEMED choreographers is costumes. Sometimes they buy new ones. At other times, like Elayssa, Djahari, and Tatianna, they make the costumes themselves, or like Anaheed or me, pay a discount or barter with friends to make them. The EEMED choreographers may also wear what they already own. Rehearsal space is also another financial constraint on the core EEMED choreographers. Elayssa, Tatianna, Djahari, and I often work out of spaces in their own homes. However, at times, along with the other EEMED choreographers, they need to rent studio space. Desert Sin, Tandemonium, and Anaheed have also purchased some special effects equipments, such as fog machines, black lights, and stage lights, which they allow other choreographers to use during EEMED.
The stage crew, including Greg Osweiler (2000-2008), Brian Tade (2005-2008), and David Yohe (2000-2006), put up the back curtain, wings, and lights when needed. Paulette Russell on many occasions brought in material and supplies to construct wings. Monica Khudan is the stage manager (2004-2008).


EEMED’s lighting technicians have been Adam Johnson (2005) and Mario Bonassin (2006-2008).

Judith Butler, in Bodies That Matter, focuses on the genealogy of matter, also known as “the materiality of the body” (Butler 1993, ix). Butler defines matter, “not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (Butler 1993, 9).

One can see an example of gender concealing its construction and solidification process in Butler’s discussion of the exclusionary, regulatory practices of heterosexuality that claim a hegemonic and “natural” position over “deviant” practices of homosexuality.

An example of deviation can be found in Butler’s discussion of how “[t]he replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original” (Butler 1990, 31). While the arborescent system generally refers to the tree-root structure, at times Deleuze and Guattari include the radicle. For example, they write, “[w]e’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics” (Deleuze and Guattari 15).

Interviews are not only found in dance scholarship, but also in American Middle Eastern dance magazines.

Grele asserts that documents produced through oral history contain information on what people think today about the past by making the interviewee’s everyday life strange. He writes, “[w]e ask people to justify actions and ideas which they in the course of their lives never dreamed needed justification” (Grele 206). Grele also states oral histories not only tell what has happened in the past, but also how people “have internalized and interpreted what happened” (Grele 245). The point of the researcher is not to test memory, but to “test and expand the histories” (Grele 249). In addition, Portelli observes oral history is fluid and unfinished and even if an informant presents “wrong” factual statements, he still finds a true psychological factor.

Portelli calls this role the “organic intellectual,” of which he claims two kinds exist – one who comes from within the class of the interviewee and one who joins the class by “becoming a member of its political party” (Portelli 40).

My schooling in dance history and theory has placed me in a slightly different place from that of the other core EEMED choreographers.

Occasionally, Foster employs the phrase “a dance tradition” (Foster 87) for the level Cohen labels “genre.”

Shira does not offer a date for “Styles of Belly Dance in the United States.” However, I first read a version in the late-1990s.

Sharon Moore first wrote “The Elusive Definition of Tribal Bellydance” in 2004.

Shay defines choreophobia as “an amorphous set or ‘system’ of reactions and attitudes that largely range between ambivalent and negative and that characterized the reactions of many” (Shay 1999, 172). It is also “the avoidance of the topic of dance and dancers due to their associations with prostitution in public contexts and with other low and unsavory elements of society” (Shay 1999, 86).

Shay concentrates on amateur social dancers. He is mostly interested in when a dance is normative, transgressive, or out of control. Shay describes several examples in which a dancer is situated within six elements (in order of importance): individuality, context, gender, age, class, and religion. Dancing is performed and situated within Ta’arof: codes of politeness that dictate manners and responses. Overall, dance can be transgressive “when an individual uses overtly sexual or sensual movements not proper to
their age, class, or gender” (Shay 1999. 123). Transgressive dancers are able to escape judgment because, as Shay argues, they are witty and good dancers, and therefore, through their technical ability can control and push the movement within the normative parameters. The dancers who are out of control are the ones who make the audience uncomfortable due to their unpredictable and inappropriate actions.

59 Shikhat are professional female performers in Morocco.

60 I would like to point out that the American Middle Eastern dance writers and the core EEMED choreographers often referred to specific names of dances rather than categories. For example, when the core EEMED choreographers used genre names, they frequently did so because I asked about how they classified Middle Eastern dance or we were discussing the topic of traditional Middle Eastern dance. However, when the core EEMED choreographers talked about their dances, they generally employed proper names.

61 According to the core EEMED choreographers, other foundations for being a good experimental Middle Eastern dancer, include thinking outside the box, putting disparate elements and ideas together, and breaking the rules.

62 My personal knowledge and experience in religious movement practices comes from texts, workshops, lectures, and performances by Mevlevi Sufis and performing a zar in 1998 on stage with Viviane's Dance Theater, directed by Viviane Hamamdjian (a teacher, performer, and choreographer of Egyptian staged-folk dance).

63 Kealiinohomoku critiques these three terms. For example, she states that the phrase World Dance builds upon a problematic history and the term World Music, which “sometimes refers to the blending of music cultures and sometimes to the varieties of music cultures” (Kealiinohomoku 1990, 5). The phrase International Dance, Kealiinohomoku asserts, ignores “the fact that dance cultures are not necessarily coequivalent with artificially derived national boundaries” (Kealiinohomoku 1990, 5). Kealiinohomoku critiques the phrase Culturally Diverse Arts for being unable to take into consideration the fact that practitioners may not view dance as “art.”

64 Robyn Friend is a professional American dancer of Iranian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, and Tajik dances, a professional singer of Iranian and Turkish Classical music, and a PhD in Iranian languages.

65 In “Dance in Iran,” Friend lists seven major ethno-regions and their corresponding groups – in Northwest Iran there are Azerîs, Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians; in the Caspian area there are Gilakîs, Mâzandârânîs, and Tâleshîs; in Northeast Iran there are Khurasani Kurds and Turkomans; in Southeast Iran there are Baluchîs; in the Persian Gulf littoral there are Bandarîs; and in Southwest Iran there are the Lor, Bakhtiari, Ramsa, and Qashqâ’î tribes. Friend does not identify any specific groups in the Central Plateau region.

66 Friend writes, “the terms ‘Persian’ and ‘Iranian’ signify very different things; the former, the inhabitants of Fars province and their language (Farsi), the latter, the people who speak Iranian languages (which includes Farsi, but also includes many other languages, such as Kurdish and Baluchi)” (Friend 2007b).

67 Some of Friend’s categories overlap. For example, she labels the Qashqa’î “tribal” as well as “ethnic.”

68 The Pars National Ballet’s website states Nazemi trained and later taught at the Iranian National Academy of Ballet. He founded Pars National Ballet in 1966 and after his immigration to the United States in 1986, he reestablished the dance company in Los Angeles. According to their website, the company performs “classical ballet, Persian Ballet, and regional ethnic dances” (Pars).

69 The politically correct term for “gypsy” is Romany. In the American Middle Eastern dance community the term gypsy refers to a style of dance that leans towards Turkish belly dance performed with a large skirt. The two EEMED choreographers who bring up the term gypsy dance, Tatianna and Djahari, both trained with Elayssa’s mother, Jenza. Djahari comments Jenza’s gypsy American belly dance style is a “mishmash of a lot of different forms” (Djahari 26). As a side note, Elayssa calls herself “Russian gypsy” (Elayssa 3) – a label for her father’s genealogy.

70 The ghawazee are public dancers in Egypt. See Karin van Nieuwkerk’s A Trade Like Any Other for an historical account.

71 Bandarîs are from the Persian Gulf region of Iran. Their dance is a mixture of Persian, Arab, Indian, and African music and dance elements. In “Dance in Iran,” Friend also names the Bandarîs as an ethnic group.
Later on, while discussing one of their traditional dances, Claudia references Tajik dance as folkloric dance.

During the rest of Tatianna’s interviews, I used the terms ethnic and traditional Middle Eastern dance, rather than just traditional Middle Eastern dance to continue the dynamic tension.

Unfortunately, Tandemonium does not state the source of the solo disco type dancing – whether it was developed within Persian dance or came from American pop culture or a combination of the two.

In the early 1990s, Tandemonium did not know of any people who, as Claudia states, “were doing traditional dances but weren’t using traditional music” (Tandemonium 47) and, as Jean adds, “traditional costumes” (Tandemonium 47). Since there was no name for what they were doing, Claudia says, “we just came up with this arbitrary term Twisted Ethnic” (Tandemonium 47). They no longer use the name because for a time they focused on traditional dance, and therefore, fell out of favor.

Some American Middle Eastern dance writers are beginning to refer to ATS as a traditional form when comparing it to its offshoots.

