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Historically and in the context of globalisation, how do western European perceptions of folk/ traditional dance pervade and shape the field of dance?

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**Historically and in the context of globalisation, how do Western
European perceptions of folk/ traditional dance pervade and shape
the field of dance?**

by

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Abstract

With the international dance community becoming increasingly globalised, how do Western European perceptions of folk/ traditional dance pervade and shape the field of dance? This paper will discuss Western European perspectives towards traditional and folk dance and investigate the origins of such perspectives, if they do indeed exist. In doing so the reasoning of Western European perspectives will be examined, considered and questioned alongside that of non-Western European perspectives. The thesis is compiled from a wide range of textual sources that explore Western European world views in relation to non-Western European perspectives to argue that such perspectives do, to a large extent, shape and pervade the wider field of dance.

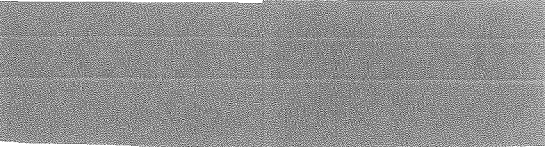
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Signed Emma Fishwick



Dated 31/01/2011

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Introduction

Dance has long been a strong force in the formation of ethnic and national cultural identities. With this in mind, it is justified to state that dance, as a part of culture, has been a tool in which nations and ethnic groups present traditions and ideologies specific to that nation or group. What is of interest is how particular societies and certain cultural practices are believed to be superior to others. Furthermore, it is of principal interest in this discussion as to how such a notion can be found in varying degrees within cultural perspectives.

Extrapolating further into the complex issues involved, it became clear that the perspective of Western European dance forms being valued as superior is a sensitive issue, particularly in this modern context. It can be seen that, ultimately, it is simply a perspective held in the West throughout the course of history to varying degrees and, not necessarily, a statement with which non-Western countries concur. In the interest of this research, the examination of Western perspectives towards folk or traditional dance will attempt to drive a clearer inquiry.

The use of the word *perspective* throughout this thesis is similar to the way others might use *worldview*: referring to our fundamental, usually hidden, assumptions about the nature of reality. What is intriguing is the way in which Western dance culture perceives folk dance and how misconceptions by the West and non-Western cultures have impacted upon the field of dance. Western perceptions of exoticism, academically known as Orientalism have seen non-Western cultures being reproduced in Western art since the 19th century and it is of particular interest how the trend of “the other” or the culturally different is continuing to shape, if it still does, the international dance community. One means of pursuing this enquiry is to examine the credibility which Western dance artists attribute to folk dance, whether at home or abroad.

As an individual in the process of transitioning from tertiary studies into the professional dance industry, scrutinizing such trends and dynamics is an exciting area of inquiry. Through observing the current world of dance, it is obvious that globalisation has exerted a strong impact on aesthetic values. Immense amounts of cultural borrowing and interchange of knowledge have increased the diversity within the existing melting pot of the global dance community. It is within this diversity and cultural borrowing that one sees folk/ traditional or social dances emerging in the vocabulary of professional choreographers. In turn, questions of authenticity and accuracy of replication arise and whether they even matter in this “cut and paste world”. (Stock 2005)

Central questions to this study include:

- How, where and why did these Western perspectives on folk/traditional dance form?
- What impact do these perspectives have on dance, globally and locally?
- What is authenticity in the context of cultural exchange?

These questions guide the study, serving to tie the necessary broader fields of research to the primary focus statement:

“Historically and in the context of globalisation, how do Western European perceptions of folk/ traditional dance pervade and shape the field of dance?”

In order to examine how Western culture perceives folk/ traditional dance, it is necessary to turn to wider fields of research which contribute insight into this principal question and how it operates within the dance community.

However, there are limitations to this study, as a detailed study requires a thorough understanding of historical, geographical and cultural interactions between Europe, Americas, Africa, Asia and Middle East in order to understand the complexities which impinge on various perceptions and cross cultural interactions in dance and the arts in these geographical areas.

Ultimately, I aim to raise questions in relation to why and how Western Europeans perceive aesthetical hierarchical values, if they do, and how this affects the industry, globally and locally. I do not plan to reach an ultimate answer, as I believe there is not a single explanation. Too many factors impinging upon the field of dance influence this question, requiring me to embrace other aspects of the global community beyond the scope of this current study. It must be noted however, that one of these factors is my own background and perspective of a white middle class female Australian dancer whose opinion will differ to the next person.

Background

Initially this research materialized from a previous study, “With the dance community becoming increasingly globalised, how do notions of *Western European superiority* still pervade and shape the field of dance?” It was from here that questions emerged such as:

- Do dance cultures merely become more *Westernised* in order to survive or to be successful and acceptable?
- Who, what and why do we dictate as the advanced, correct or artistically superior form over another?
- Why cannot the cultural dance practice of a Vietnamese be as superior as that of the Paris Opera?
- Why does one dance form reign supreme over another within a singular nation?
- How does cultural resistance impact upon the speculative Western dance superiority?
- What makes a singular ethnic group or national alignment of states more advanced than another in aesthetic terms?

These questions directed the approach of this research, to explore and understand whether this concept of Western superiority existed within the dance industry as well as in the wider population. However, after further

research it appeared that the statement of “*Western superiority*” was a matter of *perspective*. Thus it became a not a question of whether Western superiority existed but, rather, how do Western perceptions towards folk or traditional dance effect the dance community. The study aims to explore whether there is a value which Western European dance practitioners place on traditional forms of dance and if the other (the traditional practitioner) reciprocates and whether this relationship is changing?

Even as dance moves beyond its obvious boundaries of performance and social practice to become a valued agent of aesthetic and social change, race becomes a guiding trope that defines its appreciation. “Classical” forms of dance, recognised as the highest forms of physical expression, are often regulated to whites, while dancers of colour are often thought to be experts only at “lower-value”, social dance forms. It seems that race, alongside sexuality and gender, constructs difficult barriers for artists and audiences to surmount as they approach the realm of dance. (Modern Dance - Racialized in the United States, Early African Americans, 2010)

It appears that, due to the subjective nature of the art form, the audience is required to interpret dance works and its manifestations from a personal and societal standpoint. Indeed, identities are rarely formed without encoding which occurs as a result of the surrounding socio-political environment. The ideologies of the culture and the way in which the individual interprets the values and beliefs will ultimately form the way in which the individual views the world and vice-versa. Thus, audiences are unable to separate cultural politics from art and it seems logical to say that dance, thus, is physically a universal form but that, intellectually, dance remains controlled by global and racial forces that shape society. This is from the perspective of a white middle class female Australian dancer whose opinion will differ to the next person.