Adra’s data comes from her field research in al-Adhur, Yemen from 1978-1979 and 1983.

Adra notes prior to the revolution in 1962, which established Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), Qaba’il made up ninety percent of the population.

Dinici is a professional dancer and teacher in New York City, who has written on Middle Eastern dance since 1964.

In the urban dance, a soloist dances within a circle, while in the tribal dance, “each dancer, though following in a line, is free to choose her own movement patterns” (Friend 2007b).

le Festival Folklorique de Marrakech is now called the Festival National des Arts Populaires (National Festival of Popular Arts). See for further details: www.marrakechfestival.com.

Friedland observes that before the 1890s, the terms “folk song, folklore, folk culture, folk art, and folklike” (Friedland 31) were being used, while folk dance was not. She writes, “[v]irtually every possible synonym was used: national dance, peasant dance, rustic dance, country dance, ritual dance. Sometimes the name of individual dances were used…” (Friedland 31). Friedland is not sure why the inconsistency occurred. However, from 1890 through the first couple of decades of the twentieth century, scholars and dancers concentrated on what they were then calling folk dance.

Friedland locates the term folk in “a cultural revitalization movement” (Friedland 29) in the second half of the eighteenth century in Germany, during which Johann Gottfried von Herder, a German philosopher, cultivated “the concept of das Volk (‘the folk’): the embodiment of pure national culture in the common man who had, through the centuries, remained close to the national spirit and uncorrupted by artificial fads” (Friedland 29). He looked to das Volk and their customs as a source to revitalize and “rediscover [a German] national soul” (Friedland 29). Friedland notes, even after World War II, “the intense interest in folk dance as a symbol of national identity seemed undeterred” (Friedland 35).

Adra broadly defines belly dance as a solo improvised form with “fluid arm and hand movements as well as isolations and shimmies of the shoulder, pelvis, abdominal muscles and/or head” (Adra 2005, 31).

Adra briefly contrasts belly dance with classical dance, although she does not indicate how the two are different. In a footnote she writes, “I retain the term ‘folk dance’ here to emphasize it is indigenous and not a classical genre, although it is also very much part of popular culture in the region” (Adra 2005, 49).

Adra makes the point to distinguish traditional Arabian dances from belly dance. She writes, belly dance “was not traditionally performed on the Arabian Peninsula” (Adra 2005, 30-31). However, Saudi Arabians learn it from television and “perform it along with traditional local dances at parties and celebrations” (Adra 2005, 31). Since Adra defines folk dance as indigenous and traditional, one could conclude she would not perceive belly dance in the Arabian Peninsula as folk dance.

Friend discusses two versions of Çûb-Bâçî. One is an “improvised competition” (Friend 2007a), which creates a fluid flow between audience and the two performers. She calls the second version a “social dance recreation” (Friend 2007a) in which a group of people perform definite patterns at the same time.

Siegel is a dancer and writer from Philadelphia.  

In 1959, Mahmoud Reda founded the Reda Troupe (jirqa Reda) in Egypt, along with Ali Reda (Mahmoud’s brother and Farida’s husband), Farida Fahmy, and Nadida Fahmy (Farida’s sister and Mahmoud’s wife). The troupe has toured worldwide and is featured in two popular films, Gharam fi al-
Karnak (Love in Karnak) (1965) and Agazet nos el Sana (Mid Year Vacation) (1963). Reda has since left the Reda Troupe and continues to teach worldwide.

90 Anaheed is the only core EEMED choreographer who addresses the term social dance, which she defines as “literally what is done by the social classes when they gather to either celebrate a life passage, a ritual, a birth, [or] a wedding…. Social dancing overall is done for your own personal pleasure and not necessarily for a specific audience” (Anaheed 12). In Anaheed’s view, social and folk dance overlap in the concept that they are participatory forms.

91 Kabuki is a Japanese theater form.

92 Shiraz is a Qashqa’i dance found in region of Shiraz.

93 The debke is a line dance performed in the Levant and Gulf regions. Generally, dancers hold hands, link elbows, or hold onto each other’s shoulders, while performing a variety of steps, which often involve stomping.

94 Although al Faruqi writes the Islamic geography is vast, ranging “from Morocco and West Africa all the way to the Philippines” (al Faruqi 43), her examples are from the Middle East region.

95 Shay strongly draws on the work of Adrienne Kaeppler who asserts not all societies possess a term for “dance” and not all practitioners consider their movement activities “dance.”

96 Shiloah gives examples of writers who condemn all kinds of movement, including religious movement practices. For example, Shiloah writes, Burhān al-dīn Ibn Djamā’a (1325-1388) in “Response to a Fakir Concerning the Samā’,” “claimed that [music and dance] led the religious man to error and perdition” (Shiloah 35). In fact, Shiloah states, “one of the earliest treaties prohibiting music is Dhamm al-malāhī (The Book of the Censure of Instruments of Diversion) is by the theologian and jurist Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā (823-894)” (Shiloah 34). Shiloah contends canonists and theologists are not the only ones who consider “any form of dancing a vice or worse” (Shiloah 141). Some mystics themselves “expressed dissatisfaction with dance and physical excitation…” (Shiloah 141).

97 The Mevlevi order is a Sufi sect, named after the famous mystic poet, Mawlāna (our Master) Djalāl al-dīn al-Rūmī who died in 1273. The sema is one of the Mevlevi’s ceremonies, which includes recitation of the Quran, musical interludes, and semazen who whirl counter-clockwise, the right foot crossing over the left, while the whole group also rotates counter-clockwise. Their right arms and palm rise towards Allah and the left down to earth. At the end of each ayin (whirling portion), the semazen place their arms in the cross position again. According to Kurt Reinhard, in his notes for the record The Music of the Whirling Dervishes (1968), at the time of Rūmī, there were no “rigid rules for the rituals of the whirling dervishes” (Reinhard 2). Although Reinhard does not give a time line, he contends, only “as the instrumentation gradually became standardized, a traditional rendering of the mukabele (‘ceremony’) took shape” (Reinhard 2).

98 Shay specifically criticizes dance scholars Metin And, Erika Bourguignon, Ira Friedlander, Robyn Friend, Geoffrey Hamada, and Medjid Rezvani for calling the Mevlevi samā’ “dance” or including “it in descriptions of dance” (Shay 1999, 88), as well as And, La Meri, Rezvani, and Hormoz Farhat for presenting Islam’s “negative view of dance without elucidating the sources for their statements” (Shay 1999, 83).

99 Drawing on M.L. Roy Choudury’s work on Islamic history, Shay writes, neither “the Qur’an nor the shari’ah directly addresses the permissibility of music and/or dance…” (Shay 1999, 85). Instead, “the hadith have been interpreted differently by various individuals” (Shay 1999, 85). He also contends factors, such as pre-Islamic influences and social attitudes, may affect the general negative attitude towards “dance” in the Middle East.

100 Although Kenyon’s field research in Sennar, Sudan is outside of the dissertation’s Middle East dance scope, it is included here because of the close cultural crossover between Sudan and Egypt found in the zar.

101 Karol Harding is a teacher in Fort Collins, Colorado.

102 Harding includes a lengthy description by Dr. Bettina Knapp who also calls the guedra, “dance.” Harding does not indicate the source of Knapp’s quotation, but it comes from Knapp’s “Dances of the Maghreb: Part II” in Arabesque Magazine.

103 Tandemonium note Qizlarkhon’s former dance company, Munojot, had performed a shaman dance based upon Zoroastrianism.
In some of my EEMED dances I incorporate movement aspects from the zar, guedra, and the Mevlevi’s ayin section. For example, in Volatile Bodies (2000 and 2004), I employ whirling to induce trance and reach a state of balance, and my character Eve, in Eden (2005), uses head swinging and hand flickering of both the zar and guedra to exorcize her “demons.”

See Lelia Ahmed’s Women and Gender, and Islam, Fatima Mernissi’s Beyond the Veil, and Asra Nomani’s Standing in Alone in Mecca as examples of writers and scholars examining feminist positions and women’s roles within Islam.

Anaheed offers insight into her choreographic processes – the music inspired the narrative and not the other way around.

The temple scene occurs when Djahari and Cassandra, after much boisterous burlesque stripping, are center stage naked. The lights abruptly change to a strong down ray of amber and the music shifts to a slow soft chant by Ekova. Cassandra and Djahari gradually move through a set of poses taken from Hindu statues and Bharata Natyam’s mudras. Shortly after the two begin this section, Elayssa, dressed as an Indian goddess joins them.

During the tanoura, a man wears colorful skirts (tanoura), reminiscent of the Mevlevi’s plain white tennure. While spinning, he manipulates the tanoura by bringing it up, down, and over himself.

Many in the American Middle Eastern dance community and Middle East consider religious movement practices dances. In fact, some choreographers and dancers remove a ritual from its setting and much of its non-movement components and focus on the movement portions that they fuse with staged-folk style and choreography.

According to Claudia, many forms of Wicca exist. It mainly is “an Earth based religion” (Tandemonium 13) in which they worship goddess and gods and “believe everything is all a part of the same whole” (Tandemonium 13).

As a core EEMED choreographer, I am interested in ethnic dances, tribal dances, and folk dances. Although I have taken workshops and have performed some of these dances, I feel inadequate, except for raqs al-assaya, to teach them beyond an introductory level.

In this context, folk dance is an umbrella term that encapsulates any strong traditional Middle Eastern dance, including ethnic dance and tribal dance, with few indications of change.

Shay is the only scholar of Middle Eastern dance who concedes (staged) folk dance influences folk dance. He calls it “parallel tradition.” Nevertheless, in the book, he focuses on the representation of in the field by folk dance companies than the influence of staged on in the field.

Fahmy was a co-founder and principle dancer of the Reda Troupe (1959 and 1983). She received her Master’s in Dance Ethnology from The University of California, Los Angeles in 1987.

Only Nahachewsky contextualizes and historicizes the terms he focuses on, participatory and presentational, within dance scholarship and folk dance practitioners. He notes the separation of these two terms first in American dance scholarship and then elsewhere.

According to Fahmy, Reda also choreographed Imagery and Dramatic dances as well, all of which Reda based in some aspect of Egyptian culture According to Fahmy, Imagery dances “interlaced with ‘Dramatization’ and ‘Folklore’… helped Reda portray different aspects of Egypt’s folk heritage and contemporary events in dance form” (Fahmy 57). He centered them on positive images of national events, folk tales, and non-dance folk customs through character dances, “mime, gesture, and narrative” (Fahmy 34). His inspirations were “his own impressions of the customs and traditions of a society he grew up in, and a culture in which he was immersed” (Fahmy 35).

Nehad Selaiha points out in “Dancing into the Twilight,” (1999), an overview of the Reda Troupe, that some people perceived them as “Western.” She writes, “Mahmoud Rida had acquired his training with European companies; and what with Farida’s British mother and English education, the group was suspiciously regarded as pro-Western” (Selaiha 4).

Shay recounts Reda had problems with the Ministry of Culture that were significant enough for him to leave his company. However, Shay does not go into further detail. According to Fahmy, Reda was not interested in nationalizing his group, but he eventually succumbed to the government’s pressure, mainly because of finances. One result was that “by the 1970s the troupe numbered 150 artists, including musicians and stage technicians” (Fahmy 22).
Coincidences, Part 1,” writes according to Mo Geddawi, a co-founder, soloist, and choreographer in the Reda Troupe, by 1964 the group had more than 100 administrators. Geddawi left the Reda Troupe in 1964 because “[h]e was disappointed and disillusioned by the results of nationalization…” (Costanza 11), which included a decrease in the quality of dancers and salaries.

119 The Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble’s repertoire includes çiftetelli, a solo improvisational dance, often translated as belly dance in the American Middle Eastern dance community. However, in order to promote Turkish nationalism, the company deemphasizes çiftetelli’s historical connection to the Ottoman court.

120 Shay notes Serif Baykurt “divided Turkish folk dance into six choreographic/ethnographic regions known by the principle dance genre of that particular region” (Shay 1999, 213).

121 Folkloric dance is not the only staged dance form in Iran. In fact, Friend differentiates it from another staged genre, classical dance. For example, she writes Nazemi “specializes in authentic presentations of folkloric dance, modern ballets on traditional themes, and some classical-style dance” (Friend 1996). Friend makes the same observation regarding Mohammad Khordadia’s Sabah Dance Company and Anthony Shay’s Avaz Dance Theatre.

122 Siegel is a dancer and writer from Philadelphia.

123 The state-sponsored Ballet Nationale was founded in 1962.

124 Siegel portrays the folk dance version of raks al-Juzur in strong traditional dance fashion since she locates it as “an excellent example of a dance evolving from the people’s daily activities” (Siegel 1983, 4). Incidentally, Siegel recall she saw raks al-Juzur on Djerba Island, in which case one would assume she was describing the folk dance version. However, it is only in a previous article, “Tunisian Images, In Search of Dance,” does she indicates it was not the folk dance version but one performed at tourist shows.

125 Although no classical Arab dance exists, there is a tradition of classical Arab music. Jozef Pacholczyk, in “Secular Classical Music in the Arabic Near East,” connects Classical Arab music to the courts. He writes,

The classical music of the Near East was developed in major centers of the Islamic Empire, mainly in the capitals of the caliphas; Damascus, Baghdad, and Cordoba. It was rooted in pre-Islamic musical tradition of the Arabs and enriched with elements from cultures of nation with which the Arabs came into contact through conquest. (Pacholczyk 253)

I would also add colonizers’, England and France, influenced classical Arab music as well. Musicians in Iran and Turkey also produce classical music. For example, Ella Zonis, in “Classical Iranian Music,” acknowledges that besides the courts, classical music was also developed by “certain mystic orders” (Zonis 269). Additionally, Karl Signell, in “Turkey's Classical Music, a Class Symbol” writes, “[h]istorically, classical music belonged to the Ottoman ruling classes” (Signell 165).

126 Hughes-Freeland writes, Bēdhaya “may refer to the female dancers, the dance genre, and specific dances within the genre” (Hughes-Freeland 62).

127 The three groups includes Rukmini Devi who viewed Bharata Natyam as a “pan-Indian high culture rooted in the classical language Sanskrit” (O’Shea 2006, 133) with national and upper class components, Balasaraswati who presented a second standpoint as she traced “an unbroken chain” (O’Shea 2006, 135) to the regional court tradition of Tamil in South India, and “devadasi and men of their community – now collectively known as the icai vellala caste” (O’Shea 2006, 137) in Tamil Nadu. Similar to Balasaraswati, these dancers promoted a Tamil tradition. However, many of them “rejected the Sanskrit language and texts in a way that Balasaraswati did not” (O’Shea 2006, 138).

128 Sellers-Young and Shay use belly dance as an umbrella term in order to refer “to a matrix of dances including those that originate in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia as well as related hybrid forms in the United States and elsewhere” (Sellers-Young and Shay 1).

129 Several compilations DVDs, including The Stars of Egypt and The Legends of Belly Dance (1947-1976), feature clips of famous dancers from this era.

130 Beledi (Baladi, Balady) mean “my homeland,” and beledi dance generally refers to the lower class dance found in urban areas. The performers wear a beledi costume – a long dress worn with a hip belt, which may or may not have the top open for a costume top like the bedlah. Beledi may also at times be classified as folk dance.
Modern Egyptian dance refers to the turn-of-the-twentieth-century style of raqs al-sharqi that has been influenced by ballet via its incorporation into Egyptian staged-folk dance.

In her “Introduction to Dance in Iran: Part I,” Friend places the foundation of Classical Persian dance back to the Safavid period (1501-1732).

Sâzmân-e foklor-e Irân was founded in 1967 with Robert De Warren of the British Royal Ballet as its director. In “Introduction to Dance in Iran: Part I,” Friend notes, “[t]hey performed both Iranian folk dance choreographed for the stage, and balletic presentations of Iranian epic tales” (Friend 2001).

Anaheed and Djahari only use the term Persian dance. Tatianna also does, but only when she differentiates between Persian ethnic and ballet. Elayssa almost always calls it Persian ballet.

Tandemonium studied extensively with famous Uzbek dancers, including Qizlarkhon Dustemukhemedova and Qadir Muminov and American dancers Ixchel Dimetral-Maerker, Laurel Victoria Gray, and Carolyn Krueger, in addition to having performed classical Persian and Uzbek with Avaz International Dance Theatre in Los Angeles.

In “The Exquisite Art of Persian Classical Dance,” Friend notes classical dance’s “formation” in her remarks on the revival of Persian classical dance during the 1950s and 1960s. Laurel Victoria Gray, in her article “Splendors of the Silk Road,” presents information on the background of Uzbek dance. Although she does not employ the term classical dance, Gray does discuss the shift of court and folk dance to the stage in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Greek version is spelled, Tsiftetelli, and the Turkish, çiftetelli.

In both of his texts, Shay leaves out the fact that belly dance can also be found in a large number of countries outside of the Middle East, Europe, and English speaking countries, including, but not exclusive to India, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, Korea, Columbia, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Russia, and South Africa.