Perception and Perspective

As growing connections between diverse communities transform our sensibilities, people's assumption about what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, or rational and irrational are often challenged. The changes that result can produce new and sometimes startling forms of art, create new identities formed from disparate histories and experiences, and help people rethink how they came to value one dance form over another. ... For example, cultural borrowing in dance and pedagogy has evoked questions concerning the meaning of the tradition itself: What is African dance? Is it African dance if a non-African teaches it? Does it remain a cultural dance if it is performed simply as a dance and no longer as a story of the people? (Shapiro 2008, pg. 328)

Within this thesis, two terminologies will come into play; *perception* and *perspective*, and it is important to address the line between the two and clarify the context in which they will be utilised. The term *perception* defined as 1. To gain knowledge through one of the senses; discover by seeing, hearing, etc. 2. to apprehend with the mind; understand. (Collins English Dictionary, pg. 294) The term *perspective* defined as 1. A way of regarding situations, facts, etc, and judging their relative importance. (Collins English Dictionary, pg. 296)

Simply from observing these definitions, one can conclude that there cannot be one "true" way of perceiving the world as individuals' interpretations differ and no two people see one colour the same even though, throughout the duration of history, certain civilisations have believed it possible. As mentioned previously in this thesis, the use of the word *perspective* is similar to that of *worldview*, encapsulating our fundamental (usually hidden) assumptions about the nature of reality. By making such a connection, the term becomes more radicalised, as an individual worldview will be dictated by the demographic and socioeconomic background from within which perceptions/perspectives exist.

The research period has unveiled an important relationship between the two terms; it is from an individual's perspective that perceptions arise. The volatile nature of human perspectives ultimately means that conflicts and disputes always arise from conflicting perspectives as everyone has different assumptions about, and ways of seeing, the world. As long as the dance community is derived from human behaviour its members too will not be exempt from such discrepancies of artistic perspectives.

Folk to Traditional Dance

The materials of folk-lore consist of traditional tales (so-called), and traditional customs and superstitions (so-called), the feature of both groups being that at the time of first being recorded and reduced to writing they existed only by the force of tradition. (Gomme, 1942, pg. 123)

Folk is a term which too many practising Western dance artists see as a humble, traditional form of social dance, whereas the term, traditional, assumes automatically a status of culture, value and authenticity particularly in a modern context. At times, it appears that the Western perspective of the term 'folk' automatically is associated with forms of lower artistic merit than institutionalised forms such as classical and contemporary. What is of interest is how such a perception (if it does thrive) intercepts the relationship between the West and the 'other' in the context of the dance community. What is of further interest is how did this relationship historically form and how perceptions on the subject might be changing.

The word folk-lore - literally 'the learning of the people' has established itself as the generic term under which the traditional beliefs, customs, stories, songs and sayings current among backward peoples, or retained by the uncultured classes of more advanced peoples, are comprehended and included ... it covers everything which makes part of the mental equipment of the folk as distinguished from their technical skill. It is not the form of the plough that attracts the attention of the folk-lorist, but the rites

practiced by the ploughman when putting it into the soil....”(Burne, pg. 1, 1942)

The term ‘folk’ in Western European society was accepted until the mid 20th century when artistic merit and social values came under critical debate. The term derived from folklore (coined in 1846 by English antiquarian William John Thoms) which instigated the attitudes of early scholars and, in turn, their readers (Kealiinohomoku 2009, pg. 10). Many Western scholars held the perspective that folk communities were “peasants, simple or quaint people who were illiterate and unselfconscious, carrying on supposedly “primitive” and ancient traditions” (Kealiinohomoku 2009, pg.10). This appears to have been the popular perception as the majority of scholars in the 19th and early 20th century took a Darwinian stance (moving from a class related to a race related perspective) which postulated civilised European superiority and explored the theory of social evolution including perceptions of dance through imagined beginnings in folk dance before arriving at modern social dance. Folk dance consequently is merely perceived as a ‘lower’ form of upper class social dance. This evaluation would be applied not only to foreign forms of dance but also to Western peasantry dances. The Darwinian stance was part of a larger worldview which impinged upon the dance community and will be examined further along in this paper.

It can be seen that, due to this particular Western European view point, the term ‘folk’ was avoided more recently because of the condescending attitude inbuilt into the terminology. In turn, the world wide implications of the label has seen many groups change their titles from ‘folk’ to ‘traditional,’ for example, in 1980 the International Folk Music Council, changed its name to International Council for Traditional Music. Its section on dance broadened in scope from folk dance to ethno choreology; the study of all dance forms in a culture (Kealiinohomoku 2009, pg.10). It would seem, changing the term from folk to traditional instantly allowed for more academic recognition and respect, allowing forms that are more distinguished to be included in the same category.

However, having the description 'traditional' often implies 'authentic' or 'historic' which can inadvertently impact upon perceptions of traditional/folk dance. This is problematic because an 'authentic tradition ... implies one that never changes and is located at a fixed point in time' (Bruner 2005). As the term suggests, any cultural practice labelled as such is in fact static which contributes to why many refuse to label themselves as 'traditional' or 'folk'. So how can this terminology continue to exist? A potential explanation lies with the main exploration of this thesis, that perspectives particularly those of Western European society, perceive certain cultural dances to be 'folk'. The underlining issue of these definitions is that "some persons who perform what outsiders define as folk dances do not themselves identify their dances as folk dances"(Kealiinohomoku 2009 pg. 11). There are many issues related to the terminology of 'folk' dance, such as, the romanticism of folklore, politicisation of 'folk', folk dance as a means of profit and folk dance for fused traditions. Such issues will be addressed throughout the thesis where, for the clarity of the reader, the term 'folk' and 'traditional' will be used when referring to the Western European perspective of cultural dance practices.

West versus "Other"

According to Jai-Morinome, dancers often distinguish themselves from others through highlighting their differences and aligning themselves with a particular style, teaching method, interpretation or philosophy. This approach can in fact alienate 'other' dancers by implying that the others are inferior in some way because they do not have those same identifying characteristics. Once again, it boils down to the perceptions held towards another's practice which are views often shaped by the wider community. Through broadening the scope of this research, the exploration of these perspectives becomes clearer, particularly through focusing on concepts of Western European assumptions of superiority through science, imperialism and the Western European formulation of Orientalism. These perspectives essentially help to demonstrate how the assumed perspective of Western European cultural superiority works and defines the "unknown other" in terms of what is not like western values, behaviours and beliefs.

Superiority

In the interest of exploring European perceptions towards folk dance, there is a need to refine the concept of cultural superiority and *where* it exists; if it in fact does. When addressing this field of research in terms of the global dance community, the premise is that a European assumption of leadership in the field of dance follows the assumption of Western superiority in terms of intellectual thought. So, to understand and comprehend the way in which the dance community co-exists with the notion of European superiority, one must look beyond the field of dance. To gain a firmer grasp of the context for why this notion exists on a wider global social scale, it is reasonable to look to historical and scientific fields for answers. However, these fields are broad and the immense amount of information must be refined or rather, linked to the principal area in question, which is the art form of dance. An examination of the wider global community and its social and cultural development assists in the clarification of current international dynamics within the dance community.