Sol Bloom developed the Midway Plaisance at the World’s Columbia Exposition and brought over dancers (along with other types of artisans and workers) from all over the world, including the Middle East and North Africa. In his The Autography of Sol Bloom (1948), he uses the term danse du ventre. Bloom writes, “[w]hen the public learned that the literal translation was belly dance they delightedly concluded that it must be salacious and immoral. The crowds poured in. I had a gold mine” (Bloom 135).

In the book’s glossary, they define cabaret as “the form of belly dance or raqs sharqi that is most familiar in the West and on the tourist circuit in Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey” (Sellers-Young and Shay 371).

Shay in his encyclopedia entry does not call groups of dancers, such as the ghawazee, cabaret or folk dancers, but rural professional dancers. However, Sellers-Young and Shay who also discuss the ghawazee, relegate them to a traditional status since they bring them up in their discussion of belly dance history and tradition but not in their section on the “Contemporary Middle East.”

In their glossary, Sellers-Young and Shay define raqs baladi as “dance of the countryside… but has connotations of a ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ person, not a pretentious or sophisticated person” (Sellers-Young and Shay 371).

The two piece belly dance costume is called a bedlah.

Kajira Djoumahna is an early proponent of American Tribal Style, director of Black Sheep Belly Dance, and author of The Tribal Bible.

Ibrahim Farrah (1939-1998) was a dancer, teacher, choreographer, and founder/director of the Near Eastern Dance Group. He published one of the first American Middle Eastern dance magazines, Arabesque, from 1975 until 1997.

Farrah states, “‘belly dance’ has never been a traditional term” (Farrah 3) in the Middle East, although some are using it in order to communicate with American tourists. Instead, he states, “[t]he dance has always been called ‘Raks al Sharki’ or ‘Dance of the Orient’” (Farrah 3), but he does not offer any sources. He notes due to French occupation, Danse Orientale (and its English translation, Oriental Dance), has “been widely popularized throughout the Middle East” (Farrah 6).

Incidentally, Farrah does not call for American dancers to use the term Middle Eastern dance, even though he refers to the “Middle East” and “Middle Easterners” and not the “Orient” or “Orientals.”
148 Carlton includes some examination of the term hoochey-coochey. She presents all its variations, such as hoochey kootchy, hootie kootchie, coochie coochee, and cooch and hooch as well as theories about its origination, although she does not list any sources. She writes, “[s]ome have speculated that hoochey coochey derives from names of other dances such as kouta-kouta or hula-hula, or from Cooch Behar, a region of India. These speculations run amiss” (Carlton 57). Another theory is that it comes from “the French compound hochequeue (hocker ‘to shake’ and queue ‘tail’)” (Carlton 57). This name refers to a bird and a French dance. A third supposition is that it came from hooch-ma-cooch, a dance done in New Orleans by African-Americans in the 1900s.

149 Recently, dancers began calling what had been just known as belly dance to “American-Turkish style” (Anaheed 14) or Classic American belly dance in order to differentiate it from Egyptian and Lebanese belly dance styles, which have gained popularity in the United States since the mid-1990s. Dancers also use the term Turkish-American belly dance to differentiate it from current American belly dance practices, which may combine not only American-Turkish, but also modern Egyptian and/or Lebanese.

150 One of the earliest known records of belly dance in the United States comes from a lithograph of an Algerian dancer at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. See Frank Norton’s A Facsimile of Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876.

151 American belly dancers codified the form during the mid twentieth century and popularized it in the 1970s and 1980s. Recently, dancers began calling it “American-Turkish style” (Anaheed 14) and Classical belly dance in order to differentiate it from Egyptian and Lebanese belly dance, which have gained popularity in the United States. I personally view my dance as an American cabaret dance, which slightly differs from Anaheed’s American-Turkish form, since I combine American-Turkish, modern Egyptian, and folk dance.

152 An American belly dancer’s routine consists of several parts. Generally, a dancer begins with a moderate to fast tempo dance greeting the audience and establishing her dance space. She then goes into a taqsim, which is an improvisation with an elastic rhythm by a solo instrument. This section may be slower than the entrance with respect to tempo and is often more introverted with respect to the dancer’s energy and gaze. A dancer may do veil work or floorwork during this part. The fast-slow pattern continues as long as the dancer has time, but in a fifteen minute routine, the dancer generally does one more moderate tempo song before her drum solo and exit music. American-Turkish dancers used to end their set with a kashlima (an up tempo 9/8 rhythm) before their short exit music.

153 Franko recalls the names given to a choreographer’s personal style, including natural dance for Isadora Duncan, materialist and dramaturgical dance for Martha Graham, and objective dance for Merce Cunningham.

154 Susan Bauer presents some examples of recent changes in Turkish modern dance. In fact, there have been so many modifications she divides her research into three periods: 1990-1992; 1992-2000; and 2000-2005. Although Bauer does not indicate why she divides Turkish dance into three periods, it may have to do with the dates she visited Turkey: 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2005.

155 Selma Selim Sırrı worked to emulate Isadora Duncan’s concepts of dance. Selma Selim Sırrı viewed modern dance as “a stage production, an artistic performance, which ranked foremost in the hierarchy of dance movement systems” (Özturkmen 52). Additionally, since modern dance was not just performed for entertainment or pleasure, but also for communication, she saw it as a way “to give dance a respectable place in the new nation-state” (Özturkmen 46).

156 Inger and Manor also provide many examples of Israeli choreographers adding folk dance into their modern dance. For example, Baruch Agadati (1895-1976) choreographed in the “modern expressionist style” (Inger and Manor 528), but “was one of the first to mix his own steps…” (Inger and Manor 529) with Middle Eastern rhythms and debka. Many of Agadati’s dances were depictions of Yemenite and Persian Jews and Arabs. In a similar fashion, Russian ballerina Rina Nikova (1898-1974), who moved to Palestine in 1924 and opened a ballet studio, choreographed ballets with biblical themes and by 1933 was exploring and incorporating Yemenite dancing. Another case is that of Sara Levi-Tanai (1911-2005) who formed the Inbal Yemenite Dance Theater and whose work combined Yemenite folk dance and American modern dance.

157 Bauer found Murphy’s response in Nicolas Rowe’s “Will the Real Turkey Please Stand Up?”
Monica is a dancer and teacher in San Francisco.

Azar describes Modern Egyptian dance as “very controlled, elegant, refined and often includes some ballet” and then contrasts it with the “old Style Egyptian cabaret, eschewing the Russian balletic influences in favor of the original Egyptian dance” (Azar).

Anaheed recalls that she added modern dance into Bare Essences and Loïe Fuller. Elayssa recounts that she and Djahari added modern dance to Sacramental Skins, while Djahari states that she included it in Recurring Scream and An Ode to Silent Film. In addition, Djahari identifies another EEMED dance, Unknown, as a seamless fusing modern dance and Middle Eastern dance.

For Tatianna, edgy is another term for alternative dance. Elayssa is not the only core EEMED choreographer to acknowledge this negative reaction. For example, Jean says, “my major problem with most of the modern dance concerts that I’ve been to by my friends is that you end up walking out of the theater feeling like you want to slit your wrists because every single dance was so much trauma” (Tandemonium 62). Claudia has observed a similar viewpoint in dance magazines that focus on “ballet and modern dance and stuff like that. It seemed like anybody who tried to do something about a happy subject wouldn’t be taken seriously” (Tandemonium 62).

The core EEMED choreographers received some training in modern dance. For instance, Tatianna reports she took about eight months of classes but they were not for her. Belly dance appealed to Tatianna because she felt more accepted and comfortable. Elayssa and Anaheed both took modern dance in college and agreed it was challenging, although they did well with it. Djahari is the only one who took modern dance as a child. She says she had fun, but did not have good teachers. Tandemonium is the exception. Both Jean and Claudia make the point that neither of them has a background in modern dance, and therefore, do not use it in their experimental Middle Eastern dance choreographies. However, none of the core EEMED choreographers who took modern dance identified what kind they learned. Therefore, it is difficult to assess its impact on their experimental Middle Eastern dances.

The lack of distinction between emotion and expression is why many belly dancers present themselves as expressing themselves rather than a character. In fact, many practitioners are drawn to this emotional connection and use it to change their personalities.

According to Manning, the first modern dance condition occurred at the turn of the twentieth century when there was “a broad shift in performance away from the pictorial mode characteristic of the 18th and 19th centuries” (Manning 35). Moving away from this mode, both modern dance and ballet choreographers, although in different ways, share the “attention to the values, qualities, and dimensions of movement, and the movement itself became systemized according to rational principles and laws” (Manning 35). Manning’s second condition is the split of “19th-century theater dance” (Manning 36) into modern dance and ballet.

This chapter follows Manning’s editorial decision to utilize the terms post-modern for Banes’ concept and postmodern for Manning’s.

This chapter repeats Mackrell’s employment of a hyphen in the term post-modern dance.

This chapter replicates Eshel’s employment of no hyphen within the term postmodern dance.

Katya Faris is a belly dancer from Bloomington, Indiana. There is no date of publication, but I first read the article in 2008.

Marilee Nugent (a.k.a. Venus) is a dancer and teacher in Vancouver. There is no date of publication, but I first read the article in 2008.

Interestingly enough, Faris finds modern dance is easier to define because it is “a break from the traditional ballet genre” (Faris 1) and each “school of thought” has “its own rules and regulations” (Faris 1). In Faris’ view, it is not only important to understand what modern’s dance is/was breaking away, but also that it still has structure.

In Faris’ view, traditional Middle Eastern dance has rules and regulations, and, in fact, she equates tradition with folk dance. She writes, “Folk Dance is the strictest with sticking to tradition, there is usually one way to do it, and often includes group dances” (Faris 6).

Nugent calls her primary dance focus by many names, including belly dance, Egyptian belly dance, modern belly dance, raks sharki, contemporary nightclub form, and theatrical dance. All these labels situate the form as a current dance practice performed on nightclub stages in Egypt.
Dancers added Hollywood and “Western” ideas, “including use of veils, more creative use of arms and stage space, choreography and the two-piece belt and bra costumes (bedlah)” (Nugent 8).

Nightclubs are not the only place where dancers adapted baladi. Nugent brings up the work of Mahmoud Reda and Farida Fahmy. In their folkloric dance they drew on baladi identity, in particular, bint al-balad, “daughter of the country.” Nugent also notes Reda was innovative and created “a completely new dance idiom…” (Nugent 10). Although she does not go into specific details about how he accomplished this, Nugent comments Reda employed existing movements while also creating his own. Though she does not directly state that this form is a “hybrid,” she brings up the fact that Reda was influenced by Egyptian dance, Russian “staged” folk dance, and Western theatrical forms, including ballet. She also briefly notes nightclub dancers also incorporate folkloric dance into their shows.

Many in the American Middle Eastern dance community would not call dance from the first part of the twentieth-century modern, but classical or the Golden Age. See the “Classical Dance” section of this dissertation for further details.

American belly dancers also retain a tradition of using non-trained dancers in their shows through audience participation.

Americans Middle Eastern dancers began to codify the dance through classes and workshops starting in the mid-1970s.

In the American Middle Eastern dance community, both a professional and amateur world exists, although the line between them is very fluid.

The Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation, which is sponsored by Isadora Duncan Dance Company, directed by Lori Belilove, states on their website they continue to perform Duncan’s repertoire. For further details, see http://www.isadoraduncan.org/Index.html.

Ankhara is a dancer from Rhode Island.

Frédéríque David is a San Francisco-based dancer and teacher.

And describes the orta oyunu theater as “an oval or quadrangular stage, thirty yards long, twenty yards wide” (And 1959, 34). The one entrance is located next to the dirt stage floor. Audience members sit on benches or stand. And notes,

Two objects always occupy the same fixed space on the stage – near the entrance stands a chair or low screen representing a shop and at the opposite side of the stage is a reasonably high two winged screen. On these wings are glued pieces of paper on which is painted whatever the screen is meant to represent. (And 1959, 34)

The orchestra is near the entrance.

The halay is a line or semi-circle dance in which dancers hold hands or shoulders.

And notes traditionally men played women’s roles.

In 1947, Dame Ninette de Valois (founder of the Royal Ballet), was asked to open and run the first State sponsored ballet school, the State Conservatory of Music and Drama, in Istanbul.

And also sees this occurring. According to And within his section on “Theatrical Dance,” starting in the 1965/1966 season, a few non-Turkish choreographers combined to ballet Turkish music, Turkish themes, and some “elements of Turkish folk dance” (And 1998, 212). These dances, And states, “paved the way for an indigenous Turkish ballet style” (And 1998, 212). In 1968, Sait Sökmen became the first Turkish choreographer to create a ballet for the company. Oytun Turfanda, in 1973, was the first Turkish choreographer to use Turkish themes and music.

The new Turkish government banned many traditions symbolic of the Ottoman Empire during the early republic, including the fez (the red cone shaped hat worn by men) and the hajab (the head covering worn by women). Aksan also notes “traditional Turkish classical music (though only for a few months) was forbidden on the radio” (Aksan 160). Özturkmen observes “Westernization” is itself not a new aspect to Turkish culture and traces it back to at least 1839 and to the Ottoman’s Tanzimat, a program “which aimed at transforming traditional institutions into Western ones” (Özturkmen 42).

Although Aksan notes the fusion folk dance and ballet, he does not discuss the formation of staged-folk dance in Turkey as a theatrical dance. According to Özturkmen, “regional dances began to be staged and organized for the first time in the People’s House (1932-1951), semi-official cultural centers established in small towns…” (Özturkmen 49). Although not until the 1960s were regional dances being
taught in urban contexts” (Özturkmen 50) and 1975 the Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble was established. This theatrical shift begins slightly before Turkish production of ballet. 190 Aksan begins his essay recounting a walkout by the dancers of the State Ballet Company in 1990. At the time, Sonia Aslan, a teacher, was commissioned to choreograph a ballet using Turkish folkloric dance movements. Aksan does not discuss the result of this walkout, but instead, presents some of the dance community’s responses. Whereas some members of the dance community thought the two forms cannot be “blended” because ballet is international and folk dance is regional, others believed the administration should not dictate what a choreographer should do but that it is the choreographer’s right. In addition, Aksan quotes the Director who commissioned the dance stating he wanted “choreographers to experiment with Turkish traditional music and with Turkish steps” (Aksan 159, Gunes Newspaper, Sunday Edition 24 Jan. 1990) as a means of connecting ballet with the Turkish population. 191 Shira, a dancer and teacher in Iowa City and producer of the website “The Art of Middle Eastern Dance.” 192 Cera, the director of Damage Control Dance Theater, performed Hide & Seek at EEMED in 2006. 193 These venues frequently contain a raised staged. However, if venues include lights beyond the space’s typical fluorescents, the EEMED choreographers do not have control over the lighting design. Additionally, audiences are able to sit, but also talk, eat, and shop. 194 Middle Eastern dancers trained in folk, tribal, ethnic, and/or classical dance did not start performing on proscenium stages until the late-1950s and early-1960s. This move was even later, the last quarter of the twentieth century in the American Middle Eastern dance community. 195 My Unknown is an exception to the straightforward narratives generally presented at EEMED. In the dance, the sense of chronological time moves forward and backwards. For example, the buildings collapse before the airplane bombers show up. 196 Briginshaw draws from two theoretical sources. One is Homi Bhabha’s concepts of postcolonial hybridity. According to Briginshaw, Bhabha employs the term “hybridity” to indicate cultures collide and that this doubleness differs from “binary thinking characterized by separation and opposition” (Briginshaw 18). Briginshaw writes, “[h]is notion of hybridity recognizes the fluidity and changing nature of concepts such as ‘East’ and ‘West’” (Briginshaw 98), which she sees in Jeyasingh’s Duets with Automobiles. Briginshaw also relies upon Rosi Braidotti’s ideas of the nomad’s transmobility of boundaries and interconnectedness with various cultures and identifies Jeyasingh as a representative of this position. 197 O’Shea states Jeyasingh is not a translator because she is not trying to present authentic dance as a representation of Indian culture. 198 Alexandra King is a teacher, performer, and producer in Santa Barbara, California. She is also the Dance Director of the Middle Eastern Ensemble at University of California, Santa Barbara and teaches at Santa Barbara City College. 199 King also at one point uses the term “hybrid genre” (King 55). 200 Sharon Moore is a teacher and performer of tribal bellydance in Seattle. 201 Djoumahna started Tribal Fest in 2001. It takes place annually in Sebastopol, California. 202 Moore defines fusion bellydance as an umbrella term that can encompass any sub-genre of tribal belly dance and tribal fusion and is “the marriage of choreographed and improvisational forms, specifically with significant emphasis given to what would be considered ‘American Nightclub’ or ‘Cabaret’ styles of belly dance; but can also refer to emphases on specific ethnic dance influences, such as ‘Indian Fusion,’ ‘Flamenco Fusion,’ ‘African Fusion’ and the like. (Moore) 203 Djoumahna defines Tribal Fusion Belly Dance as “a mix of ATS and Cabaret Bellydance…” (Djoumahna 2008) and World Fusion Belly/Dance as the fusion of non-Middle Eastern dance and Middle Eastern dance. 204 Moore identifies tribaret as a mixture of tribal and cabaret. Although Moore claims to have coined the term tribaret, it has been in use, at least in California, since the mid-1990s as a description of dancers who combine cabaret and tribal forms. At that time, the term tribal fusion dance did not exist and tribal dance referred to cabaret dancers who incorporated folk, ethnic, and tribal dance from the Middle East into their cabaret dance and costuming.
205 In these names, Djoumahna employs the term Belly/Dance in order to indicate a particular dancer may use more or less belly dance.
206 While defining fusion, Anaheed introduces the topic of a healthy hybrid, which she asserts is “stronger than its individual parts” (Anaheed 24). Later on, Anaheed comments that a hybrid plant or animal “can be sterile” (Anaheed 29), but a successful one can reproduce.
207 Anaheed and Tandemonium also define fusion dance as performing traditional Middle Eastern dance moves to non-Middle Eastern dance music. This concept of fusion dance in the American Middle Eastern dance community used to be prevalent before the wave of tribal fusion dancers co-opted it.
208 I have created two dances for EEMED in which creating a fusion dance was the experiment. In Falling for Echo (2007) and Minara (2008), I took two different approaches to fusing ballet and belly dance. In Falling for Echo, I maintained ballet’s use of Western Classical music by employing Vivaldi’s Concerto Per eco in lontano and its narrative structure. I mixed elements of costuming from both. I also move sequentially through both vocabularies but simultaneously incorporate several of ballet’s movements that stayed connected to the ground as well as its uplifted and erect, but light posture into my belly dance moves. In Minara, I chose to move away from ballet by using mystical Persian music, Minara by Niyaz and by continuing belly dance’s abstract structure. Additionally, I wore more of a simple and flowy tribal fusion outfit – flared pants, a thin skirt, and wrapped top. However, I focused more on fusing the two vocabularies, by adding more ballet moves than I did in Falling for Echo and performing them simultaneously.
209 Moore uses the umbrella term tribal bellydance “to generally refer to most styles of this dance, excluding the direct stylistic ancestors of FatChanceBellyDance, which I refer to as ATS” (Moore).
210 I differ from Moore’s assessment that tribal fusion’s accents and staccato movements come from break dancing. Although links between the two genres occur, I see tribal fusion dancers as exaggerating, extending, and concentrating on a belly dance movement quality in a similar manner as ATS dancers do with the smooth, continuous flow of belly dance’s taqsim section.
211 Most in the American Middle Eastern dance community label Brice’s style as the prototype of tribal fusion and do not call it alternative tribal belly dance.
212 Within U.S. tribal, Shira includes American Tribal Style and its variations/sub-genres.
213 Djahari also may be relying upon the public’s familiarity of the term alternative as the label for non-mainstream, independent rock music.
214 Since Tatianna saw her solo and Desert Sin work as both experimental and alternative dance, I began using them both in the interview questions.
215 Friend’s description of Haleh, a Persian dancer who also studied ballet and flamenco, “provides an example that Persian classical dance is not a dead art, frozen in time and endlessly repeated, but one that is both rich in heritage, and capable of adapting and incorporating elements from outside its tradition” (Friend 1996, 8). Friend acknowledges Haleh not only maintains the “strength, flexibility, musicality, and art, into what could be considered the epitome of classical Persian dance,” but also adds “western technique and the power of flamenco” (Friend 1996, 8). Nevertheless, Haleh’s additions do not disrupt what Friend labels as the hallmarks of classical Persian dance, which include,