But what is the thread of western civilization that distinguished its course in history? It is difficult to illuminate briefly, but it has to do with the preoccupation of western man with his outward command and effect on physical matter; it has to do with his sense of superiority in the natural order of things. (Erickson 1972)

Within this thesis, two related terminologies will come into play; *superiority* and *dominance*, and it is important to address the fine line between the two and clarify the context in which they will be utilised. The term 'superior' is associated with intellect, a belief of being higher or of greater value to another person or knowledge field, whereas 'dominance' is associated with physical or material attributes of control and power. In reality, the two are relative to one another: with a belief of superiority comes the means to dominate intellectually which, in turn, justifies the need to dominate physically. In regards to this thesis, the two terminologies will be approached from an intellectual stand point – meaning that when using the term *dominate*, I refer

to those beliefs and ideologies which dominate on the justification that they are deemed to be more important or favoured than other beliefs or ideologies.

Initially, it is important to build a wider understanding of why this belief shaped Western cultural identity and its perceptions. These fundamentally racial and class-based forces which exist within world populations systematically filter through into the field of dance. They stem from a kind of ecological struggle that has existed within civilisation relations throughout history. The struggle to be the strongest, intellectually, politically, culturally and economically, has produced a competitive focus on which the Western cultural identity can be said to be founded. Whilst dance is viewed as a universal language, there is a dance language that is led by Western European civilisation which is distinct from other dance vocabularies. It is important then to ask why dance succumbs to particular perspectives of cultural superiority if, at the same time, it is said to break down so many barriers. Can it be considered that dance is physically a universal form but that global and racial forces shape each society also control an overview of dance activity?

The perspective of a middle class, white Australian female whose influences are predominantly Western European will differ to that of a my counterpart in Japan or the Middle East, who may view their culture as superior to Western European civilisation. It is then fair to note that value is estimated on matters of perspective and perceptions of the world. I do not wish to claim that Western European culture is superior, as I do not believe one culture to be superior to another; it is as I stated previously, that the Western premise of superiority is what is of interest. Evidence is present throughout Western history as seen through constructed sensibilities towards political, scientific, imperial and economic endeavours. So the issue remains: how has a distinctly Western European perspective developed and, specifically, how has it shaped, if it has, Western Europeans views towards folk and traditional dance practices?

Science of Nature to Darwinism

The foundation of Empire is art and science. Remove them or degrade them and the Empire is no more. Empire follows art and visa versa as Englishmen suppose. (William Blake in Sampson 1905)

Science is at the forefront of ideologies particularly in empires as forged by the occident (West). Scientific views towards the laws of nature and the biological sciences has influenced and shaped Western Europe's impact upon the world and itself. Western ideas and trends about the laws of nature developed throughout the course of history until prominent people like Darwin presented theories about nature and evolution which differed from accepted accounts given in the Bible. In studying the principles of these trends, one may be able to grasp a better viewpoint about intellectual development of Western European perspectives and assumptions which have led to an undermining of folk culture. As mentioned, previously many scholars adapted Darwinian ideas to downplay the significance of folk culture. For the purpose of this paper references to author David Arnold's (1996, pg. 9) term "Science of Nature" will be used to group the Western scientific views towards the laws of nature. "Science of Nature" was the forerunning branch of Darwinism which contributed to the development of the generalised Western world view. Evidence suggests that the "Science of Nature" helped build Western beliefs and acted as validation for perceived superiority over the 'other' and the 'unknown'. Starting from the 14th century to the 20th century, environmental science according to the west has helped determine trends in an embryonic 'global' society.

Commentators on this branch of science believe that nature, environmentally and biologically, has been used at different points in history as a means of enforcing authority, identity and defiance. (Arnold 1996, pg. 27) Arnold considers environmental history to be a central element in the complex relationship between Europe and the rest of the world. He states that environmental factors such as climate and disease determine trends in human

history, account for the rise and fall of civilisations, expansion and extinction of entire social political systems and consequently cause wide disparities between one culture and another. The study of environmental science reveals new perspectives on the rise of a Western European perspective of superiority from the 14th through to the 20th century, an age of European growth. Arnold states that economic and political dominance over the rest of the world was matched by the growth of western ideas about different environments and who inhabited them. The environment was used to explain human behaviour and to make contrasts between people of Asia and Europe by Western European who sought any justification for claiming power or dominance.

The small variations in climate to which the Asiatic are subject, extremes of both heat and cold being avoided, account for their mental flabbiness and cowardice as well. They are less warlike than Europeans are and tamer in spirit for they are not subject to those physical changes and the mental stimulation which sharpen tempers and induce recklessness and hotheadness. Instead, they live under unvarying conditions. Where there are always changes, men's minds are roused so that they cannot stagnate. (19th Century view cited by Arnold, 1996, pg.142)

However, such climate and geographical determinism in the late 19th century lost favour in lieu of a new preoccupation - race. New perspectives evolved with more aggressive and competitive notions of human evolution. It must be noted that there are numerous scientific branches of research that have contributed to the development of the Western European world view. However, the most prevalent and relevant to this paper is the effects of Charles Darwin's publication *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The competitive desire for racial superiority particularly in Western Europe can be linked to Darwin's "emphasis on the perpetual contest between species and the 'survival of the fittest'" (Arnold 1996, pg. 26). Darwin's writings provided historians and philosophers, unwittingly on Darwin's behalf, of scientific authenticity to explain and justify a Western European perception of authority on a global scale. Darwin's findings were applied to unintended areas -

social, economic, and political - to justify western European progress and intellectual dominance. Such distortions established Social Darwinism and other forms of scientific and social ideologies. It is important to comprehend the context in which science influenced and secured rationalisation for Western European viewpoints and promoted this branch of intellectual superiority in order to understand how such a perspective (if it does exist) resonates in the philosophical views and values held by Western Europeans for “other” forms such as folk/traditional dance.

However, whilst these scientific branches of study deemed Western European as being of greater value, the Western European nations, particularly Germany, found themselves in a state of contradiction. During the 19th century, the Enlightenment age of intellectual growth and artistic efflorescence, saw those who pursued an agrarian lifestyle as illiterate, backward and inferior. Simultaneously, this ‘folk existence’ was romanticised with nostalgia particularly in Germany, as an unspoiled traditional way of life. This idyllic German folk culture evolved alongside nationalism through to the 20th century when Nazi Germany used folk dances and German folk culture as government propaganda. It was believed that “folk dances embodied the mystique of an idyllic Germany”(Kealiinohomoku 2009, pg.10). These folk dances were to encompass national pride and display the Third Reich’s ideology: an ability to achieve an amalgamated (supposedly) superior ‘race’ through traditional folk activities. However complex and contradictory Western perceptions towards folk practices are, formulating tension between folk (conservative) and scientific (progressive) matters, the complex relationship between dance seen as traditional and dance seen as the “other” all boils down to matters of perception.

Imperialism

Imperialism umbrellas a complexity of issues, however simplified, imperialism is a power game marked by beliefs that the dominant country has the moral right to control another. This breakdown of imperialism will clarify how important it is to Western European perceptions towards the “other” and

in turn, their cultural practices, which encompass their folk traditions. Imperialism was prolific in Europe in the 19th century with Western Europe controlling the majority of world industries and economies. Economically, technologically, politically, intellectually and artistically, Western Europe extended its power across the globe, in particular across Asia, Africa and the Americas. Through war, trade and colonisation, the expansion of Western empires grew in parallel with scientific and economic developments which subsequently strengthen a sense of European superiority across the board. According to International World History Project, the nations of Western Europe justified their imperialism with a number of rationalisations. Colonisation was perceived as an attempt to spread civilisation, bringing Christianity to the “heathen”, and introducing progress to the “less fortunate”. (International World History Project 2010)

For the purpose of this study, this imperialism left its mark on the global community and Western European culture. Edward Said states that “the global reach of classical 19th century European Imperialism still casts a shadow over our current times. Hardly any individual hasn’t been touched by the empires of the past.” (Said 1993 pg. xiii)

• **Implications of Imperialism**

Although the era clearly had an identity of its own, the meaning of the Imperial past is not totally contained within it but has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared history and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology and policy still exercises tremendous force. (Eliot 1932 cited in Said pg. 10)

The implications of imperialistic attitudes remain even after imperial rule has deteriorated. Colonised nations, due to their imperialistic pasts, will have an encoded perspective that the putative parent nation is the superior culture, even while many have regained their cultural traditions.

In truth, dance only exists in relationship to recognisable human interaction, and is structured according to local beliefs and ideologies. (Modern Dance – Racialized in the United States 2010) In turn, these local beliefs and ideologies generate a sieve through which the arts are rarely, as Said states, untouched by past empires. As a result, performing arts as a means of communication reflects a constant confrontation between past and the future, between the traditional performance and mainstream artistic efforts and the corresponding values attached to identity maintenance and change. The colonial experience of colonised countries (such as India and Malaysia) has moulded corresponding attitudes of confrontation or adjustment, and thus each country has come up with a unique way of dealing with the above issues. (Urmimala Sarkar Munsri pg.60) It has become a question for colonised cultures, whether to reject, imitate or replicate Western European values and traditions culturally and artistically. As dance encompasses many communicative possibilities, it is fair to assume that individual perspectives will continue to be ‘tinged with the material implications of past racist ideologies’ (International World History Project 2010), dictated by European Imperialism.

Orientalism

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes ... the French and British have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the orient based in the orient’s special place in European Western experience. (Said 1978 pg.15)

The term Orientalism is associated with broad assumptions that were formed by Europeans in order to understand, appreciate and dominate the West’s or more precisely, Europe’s supposed “other”. Throughout Western European history, the concept of Orientalism has evoked academic and artistic imaginations where Asian, Middle Eastern and North African cultural systems were portrayed through idealization and/or demonization. The exotic appeal

of the orient brought new perspectives to the overall psychology of Western artists who had exhausted the stiff restrained nature of classical Western European principles. Whilst European notions of imperialism and science solidified perceptions and promotion of European art, as being more refined than “other” folk practices, Orientalism does not adhere to such straightforward judgment. Rather Oriental thought acts as a contradiction, as Western society and its artists immersed themselves in the traditional folk culture of the East to influence their own practises. To a large degree, the foundations of modern dance were based on explorations of the exotic and different aesthetic mores. Isadora Duncan turned to the Ancient Greeks for inspiration of natural and free movement and Ruth St. Denis produced her own "translations" of Indian and Japanese culture. These adaptations were based on Western European perceptions of the “other” and these modern dance exponents’ traditional dance practices and performances were not intended to display authentic traditional forms but rather to enable the performers to express themselves through refinements of traditional/folk dances.

Western Orientalism dealt with the orient by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, reconstructing and having authority over the Orient.
(Said 1978 pg.16)

According to Oueijan, Orientalism in the 19th century and before was believed to advance the feelings of superiority of the West over the East. The Orient was frequently represented by the West as a “foreign scented female figure” one for the West to “assert authorial hegemony over the feminized East and bring under the regulation of the masculine West” (Eric Myer cited in Oueijan 1998 pg. 28). Such depiction of the “other” formulated a generalized perception of non-Western countries to be weaker (by those who held this view) in all aspects of their culture including dance. However, literature and the arts made Eastern cultures bright, colourful and enchanting, offering a remote world for Western Europeans to escape to.

So deeply is the Orientalist paradigm rooted in Western consciousness that dancers are often unaware of the extent to which the categories of qualities they value in Middle Eastern dance forms – sensuality, mystery, exoticism, femininity-have already been constructed as through a history of Western (predominantly male and European) representations (Dox cited in Jai-Morincome 2005, pg. 9).

The point at which Orientalism became a Western preoccupation varies among scholars, from early Greek civilisation to the 20th century. One may assume that this intellectual tendency still resides in the wider Western European conscience, particularly in the dance realm, with the top contemporary choreographers originating from the East or with Eastern heritage. English-Indian Akram Khan, Moroccan-Flemish Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Israeli Hofesh Shecter develop works that trigger notions of the exotic, suggesting that oriental influences still produces similar sentiment of two centuries ago. Even though these artists are displaced, they remain Eastern and maintain a different perspective to Western and non-displaced Eastern artists. Due to the increase in communication and globalisation, is the West's relationship with Orientalism today used to display cultural acceptance and harmony with the “other”, accepting a different perspective, rather than its use for exoticism and escapism?

The Exotic, The West and Misconceptions

The previous chapter addressed the issue and history of Western European culture and its perceptions towards the “other” in a broad sense. For a more detailed study, it is in the interest of the paper to examine a particular genre of non-Western dance. Over the course of research, I discovered the intriguing instance of Middle Eastern dance in the West, which is a prime example of misconceptions and perceptions of “other” traditional/folk dances invariably made by Western European society. For clarity, I will be specifically addressing the perceptions towards Belly Dancing and how it has been

categorized, by most, in Western European society as a traditional or folk dance of the Middle East.

Two forms of Middle Eastern dance were being represented in the West by the beginning of the 20th century. The ‘authentic’ Middle Eastern *danse du ventre* (belly dance) performed by “natives of those cultures”(Deagon 2007 pg.36) and a hybrid theatrical presentation of Middle Eastern themes by Western women using western techniques. Many of these Western imitations were predominantly performed in burlesque shows and became known as the *Hootchy Kootchy* dancers. Over the past century, belly dancing has become a formidable symbol of the Middle East in the West, packaged in exoticism and Orientalism by Western audiences.

Orientalism and exoticism is where we lay our misconceptions, the perceptions which are based upon an idea or image which more often than not holds no stable reality or authenticity. Not all Middle Eastern women know how to belly dance nor is it a culturally acceptable practice in its country of origin. In fact, most Arabic women who pursue dance as a profession are often held in disrepute. It is against Islamic mores for any women to appear uncovered in front of males who are not their husband or family members. In fact, female public dancers who appear in male public spaces strongly contravene these mores and reinforce the widely held notion that professional dancers are prostitutes (Shay & Sellers-Young 2003, p.16 cited in Morgan Jai-Morincome). It would appear that the stereotype or misconception which has evolved through Western European fascination with the Belly Dance form over the years has potentially tainted the way in which people of Middle Eastern descent regard their “tradition”.