Delicate hand movements, gentle upper body undulations, and facial expressions… The movements require extreme flexibility and grace of the upper body and varied facial expressions, including moving both eyebrows independently. Indeed, Persian classical dance emphasizes feeling, rather than movement. The dancer teases the audience with her coquettish glances, and displays a variety of expressions: reluctance, joy, sensuality, pride, laughter. (Friend 1996, 6)

216 Anaheed offers another example in one of her staged-folk dances. While discussing the Perfumes of Araby Annual Concerts, she confirms in her bint al-beledi dance, the dancers wore traditional costumes and danced to traditional music. Anaheed also used “primary belly dance movements” (Anaheed 24) and her choreography was generally “folk style or folkloric” (Anaheed 23). However, she added some modern dance movements. Regardless, Anaheed still considers her bint al-beledi dance a traditional dance.
217 Elayssa presents Jheri St. James’s Take a Tip (2001) as an example of how a dance may be viewed in two different show contexts. Elayssa says at an IAMED show, the audience “may not even notice that it’s experimental. [They] may think, ‘that’s just great. She’s throwing out little candies for us to eat’” (Elayssa
65). In this context, tradition regards these breaks as small and fun and easily reincorporates the piece back into its space. Elayssa contends this may also be because the American Middle Eastern dance community has become used to an amount of experimentation. However, EEMED audiences may view St. James’s piece differently because of the show’s framework. They may see “an aspect of Middle Eastern dance, traditional, that they never quite noticed before… [mainly] the dancer tipping the audience rather than the audience tipping her” (Elayssa 33). If viewers are familiar with traditional Middle Eastern dance codes, they will recognize St. James’s action as a reversal of traditional practice. If viewers are not familiar with traditional Middle Eastern dance codes, Elayssa hopes they will reflect on the act of tipping a traditional Middle Eastern dancer.

218 Tandemonium comments that several people have asked them if they are performing a comedy number that year, even though they had only presented two at the time of the interviews. Incidentally, Jean remarks, “[n]o one ever walked up to us and said, ‘are you doing a classical Uzbek dance today?’” (Tandemonium 78). They also recount how a friend who expected there to be nudity in the show was disappointed when there was none.

219 Although the core EEMED choreographers assert that they focus on producing new works for EEMED, some of them repeat their dances. For example, Anaheed has reworked Loie Fuller from a solo, to a duet, and then a trio and Bare Essences from a solo to a duet. She frequently maintains the basic premise of the dance, including costume, vocabulary, and sometimes music. Desert Sin had performed Ode to Silent Film and Fairytale at another event before performing them at EEMED. Djahari comments that she was hesitant about repeating Ode to Silent Film, but she performed it anyway at my request. For both dances, Desert Sin made modifications to re-design their EEMED version. For example, for Ode to Silent Film, they included another dancer and used the lighting design they initially wanted but could not completely accomplish at the first venue. In addition, EEMED frequently voices a theme, which organically grows out of the collection of dances. For example, in 2008, eight out of the ten dances were about or had a death; in 2007, five out thirteen pieces had animal themes; and in 2004, seven out thirteen pieces contained some type of veil.

220 Elayssa, Djahari, and Tatianna give EEMED a lot of credit for helping Desert Sin explore and develop its style. For example, Djahari claims, “EEMED is really where I started to explore the whole theatrical side much more” (Djahari 65). As a result, “[i]t just opened so many doors. And I didn’t even know what those doors were yet, but there was this sense of limitless opportunity of what could be done with Middle Eastern dance” (Djahari 71).

221 Franko limits his use of the term experimental to the periods when choreographers are first radically breaking away from their predecessor and before they develop their personal technique/tradition. 222 Novack asserts that dancers in the first part of the twentieth century moved dance away from entertainment to art and transmitted “images of individualism, pioneering innovation and emotional expression realized in the physical technique and choreographic ideas…” (Novack 24). Additionally, these dancers utilized improvisation as a part of their choreographic process, although it was not part of an end product.

223 I continue Novack’s usage of the term postmodern without a hyphen. Novack finds it difficult to differentiate modern dance and postmodern dance “because further contextualization is needed to understand their meaning” (Novack 229), but she notes that dance scholars frequently label experimental dance of the 1960s and 1970s as postmodern dance. Similar to many of the dance scholars in the “Post-Modern Dance” section of this dissertation, Novack also acknowledges differences between postmodern dances of the 1960s and those of the 1980s. In fact, she observes experimental dance from the 1960s has formed “two kinds of organizational frameworks” (Novack 228). One small and marginal group continues ideas developed in the 1960s and are rarely cited as postmodern dances. The second group, which is frequently labeled postmodern dance, has moved into the mainstream as big companies supported by large donating sponsors.