We Arabs in the West remain deeply ambivalent about belly dance, and the aura of cheapness and sexiness which surrounds it here ... we want to represent ourselves to Westerners in the best possible light and we are very ashamed of this part of our culture. We feel it threatens our dignity. We ignore it and are not interested in its progression as an art form. I think it is wrong to feel this shame. To

disown such a rich part of our culture. To care so much about what other people think, which results in a wonderful dance form being left to die. Belly dance is just a dance and, here in the West, we Arabs should forget the old taboos (of the East) which hold us back and embrace the artistic freedoms which are available to us (in the West) (Mikhail cited in Williams 1996 pg. 27).

The westernisation of folkloric dances from the Middle East has seen growth in Egyptian staged folk dance troupes. The *Reda Troupe* established in 1959 is considered to be an 'authentic' representation of Egyptian folk dance due to the members being of Egyptian descent living in Egypt. However, the troupe utilises Western choreographic and staging techniques when creating and performing an Egyptian folkloric inspired work. Dark lighting with earthy reds and yellow tones, sequined folkloric costume (Beledi dress) that sparkles in the dark, four women all with long black braided hair, gracefully skip and step across the stage flirtatiously engaging with each other and the audience (Reda Troupe, (1969). The music is hypnotic and playful and, from a Western perspective, it appears to be an authentic display of traditional/folk dance of Middle Eastern culture. What Westerners measure to be "authentic" Middle Eastern dance is most likely, what the performers actually consider to be Westernised folkloric dance.

In many respects Belly Dance has taken on Western values since its arrival in the Western European dance community. Its interpretation and representation in the West, according to Jai-Morincome, offers empowering concepts of femininity for those who engage in the dance form. Jai-Morincome goes on to suggest that this may indicate Western women have found in belly dancing what is potentially not accessible in their own culture. One may also suggest that when a culture adopts another's practices, more often than not, the borrowed practices are injected with the borrower's values and beliefs. It is this romanticised image of the Middle East that Westerners have favoured, as it reflects Western sensibilities, values and ideals. Belly dancing in the West says more about the needs and desires of Westerners than about Middle Eastern culture (Jai-Morincome 2005 pg. 15). Traditional Middle Eastern

dance practices bring empowerment, exoticism and cultural awareness to a Western performer, together with elements of misrepresentation; cultural appropriation of Western Orientalist fantasies. This should not deter Western Middle Eastern cultural fusion from continuing, as long as what is culturally accurate in regards to Middle Eastern folkloric dance is not lost or misrepresented.

Evolution of Traditions

Examining Western Europeans perceptions towards the “other” and its traditions has unveiled adaptations, misinterpretations and fusions of cultural practises, fuelled by Westerner’s fascination with Orientalism and the exotic. However, it is relevant and necessary to pry further into the impact of Western European assumptions and perspectives of folk on non-Western dance cultures. How do particular cultures maintain or rebuild their traditional dance identity after Western contact and influence and how authentic are the new practices, in a modern context? Once again, this is an area of discussion that encompasses a wide range of cultures and traditions ranging from India, South East Asia, and Africa to the Middle East. The dance industry of Singapore is a prime example of the multitude of external and internal cultural factors that challenge the traditional folk identity of a single nation. Singaporean dance is relevant in discussing theories of authenticity of tradition and its place in a modern context. Singapore’s history displays the impact of Western European assumptions on non Western cultural identity. Singapore’s constant struggle between the rejection and acceptance of Western dance influences lies alongside the nation’s search for Singaporean folk identity in a multicultural setting.

Singapore has a comparatively short history of creative professional dance; however, the range of dance is a clear reflection of Singapore’s cultural diversity. With 42% of Singapore’s population being foreigners from China, Malaysia, Philippines, North America, Middle East, Europe, Australia and India (Singapore 2010), it is reasonable to believe that a single Singaporean tradition dance is difficult to define. According to Gan Hui Cheng, multiculturalism often heightens racial differences, resulting in confusion as to

whether Singaporeans are just Singaporeans with tag hyphenated identities. There are ongoing East meets West and East versus West debates, where some practitioners reject Western forms (i.e. ballet) in their choreography while others seek a harmonious blend of both Western and Asian dance elements (Cheng 2002). Singapore's long and illustrious history with the West: Portuguese rule in 1511, Dutch rule in 1641, British Rule since 1875 - 1959 (Japanese Occupation 1942-45), made Western influence inescapable. In an effort to strengthen Singaporean independence and iron out the issue of "traditions" in a diverse immigrant population, institutionalisation of generic traditional dances of Malaysia, China and India occurred. These "traditional" or "ethnic" dances of Singapore's multicultural demography causes a division between an individual's mother country and his or her national identity, leaving an outside Westerner to presume that there is no singular Singaporean folk culture but rather a hub of folk cultures.

As mentioned previously, colonised nations have encoded a perspective that the values and traditions of their parent nation from Western Europe are the highest or most civilised within the international arena. Moreover, Singapore has been subjected to Westernisation even after independence. The prime example is its induction of classical ballet in the 1930s and formation of the first flagship company, the Singapore Dance Theatre in 1988.

It is not only ballet that marks Singaporeans' preoccupation with Western dance forms. In the 1980s the break dance craze, inspired by the street dancing of Afro American working class youth... Lindy hop, another Afro American dance form, has also found its way here too. There are the evergreen social dances, such as the cha-cha, the tango, Western line dancing and ballroom dancing. (Cheng 2002)

It is not necessarily that Singaporean dance was unable to withstand the appeal of Western European dance genres. Rather it is possible that Singaporean dancers used the methodologies of the West to build an efficient and advanced professional dance industry so as to co-exist in global contexts. These imports are viewed less as Western culture than 'World Heritage' due

to the global status of the art form and accessibility of globalisation. However, it is ironic that the majority of Singapore's population are more aware of ballet than of the traditional dance scene and more attention is given to the ballet company than to groups which sustain the traditional dance heritages (Cheng 2002). In turn, it may be perceived that Western high art dance practices are considered to have greater worth than the traditional/folk dance practices of Singapore due to their global standing.

Whilst it is fair to presume that Singapore has no accurate singular folk identity, it is also reasonable to assume that a Singaporean folk identity exists, consisting of multiple cross cultural traditions. The issue with Singapore's diverse cultural dance scene is it that these traditional genres did not originally evolve in Singapore. In turn, this becomes a matter of authenticity. As cultural forms move across borders, they inevitably merge and are reinvented and revitalised to suit the needs of local communities (Crosby 2007 pg 28). In the case of Singapore's traditional dance identity, it is perceived that CIMO (Chinese, Indian, Malaysian and Other) (Cheng 2002) is a fused cultural identity. Despite the fact that many Singaporean dance practitioners have attempted to reject Western methods, many have never stopped collaborating with Western artists, adapting and reappropriating Western techniques and combining Eastern elements to communicate a modern Singaporean experience.

... in our survey of all the dances and dance aesthetics, we have come to realize that Singaporeans are essentially all cultural hybrids, having an Asian heritage and continuously exposed to foreign/Western influences. The clash between traditional Asian culture and modern Western influences is precisely what makes up the familiar fabric of Singapore society. (Cheng 2002)

Globally Intercultural

Globalisation is the modern mechanism or tool of spreading perceptions, ideologies, products and cultures through a less physically aggressive method of media, communication, economics, technology and politics. Ultimately, when there is globalisation, the culture that has the greater resources will prevail in enforcing their perceptions and messages across the globe.

Globalisation brings cultures the opportunity to share, learn, incorporate and influence each other with multiple ideologies. Dance, its culture, and multiple sub-industries are inevitably brought into the flux of exposure and change.

Through mediums such as YouTube, commercials, television, movies, music video clips, the increased ease in communication, travel and migration across continents, growth of written and visual resources and the wealth of festivals and touring has allowed the dance community to develop into an interconnected web. Dancers are globally aware of their peers and cultures on the other side of the world. However, one can begin to question whether or not such an increase in communication and awareness has indeed flattened out the evaluation of dance genres. Does too much exchange lead dance into a concoction of styles due to the immense cultural borrowing, making diversity another dot point on every dancer's resume? However, returning to the point, when this cultural borrowing takes place, does cultural hierarchy still exist and if so, why? Perceptions of racial superiority are major factors in the evolution of the global socio-politics and global culture and its industries, of which dance is a part.

Dance is a vital part of culture and as identities change world-wide, dance does as well. The dance profession/industry reforms and becomes an amalgam of styles and cross-cultural references and, at the same time, maintains traces of a cultural imprint derived in ex-colonised locations from ideas of Western perspectives. Originally, Western European perceptions and values were enforced through political and geographical expansionary powers. With globalisation, new less 'physically aggressive' methodologies of marketing, media, entertainment, and consumerism have transformed the way in which

the West advertises and infiltrates its perceptions and ideologies. In many ways, Western European imperialism has been translated into globalisation, which illuminates the values of the West and USA as ‘the Best’ (the American Dream) and “Must Haves”.

The standardised notion of the quality of life and the patterns of behaviour set forth by the colonizers, were imitated and followed or rejected and discarded in various degrees by different countries at different times. But the western world more or less successfully established “standards” of human existence, which in turn, led to cultural confusion in the case of many of the colonies. Moreover, the colonies, felt they needed to transcend the boundaries set by the colonisers, in order to reach the other (and highly desirable) and “standardized” side of the polar spectrum. (International World History Project 2010)

This need to “transcend the boundaries” is evident in the constant cultural evolution instigated by globalisation. All nations are seemingly encouraging one another through an increased ease in cultural exchange. It is easy to see the political, economic, social and cultural domination by Western powers which has impacted upon and shaped the rest of the world. According to Urmimala Munsî, the change has brought about a shift from the philosophical to the materialistic, from the qualitative to the quantitative, from the non-linear, temporal world to the world governed by technology. It is now a question of whether the arts and dance can withstand the bombardment and requirement for constant adaptation. According to Munsî, globalisation is demanding minority or smaller cultures to cope with the divide between the ‘primitive’ and the ‘modern’, the ‘uneducated’ and the ‘educated’, the ‘folk’ and the ‘classical’, the ‘classical’ and the ‘minority’, the ‘uncivilised’ and the ‘civilised’ (Urmimala Sarkar Munsî pg. 60). Such divergence continues due to perceptions of the West systematically directing globalisation.

Folk dance in globalised world

It is the nature of dance to continually evolve and make 'new' and to pursue through artistic growth and maintenance of culture as well as relevance to the changing environment. The increase in kinaesthetic awareness through greater anatomical knowledge and advances in technology found Western European dance art connected with the wider world industries in order to survive and remain relevant as a Western art form. However, where did this desire for evolution evolve from and why is the fascination to continually reinvent new expressive forms seemingly a global requirement? Traditional/folk dance practices are faced with various social elements that instigate transformations or "processing" of cultural characteristics. Ramon P. Santos states that modernisation, entertainment, commoditisation and improvement to be the four elements contributing to the current 'processing' of traditional practices.

- Modernisation: change occurs due to our changing concept of time and the changing needs in terms of space.
- Entertainment: the urban audience and its expectations for new aesthetics born out of the need for entertainment, leisure and the need to escape from the intellectual and physical pressure of everyday life.
- Commoditisation: of dance, as part of a materialistic, market orientated world. Dance according to Santos is one of the important commodities that are sold to the foreign market, in turn, generating interest, in particular, western interest in the "other", the east [and the south---Africa/sthn America].
- Improvement:.. Santos, believes that 'improvements' are made to the perceived outmoded and simple expressions, which are ordinarily done by untrained traditional performers. Changes aim towards "elevating" simplistic traditional practices into more complex and sophisticated art forms, thus replicating the context of hierarchy of standards in classical art. (Santos 1998 cited in Munsi pg.60)

Hip Hop culture is a prime example of Santos's theory of "processing" of traditional practices. The rhythmic, grounded style of Hip Hop and its sub genres such as Krumping, Popping and Break Dancing are modern bi-products of African traditional dance with the original manifestations (in the USA, 1970s) largely influenced by West African music and storytelling (Bouchard 2009). Hip Hop has experienced a strong and complex, politically driven development, which acted as a means for many African American youths to display and communicate their identity and resistance to comply with mainstream white America. Over the duration of history, this cultural manifestation became commoditised (Santos 1998 cited in Mumsi pg.60), however the element of political and personal resistance lingers. African cultural practices have been present in Western European society particularly from the mid 15th century due to the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The adaptive social dances that developed amongst African slaves in America, in many ways became the folk dances of African Americans. Over the centuries, these social dances, such as the calk walk and shuffle, have gone through *modernisation* and *improvement*, becoming forms of *entertainment* surviving through white and black Americans turning these cultural forms into *commodities*, from minstrel shows to MTV. Once again, Western European society can be said to seek difference in the "other" for cultural escapism, similar to western women using belly dance, adapting the traditional practices so as to reflect their own cultural desires and practises.

For the purpose of this paper, it is fair to state that Hip Hop is the modern folk dance culture of African Americans. However, in stating that it is a modern folk practice, it must be noted, that it is an urban form with a strong history of political and racial resistance. A folk practice has grown into a worldwide practice due to: 1. the European African slave trade that has displaced people of African heritage into Western European societies, and 2. globalisation that has turned Hip Hop into a global culture with an African American heritage rather than a folk practice for African Americans.