224 Chovexani is based in New York City and directed by Zan Asha who also started Urban Oasis (started in 2004), an “experimental (Non-traditional) Dance Showcase” (Chovexani 2009c), and Shadows of the Harem (started in 2006), a monthly Gothic Bellydance Showcase.
225 In an interview for Zaghareet!, Zan Asha discusses her Night of 1001 Goddesses. See Erin Marshall’s “Enter the Goddesses!”
226 Kaeshi is a native of Australia who now teaches and performs in New York City. She is a co-founder of Bellyqueen Dance Theatre with Amar Gamal (1998) and PURE with Darshan (2004). Darshan is a teacher and performer in New York.
227 After the workshops, participants then start or join a PURE group in their own area, of which they claim now over seventeen branches. Crouch also writes, at least a couple of branches require some amount of dance training, usually between six to twelve months of classes. These are collaborative groups without a director, although facilitators and choreographers exist. In addition, PURE generally requires dancers to practice weekly, pay a donation to the group, buy their own group costume, which is generally of a simple American Tribal style, and perform at community events.
228 In addition to Experimenteller Tanz (Experimental dance), Ghaziya also notes that she performs Orientalischer Tanz (Oriental Dance) and Zigeunertanz (Gypsy Dance).
229 Anaheed identifies two of her EEMED dances as challenging. In Bare Essentials (2001), two dancers performed behind a three-sided scrim. The only light source was three lights that casted the dancers’ shadows onto the white cloth. Anaheed acknowledges, “what I wanted to do with the nudity was not distract the audience” (Anaheed 33). Instead, the purpose of the dance was to show “the essence of movement” (Anaheed 84). Since Anaheed did not want the challenging elements to overpower the purpose of her dance for an audience that does not readily accept nudity in public, Anaheed softened it with the projection of shadows on a scrim. She also notes that her Loïe Fuller dances are challenging because the dancers were once again unclothed under the fabric. Anaheed says the audience “would see the shape – the flower, the butterfly, the angel or whatever, and then suddenly flesh. Flesh would exist under the veil” (Anaheed 97). Here, she mixes transcendence with corporeality.
230 Anaheed notes that she had to learn and be given permission and support in order to break the traditional rules. She recalls, “I do remember in my early dance years a woman who helped me with my costuming… and said, ‘look you can do things differently. You don’t have to follow the rules. Break the rules and you can still make something that looks good.’ And that was news to me” (Anaheed 60).
231 My understanding of Tandemonium’s intention in Delirium Awakens the Sacred Spirit was to layer one cultural singing style upon another culture’s dance. They also wanted to recreate the feel of a dance that no longer exists.
232 Claudia and Jean point out some of the experimental elements. For example, Claudia notes, “all the sounds came from our own bodies, either our voices, our bells, our rattles, [or] our tambourines. That’s certainly not traditional. The narrative was not traditional. We were taking movements from several different cultures and combining them in ways they would never be” (Tandemonium 65). Jean adds that their headpieces and make-up were not traditional. However, many read the dance as traditional because, Jean recollects, “we kept some visually traditional aspects to the dance…. “ (Tandemonium 65). Claudia concludes, while Jean agrees, “because we were wearing those embroidered tunics, they automatically assumed that it was something very traditional” (Tandemonium 66). By including tunic costumes and face paint, and I would add, a ritual-like procession onto the stage, trance elements, and producing their own music, Tandemonium demonstrates what kinds of elements can easily construct and invent a “tradition.”
233 During the interview, I offered examples of the ways in which I saw Hypothermia, Loïe Fuller, and Unknown as Middle Eastern dances based upon my own experiences and my discussions with the choreographers. Both Jean and Claudia were quick to assert that they had only watched these pieces once and often only in dress rehearsal. However, their viewing of the dance one time is similar to the audiences’ experience, which means others could question these dances’ Middle Eastern dance connection too.
234 Hypothermia is a spectacle driven dance based around a character who is defrosting. Elayssa supports her role through elaborate costume and make-up. She wears an outfit is reminiscent of the bedlah (the two-piece belly dance outfit) but with unusual fabric and construction and dotted with blue LED lights. Her make-up, hair, and contact lens pull away from the traditional dance usage of making a dancer look pretty, and instead, construct a half frozen and half thawed image. Although Elayssa continues the tradition of providing a visual presentation of the music, she chooses contrasting, non-Middle Eastern music to present
both sides of her character. Almost all of her movements are Middle Eastern dance, except for her facial expressions. However, with the added dramatic elements her moves become disjunctive and alienated. 235 In Loïe Fuller, Anaheed re-creates Fuller’s use of thirty of yards of silk to form shapes and images under changing light colors. Although the music and costume are non-Middle Eastern, most of the movements, shapes, and flow come from Turkish-American veil work, which in turn Fuller herself may have influenced. The yards of fabric greatly alter the traditional belly dance’s costume aesthetic by covering the body while simultaneously extending its reach.

236 Unknown begins with dancers in black light. The only things showing are the four or five white masks placed at different points on the nine dancers’ bodies, which gives the illusion of many people on stage. Not visible, and perhaps unknown to the audience, the performers use various Middle Eastern dance movements to make the faces come “alive.” In the following sections, the dancers are revealed in costumes of ripped jeans and t-shirts and black, red, and gray streaked makeup. Pushing Middle Eastern dance to extremes through asymmetrical and off kilter movements, they move through a non-linear narrative loosely based on 9/11, but that could be read as the destruction of Hiroshima, due to the music’s title, Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima by Krzysztof Penderecki.

237 In 1893 spectators could walk down The Egyptian Street in Cairo or through the Algerian and Tunisian Village and the Turkish Village and see the Persian Palace, the Moorish Palace, and the Egyptian Temple. Sol Bloom, the entrepreneur who brought over at least the Algerian and Tunisian entertainers, was also the manager of the amusement concessions of the Midway Plaisance. He first saw the Algerian entertainers at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle. For more information, please see Donna Carlton’s Looking for Little Egypt and Paul Monty’s Serena, Ruth St. Denis, and the Evolution of Belly Dance in America (1976-1976).

238 Frank Norton’s A Facsimile of Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876 (published in 1877) contains a picture entitled “Scene in a Tunisian Cafe - The Scarf Dance,” depicts a woman dancing in front of three musicians for a mixed crowd.

239 Until World War I, there were not many Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States. Eric Hooglund, in Crossing the Waters. Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States Before 1940 (1987), estimates there were about 100,000 mostly from Mount Lebanon, in Syria; a part of the Ottoman Empire; and were not Muslim but Christians: Syrian Orthodox, Maronite, and Melkite. Alixa Naff, in “Arabs in America: A Historical Overview” (1983), notes that many Arab immigrants were peddlers, selling various wares house to house with a few going into farming and factories in Detroit, Boston, New York and Los Angeles. A second wave of immigration, this time from all over the Middle East, happened after World War II. These communities practiced the identity and heritage through social, church gatherings, clubs, and newspapers.

240 Middle Eastern dance was not the only Middle Eastern art form experiencing change. During the 1960s, several musicians, such as Eddie “the Sheik” Kochak (Syrian-American), Freddy Elias (Lebanese-American), Hakki Obadia (Iraqi), and Muhammad al-Bakkar (Egyptian) began to fuse various Middle Eastern music genres together as well as Western tonality in order to develop the Arab-American sound, which they disseminated through their recordings. For further details, see Anne Rasmussen’s dissertation, Individuality and Social Change in the Music of Arab-Americans (1991).

241 For more information, please see Aisha Ali’s “Looking Back: The California Middle Eastern Dance Scene” and Artemis‘ “Turkish Dance, American Cabaret and Vintage Orientale.”

242 For example, Anthony Shay and Leona Wood founded the Aman Folk Ensemble in 1963 (Los Angeles), Ibrahim Farrah the Near East Dance Troupe in 1969 (New York City), Aisha Ali Dance Company in 1974 (LA), and Morocco and the Casbah Dance Experience in 1977 (New York City).

243 In 1968, Jamila Salimpour took American Middle Eastern dance in a new direction when she began performing at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire (1968-1975) with her Troupe Bal Anat. They along with other San Francisco dancers inspired Fat Chance Belly Dance in the late-1980s to develop American Tribal Style, which eventual lead to other forms, including Tribal Fusion, Urban Tribal, and Gothic belly dance during the mid-2000s.
Although Adra, Sellers-Young, and Shay examine Westernization and Orientalism’s influence on Middle Eastern dance, they simplify the situation and discount not only the complexity of post-colonial decolonization, but also the dynamic relationship between tradition and innovation.

Ingber and Manor note Inbal Yemenite Dance Theater, founded by Sara Levi-Tanai in 1949 (she was ousted in 1991), “is now mandated to become a center for the preservation of folklore material…” (Ingber and Manor 532).