It seems logical that traditional folk practices become new in order to survive the rapidly changing trends of globalisation set by the Western world. As

these traditional dances merge into the mainstream dance industry is there a risk of their being de-contextualised, shredding them of their cultural and social significance, which originally facilitated their relevance and uniqueness? (International World History Project 2010) Interestingly, it reoccurs that it is Western European perceptions which shape what elements of the foreign cultural dance practice are valuable; what elements of foreign traditions generate the most interest for marketing, imitation, and adaptation. How fine is the line between cultural exchange and cultural poaching? Shows like *So You Think You Can Dance*, which use different cultural dance genres such as Afro-Brazilian and Bollywood, received over 2.1 million viewers in the 2008 Australian series. (Start Dancing 2008) Journalist Valerie Lawson, of the Brisbane Times, wrote in March 2008:

Its very success - the program attracted an audience of 1.5 million on Sunday last week - is compromising dance as a performance art. The audience is led to believe that the most obvious effort, the most athletic of tricks, and the most vulgar of moves, represent dance at its best. (Start Dancing 2008)

Are the genres on such programs simply presenting Westernised or commercialised re-productions that lose the element of cultural sensitivity which made them unique? Whilst these dance styles and cultures have entered the main arena, has it “elevated” them to high art or do they remain vehicles of entertainment? This question is also relevant to genres such as Hip Hop and Break Dancing with their increased popularity and plentiful practitioners: are these forms reaching the institutionalised status of contemporary dance and classical ballet? Or will the assumed complex, highly technical dance genres of Western Europe continue to be perceived as more valuable forms regardless of global expansion?

This is not a bunch of people dancing wild. It is just as valid as your Ballet, as your Waltz, as Tap dancing. Except we didn't have to go to school for this (Krumping), it was already implanted in us from birth. (Quote from film RISE, LaChapelle, 10 November 2005)

Hip Hop culture is a prime example of a lower class dance form which has quickly become the pivot of a wide spread industry now popular in all corners of the globe. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hip Hop and Break Dancing are extensively practiced from Singapore, Japan, and Korea to France, Germany and the UK. It has in fact gone a full circle, with the Hip Hop culture reemerging in African Youth culture since the late 1980s, largely because of globalisation. Whilst the African American Hip Hop music culture led the cultural global expansion, the Hip Hop and Break-dance dancing in the music videos was never far behind.

Rapping in African music and culture is a tradition that was carried to the new world in the 1400s. History has come full circle, and rap music and hip hop culture are now being re-created by African youth all over the continent, who have taken rap's current day manifestations and added a new African twist... Hip hop was more than just another form of music -- the fact that it was also its own subculture and a transmitter of political and social commentary was absorbed by the African youth ...(Clark October 15, 2007)

What does this mean for African contemporary dance? Has globalisation returned a lost folk practice or is Hip Hop just another foreign practice? Globalisation has impinged itself upon the African folk culture, with foreign styles such as Ballet, Salsa, Tango and now Hip Hop, emerging in to the Contemporary African dance scene. These fusions are due to the global accessibility of dance professionals to travel aboard to widen their practices and the widespread reach of globalisation with remote Africa villages receiving MTV on their TV screens. However, it is argued that the new methodology of “contemporary” dance emerging in Africa is not the “Western European” genre of contemporary dance, rather a contemporary take on traditional African dance.

Because this is a new item on the African dance menu, they call it “contemporary African dance”. Some critics are not comfortable with the label because, they argue, it could blur the fact that traditional African dance is still evolving; introducing new ingredients and producing what is contemporary African dance. (Micheni 2010)

This is to say that African traditional dance is like many other cultural folk practices still evolving alongside an evolving society. No traditional folk dance can remain the same and, at the same time, be authentic or be a reflection of that culture in its present context. African American dance is not excluded from this evolutionary momentum and it appears that, due to its economic viability and increased global popularity, it is increasingly finding its place within the professional Western European dance scene. It has done so arguably since Jazz dance came to Europe in the 1920s and through African American choreographers like Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey in the 1950s. Moreover, contemporary dance artists are beginning to explore and incorporate methodologies from the Hip Hop dance genre into their works.

Australian Choreographer Antony Hamilton, based in Melbourne, trained in Sydney, Perth and New York, has danced with notable Australian and international companies such as Australian Dance Theatre, Lucy Guerin Inc. and created numerous works receiving wide acclaim and popularity. Hamilton trained in classical ballet and contemporary, however, there is an evident expression and use of Hip Hop culture in his works and movement vocabulary. Hamilton’s 2010 commission on LINK Dance Company (WAAPA), *Points in Time*, featured twelve dancers who presented an altered reality. There is a distinct reference to popping, a Hip Hop technique of quickly contracting and relaxing muscles to cause a jerk in the dancer's body. This is done continuously to the rhythm of a song in combination with various movements and poses. The LINK dancers listened to Hip Hop music through ear phones, whilst the audience heard an ambient soundscape presenting the illusion of a unison robotic, mechanical movement quality emerging mysteriously out of nowhere. This example of cultural fusion is evidence of

how modern African American folk dance has progressed and is receiving artistic creditability within the Western European dance industry. Like any other traditional folk practice, African American folk dance has offered 'new' creative stimulus and Hip Hop appears to have an emerging future, moving from once a "lower-value" "social dance form" to an acceptable artistic dance practice. or is it also being Europeanised and accepted into the hierarchy?

These are questions one must continue to consider, as it would be presumptuous to make a conclusive prediction of the outcomes of globalisation on folk dance and the wider dance community; rather I think it is more acceptable to provide observations and present questions and perceptions on the matter.

The study aims to explore whether there is a value which Western European dance practitioners place on traditional forms of dance and if the other (the traditional practitioner) reciprocates and whether this relationship is changing?

Concluding Summary

Returning to the centre of this research, it is relevant to summarise the areas addressed, concerning Western European perspectives towards folk/traditional dance forms. There are obviously, numerous factors which have not been raised that have had considerable impact on the wider discussion of Western European perspectives, however, reference to the areas noted will be dealt with herein.

Perceptions can be extremely volatile, they will vary from individual to individual and will build frames through which individuals perceive the surrounding environment. This investigation into Western European perspectives towards folk and traditional dance practices has noted how these Western European perspectives tend to dominate values in a particular location (locally) and, at times, in the wider dance community (globally). However, it is important to observe that the information and literature surrounding the issue have been derived from European sources which, in

itself, may skew perceptions in favour of Western European values. As perspectives are based on human behavior and interpretations of their environment, conflicts will arise due to individual perceptions of what is right and wrong. The dance community is derived from such human behaviour and is not exempt from discrepancies in artistic and world perspectives.

An overview of the causes for Western European perceptions of folk and traditional dance practices will clarify the discussion further. Commencing with the rise of science within Western European civilization, crystallised by Darwin and his theory of evolution from which the notion of survival of the fittest was extracted, Western society took on a so-called Darwinian stance which postulated civilised European superiority at the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder, exploring speculations of social evolution which placed folk dance in imagined beginnings in 'lower class' folk forms to its classification today as 'modern social dance'. This perspective which originated in Western Europe by Western Europeans as a means of enforcing authority and identity encompassed all forms of folk, including Western peasantry dances. It also demonstrates how perspectives associated with terminologies, like folk, impacts upon the way one art form is valued over the next.

Alongside Western sciences, the imperialistic endeavours of Europe (territorial expansion, trade, power) and the spread of civilisation (as understood by the Europeans) paralleled and justified the promotion of European arts as more refined than the arts of "other" cultures. The impact of Western European Imperialism caused a multitude of issues that were felt locally by the colonised, the most relevant for this discussion being the imprint of inferiority left on the colonised perspective. European powers removed their physical presence from their former colonies when these states gained independence, leaving complex issues, particularly that of cultural identity, for politically liberated populations to confront. The identity of past masters, especially in terms of aesthetic ideals, was not easy to erase. Along with the struggle for independence, the colonised nations faced a struggle to recapture their authentic traditional forms of culture.

Orientalism, however, complicated Western imperial views towards traditional and folk practices mainly due to Western European desires for the new and the exotic. Orientalism is a Western invention which was viewed in many ways as a means of escapism for artists, in particular, from exhausted classical Western European principles. Orientalism promoted the foreign folk practises of the supposed inferior East contradicting the Western imperial perspective. The Middle Eastern folk practise of Belly Dancing is a prime example of how Western culture has adopted the exotic traditional practices of the 'other'. It is also a prime example of the Westernisation of a non-Western tradition, wherein Belly Dancing in the West says more about the needs and desires of Westerners than about Middle Eastern culture and of the dance form's origins (Jai-Morincome 2005 pg.15). Orientalism has brought new cultural practices to the West, however, it must be noted, that it has also brought misrepresentations and a less authentic version of the traditional form in the process of cultural exchange. Ultimately such appropriation affected the way the practice is perceived, by both those who have appropriated and those who originated the form.

This discussion leads to the issue of the authenticity of folk/traditional practises and how multicultural societies struggle with the concept of an authentic national identity. Singapore is clear example of such challenges to diversity, making singular cultural identity a constant pursuit in an environment of continuous cultural exchange. In the case of Singapore's traditional dance identity, it is perceived that CIMO (Chinese, Indian, Malaysian and Other) (Cheng 2002) is a fused cultural identity. Despite Singaporean dance practitioners who attempt to reject Western methods, many others have continued to collaborate with Western artists, adapting and reappropriating Western techniques in combination with Eastern elements to communicate a Singaporean experience. It can be suggested that the authenticity of cultural practises (in the context of cultural exchange) are moulded and adapted alongside an ever changing society, enabling modern representation and perceptions of the peoples of multicultural nations, such as Singapore, to be communicated locally and globally.

Finally, driven by the forces of globalisation, the dance industry continues to reform and become an amalgam of styles and cross-cultural references through access brought by technologies of communication. Folk practises have been brought into the Western commercial world through modernisation and improvement, becoming forms of entertainment turning cultural traditions into commodities, allowing globalisation, a Western enterprise with Western perceptions towards cultural traditional practices, to shape the dance industry. Hip Hop is a clear example of such a transition to commodity status wherein, interestingly, the genre emerged from a cultural practice that has unfolded within Western European society. In many ways, Hip Hop has been diffused worldwide by the forces of globalisation (potentially, American globalisation), moving from its manifestation as a form of social protest to its current status as a profitable sub-culture. However, it has arguably been the route from protest to worldwide commodity in the process of returning the genre full circle to its African heritage. Perceptions towards African American dance has indeed changed over the ages and globalisation has assisted the process of deconstructing the cultural hierarchy that pervades and shapes the arts through the increased ease of communication about cultural practices and experiences.

Such cultural sharing and exchange appears harmonious, but does a balance of aesthetic power exist or are current perceptions merely seen to be flattened by the plurality of cultural identities? Western European perceptions do pervade and shape the field of dance, as all cultural perceptions do at some stage. However, it can be suggested that Western perceptions are now seen less through imperial frames than through a greater two-way globalised communication, where the West, at times, has a stronger influence. It is not my goal to attempt to make any final decisions within this paper. Mainly, it is my objective to shed light on issues concerning Western European perceptions by noting the complexity involved due to dance's implications in wider cultural perceptions or perspectives. Finally, I'd like to state that to hold a perspective is a unique attribute of being human, as it allows for expressions of individuality and, combined with the art form of dance, it enables individuals to share and see multiple views of the world around us.

Post Script: Crossing Borders, Crossing Identities

With every day, the world community continues to be an ever growing globalised organism, there being potentially no limitation to the range and degree of cultural exchange that occurs. As an afterthought, it is interesting to acknowledge the cross cultural identities who now exert their influence throughout society as a result of globalisation and, in particular, how those identities work within the dance community. These artists have adapted, fused or maintained traditions and folk practices in a new context. Exchanges seem to be happening differently in a context where hybridity is a given and where diversity of choice often constructs rather than discovers identities.

UK choreographer and dancer Akram Khan works in a world where cross cultural practises is becoming commonplace. Born in London into a family of Bangladeshi origin, he began dancing at seven and studied classical Indian Kathak dance. Khan first presented his works in the 1990s and these performances were strongly tied to classical Kathak alongside his development of modern work. In 2000, Khan launched the Akram Khan Dance Company, providing this choreographer with a 'platform for innovation and a diverse range of work through collaboration with artists from other disciplines' (Akran Khan Dance Company 2010). Khan represents a new identity of an Indian Englishman, which arguably enables him to explore identity through his intercultural practices where the context is not the West versus 'the other' but an integration of that opposition.

This process of a personal integration differs from one wherein the choreographer constructs a hybrid identity with cultures foreign to his/herself. Moroccan Flemish dancer and choreographer, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, fuses his Moroccan Flemish cultural practices and contemporary dance training with foreign styles such as flamenco, *Dunas* (2010), and Chinese Kung-Fu in *Sutra* (2009) both of which are far removed from his own cultural experience and practices. This multitude of cultures and genres fused into a hybrid dance form creates a constructed identity by an intercultural choreographer. This cross cultural borrowing of folk and professional dance practices (which often

occurs through tools of technology) is at times not considered appropriation, but remains many artists' preferred choice of practice (Stock 2005 pg 448). Stock continues to question where this leaves artists ethically and what belongs to whom in a de-contextualised world art environment? (Stock 2005 pg 448) Postmodernism introduced the art community to appropriation and globalisation validated the process. Appropriation within the dance community may be viewed as a reflection of global perceptions towards traditional practices. Once appropriation was conducted like a one way traffic with the West (first world) appropriating from the East (third world). According to Stock, globalisation has provided the context for a two way traffic where exchanges provide a tissue of connectivity of practices through a networked environment (Stock 2005 pg 448). Globalisation should be demonised with discretion and acknowledged for its ability to increase the positive effects of cross cultural identities and practices. Thus, it is the artist's responsibility to be aware of such complexity and choose to maintain or modify traditional folk identity according to ethical considerations of the benefits that might outweigh any tension or negative effects on the cultures involved.

Modernization is not all about progress. It is also about tension and even discontent. It has profound effects on the notion of selfhood, as individuals deal with social changes and new cultural forces while maintaining a sense of balance with the past. Different communities and individuals react differently to these situations. How each of these traditional dance forms will evolve eventually remains to be seen. (Cheng 2002)

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