Fahmy claims, “new choreographers, however, have not introduced any remarkable innovations in the field of dance in Egypt” (Fahmy 76).

Percival asserts that experimentation has the best chance of succeeding when choreographers can revolt against a strong tradition. He writes,

> Experiment is most likely to be found where some form of dance is already well established. If you are trying to start activity where none existed before, whether you are likely to model your work after traditional examples, or else the experiments you try will probably be of limited interest and success for lack of a fixed starting point. When there is plenty of traditional dance to revolt against, plus a creative atmosphere, experiment stands most chance of succeeding. (Percival 12)

Unfortunately, Percival does not explain, what “succeeding” means with respect to experimentation.

O’Shea presents examples of the ways in which some Indian choreographers have dealt with negotiating innovation and tradition – all of which employ some sense of historical connection in order to legitimize their innovation and “to construct a unified and pristine history where there has long been divergence and fragmentation” (O’Shea 2006, 122). However, O’Shea claims that Jeyasingh rejects these historical projects and produces “challenges to an unmoving tradition” (O’Shea 2006, 123).

Nugent presents examples of the outside influences, including “Western” and Hollywood on costume and make-up, the introduction of the nightclub and stage to Cairo and the resulting changes in the use of space and show structure, and the addition of ballet in “more expressive use of arms, staging, refinement of carriage and the employment of choreography” (Nugent 1).

Since around 2004, dancers have been able to enter Middle Eastern dance through American Tribal Style and its descendents, rather than from folk dance, ethnic dance, classical dance, and belly dance as the core EEMED choreographers do. American Tribal Style holds an ambiguous position between traditional and experimental Middle Eastern dance. Although some dancers and writers may not consider American Tribal Style to be a traditional form, it has a distinctive image, which dancers can move away from as their base.

Perfumes of Araby Annual Concerts took place at dinner theaters between 1981 and 1994.

Anaheed defines the term edge as “something that has not been done before” (Anaheed 25).

Although many may not identify American Tribal Style (ATS) as a traditional dance because of its short history and its discontinuity from dances in the Middle East, others could read it as such. ATS has roots in American belly dancers performing at Renaissance Fairs in the 1970s, in San Francisco. During this time, the dance was in an experimental space as dancers explored belly dance outside of the nightclubs and fused it with folk and historical dance. In the late 1980s, a San Francisco company called Fat Chance Belly Dance took this process and codified it by creating rules, structures, and an image that became popular and known in the American dance community as ATS. Towards the mid-2000s, ATS has experienced another growth of experimentation as dancers break away and formed their own forms, including tribal fusion, urban tribal, and gothic belly dance. When comparing ATS’s distinctive image to these newer dance forms, it appears to be a traditional dance.

MECDA was started in 1977 by a group of Los Angeles dancers who called it the Middle Eastern Cabaret Dance Association. Their initial intent was to unionize belly dancers. However, their endeavor did not succeed, and by the early 1980s, MECDA became a social organization called Middle Eastern Culture and Dance Association. For details about the history of MECDA and current debates within the organization please see: Doyne Allen’s “What Happened to MECDA’s Democracy?” and “Just the Facts,” Feiruz Aram’s “How MECDA Began,” Mish Mish El-Atrash’s “How MECDA Began,” Samra’s “Unionizing Belly Dance: MECDA's Beginnings,” Marta Schill’s “MECDA’s First 30 Years,” and Marta Rachel Lazarus Soto’s “MECDA Breaks Its Silence.”
255 For details about this debate, please see: Suzy Evans’s “Regarding: An Evening of Experimental Middle Eastern Dance,” MECDA Board Members’ “Personal letter,” and “Correction,” Marta Schill’s “MECDA’s Letter to ‘Experimental,’” Suad Borchardt and Mary Tanner (Nailah)’s “Experimental” Response,” Melissa Crandal’s “The Soul of a Dancer Lives through Experimentation,” Tandemonium’s Personal Letter sent to MECDA, and my “Warning: I am Going to Talk About Nude Female Bodies on Stage.”

256 Anaheed underwent other problems with MECDA stemming back to criticism the Perfumes of Araby received from them in the early 1980s. During the intermission of one of the Perfumes of Araby Annual Concerts, their “fantasy fashion show included designs that were Middle Eastern or quote unquote belly dance designs, but also totally fantasy designs” (Anaheed 39). At one point Anaheed wore a backless dress and another dancer wore “a sheer chiffon top” (Anaheed 39). She recounts that MECDA published letters from some of its members, one of which “called us the whores of Araby” (Anaheed 39). Besides the defamation, Anaheed was troubled by the fact that MECDA did not publish any of the letters she knows they received that offered a differing opinion. Anaheed responded with her own letter that was not about the printed opinions or statements, but MECDA’s one-sided presentation. The disagreement finally subsided and the following year Perfumes of Araby had a larger audience. She states, “I think the controversy and following publicity engendered in the end a positive exposure and result for us” (Anaheed 39). Anaheed’s recollections demonstrates the power MECDA has in the Los Angeles Middle Eastern dance community to dictate what is and is not Middle Eastern dance and what is and is not appropriate. Anaheed’s comments also show she has a broader definition of Middle Eastern dance, which was in conflict with those of MECDA’s board at that time.

257 Robyn Friend, in her article, “Status and Preservation of Iranian Dance,” addresses a similar fate in Iran. She writes,

Certain village and tribal folkloric dances may be headed towards extinction. The tendencies of previous governments to urbanize and settle trans-human tribes, which already created serious obstacles to preservation of folk dances, have been supplemented by Islamic revolutionary and other forces. The result has been an effective ban on certain traditional music and dance forms, and the separation of what remains from the social context which developed and preserved them. (Friend 2007d)

258 Café Beledy is a showcase featuring various dancers and musicians. Anaheed originally produced it at the Pars Art Center in Van Nuys (founded by Linda and Abdollah Nazemi, it has since closed), which was a large room with a lighting grid. Generally, she set up the audience chairs in a U-shape so dancers had room to dance on the floor and/or share the small stage with the musicians. The lights were left on as a general wash.

259 Rakkasah is in the San Francisco area and Cairo Carnivale is in the Los Angeles area (since 2009 it is known as Cairo Caravan).

260 Desert Sin reworked Sacramental Skins into Kali for their 2004 full-length production Musée des Femmes – Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. They maintained the costuming, body paint, and tone, but expanded it into a trio and added more music and movements. It is this version that Djahari and Elayssa modified further in order to perform at Rakkasah.

261 Djahari offers my Unknown as an example. She notes, “you wouldn’t put that piece in a club event kind of thing” (Djahari 86), because it is not about entertainment but rather makes people think.

262 Many of the EEEMD theaters could accommodate suspension from the ceiling. None of the FEMED choreographers have asked to do so.

263 FEMED had a follow spotlight at the Secret Rose Theatre in 2003.

264 In 2003, Anaheed wanted to perform her first Loïe Fuller dance, but had to postpone it until the next year when the theater was large enough to accommodate the costume and lighting needs. Even then, Anaheed still had to make changes to her concepts. For instance, she wanted lighting in the floor and mirrors, but ended up not using them. However, this modification was not due to the constraints of the space, but because, Anaheed says, “I’m not always able to create all the extra equipment needed for a concept” (Anaheed 52).
Frow defines text as “any organization of one or more utterances that is recognised by some receiver as a meaningful communication. The concept is not restricted to speech or writing: it can be applied to any medium of expression, or any combination of media” (Frow 154).

According to Frow, Derrida posits the idea that the “mark” of the genre does not belong to the genre. Therefore, the text can only “remark” the genre.

Frow defines a situation as, “a context which may exist in the form of actual speakers and physical environment together with structure of information that they carry, or may be virtual but still laden with information” (Frow 152).

Deleuze and Guattari mainly discuss how lines of flight deterritorialize. However, they consider lines of flight can enter territories. For example, they write, “[y]ou may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject” (Deleuze and Guattari 9).

According to Foster, the frame is “the way the dance sets itself apart as a unique event” (Foster 1986, 59). The four modes of representation or “the way the dance refers to the world” (Foster 1986, 59), include resemblance, which focuses on a certain quality or attribute; imitation, that wants to be like the object; replication, which selects and depicts the relationship between qualities; and reflection, which is “pure” dance. Vocabulary is the movements of a dance. Syntax, “the rules governing the selection and combinations of moves” (Foster 1986, 59), is comprised of three major types: mimesis – combination based on a repeating or reoccurring sequence; pathos – combination based on feeling; and parataxis – combination based on chance. Style is choreographer’s characteristic employment of movement qualities, use of body parts, modes of representation, syntax, and vocabulary.