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Aisha Ali and the Art of Presenting Dance on Film: An Ethnochoreological Approach

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Culture and Performance

by

Jaynie Aydin

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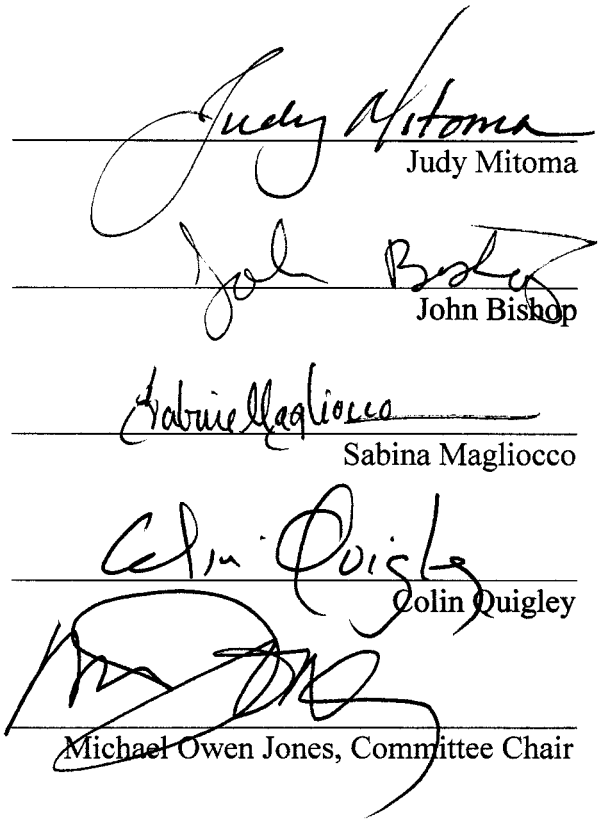

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For Houdini and Punalu'u

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Aisha Ali and the Art of Presenting Dance on Film:
An Ethnochoreological Approach

by

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This dissertation defines how film is instrumental in the perpetuation of customary kinesthetic knowledge and considers the people who disseminate that particular knowledge. Issues such as authenticity, filmmaking aesthetics, and the purposes of film (i.e., whether or not it can effectively convey and teach dance) are addressed in the context of generating culture and performance. The investigation of these issues illuminates the collaborative ethnographic dance experience as seen on film. In order to assess the meaning and potential of the ethnographic or documentary dance film, I argue it is necessary to understand the perspectives of the individual who recorded and produced it. Only after an in-depth investigation of the researcher's relationship to the documented material can we begin to understand how movement becomes inscribed in film and consequently incorporated by future generations of dancers. Recent innovations in recording equipment, specifically digital video technology, have enabled researchers to disseminate folk dance and music to widespread and diverse populations,

thereby providing alternatives to the commercially mediated modes of communication and encroaching globalization. Digital technology offers vast potential resources for the preservation, perpetuation, and dissemination of performative folk traditions. American dance ethnologist Aisha Ali exemplifies the advantages and limits of using contemporary digital technology for the dissemination of folk dance and music traditions. Ali embarked on series of extended field trips to the Middle East between the years of 1971 to 1997, where she recorded and filmed the lived music and dance traditions among the people of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. Ali subsequently released a series of documentary audio and video recordings that highlighted the personal interactions she shared with musician and dance performers in both urban and rural settings. Not only do her documentaries include personal stories and experiences, but also Ali records and ensures the preservation of the movement performances of others. This dissertation documents Middle Eastern culture from within the boundaries of lived experience while providing a framework to analyze and understand the manner of contemporary documentary fieldwork, which is applicable to the larger scholarly body of media ecology, folklore, and dance ethnology.

Chapter 1
Aisha Ali and the Art of Presenting Dance on Film: An Ethnochoreological Approach

Dance ethnologists and ethnochoreologists have asserted that in order to truly understand the meaning of dance it cannot be separated and studied apart from the moving body of the performer (Buckland 2001; Giurchescu 2000; Grau 2001, 2005). Unlike other expressive forms such as material art or architecture, dance represents an embodied tradition caught in a physical act between performer and audience. It is the physical act of dancing that communicates symbolic thoughts, ideas and beliefs, providing " a way of discovering something about oneself and the human condition, especially about the world of feelings" (Blacking 1978: 3). Dance as an embodied tradition suggests that the performer is inseparable from the final product.
"O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (Yeats 1994: 184).

The contemporary use of film and video in recording dance and the events at which dances are performed has made it possible to visually represent, interpret, and perpetuate dance experiences outside of the moment of performance (Johnson and Snyder 1999). Dance on film is an end product that exists beyond the space and time of its original performance separate and apart from the performer. Because the nature of film detaches the dancing body from the lived experience of dance, questions regarding the original meaning and value of performance and how these ideas have been visually represented, interpreted, and perpetuated are a current concern in dance research (Bakka 2002; Gardner 1977; Giurchescu 2000; Mitoma 2002).

In addition to matters relating to the context of filmed performance, dance researchers are confronted with issues surrounding the perception of documentary films (hereafter the terms film and video are used interchangeably, except as otherwise noted). Specifically, many visual recordings of dance, made in a research context, fall into the category of documentary or ethnographic film. Within these two filmic genres, individuals, as the documented performers, are often presented as living practitioners of dance and are ostensibly given the chance to self-represent their customs and traditions to a wider audience through the film medium. Dance performances in this category are represented as authentic and truthful depictions of human movement, behavior, and expression. But like all filmed productions, documentaries are situated on a continuum of reality generating a mediated version of truth (Bishop 2002). How this "reality -based film" (Bishop 2002: 24) is constructed and who is able to create it have been intriguing topics discussed in contemporary folkloristics, ethnochoreology, and media ecology (Asch, Marshall, and Spier 1973; Bishop and Bishop 2004; Bishop and Prins 2003; Buckland 2001; Carpenter 1972; Heider 1976; Magliocco 2004; Pink 2001; Sherman 1998; Worth 1981. For more discussion about ethnographic, documentary, and "reality-based film" see John Bishop's 2002 article "The Camera as Choreographer in Documentary and Ethnographic Film" published in Judy Mitoma's *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*).

In order to understand the meaning of the documentary dance film, I assert that it is necessary to understand the perspectives of the individual who recorded and produced it. Only after an in-depth investigation of the researcher's relationship to the documented

material can we begin to understand how movement becomes inscribed in film and consequently re-incorporated by future generations of dancers. Questions such as, " Who is the researcher in relation to those she is depicting and how does she represent traditional dance on film?" and, "Can the films the researcher produces replicate and perpetuate the dance movements learned during extensive time in the field?" are vital to establishing the role of the filmmaker in dance films. By investigating the answers to these questions we can demonstrate how individual filmmakers present research, document and disseminate traditional dance data, and use film in examining the panhuman experience of dance.

Dance ethnologist and filmmaker Aisha Ali has investigated, recorded, and performed Arabic folklore for the past forty years. An accomplished dancer and artist, Ali is an internationally recognized authority on the dances of Egypt and North Africa, the areas most often associated with belly dance. She has published numerous articles on Arabic folklore and continues to lecture, teach, and conduct workshops throughout the worldwide belly dancing community. Ali began her career in the early 1960's as a professional belly dancer in Los Angeles, California, and is interested in "the role of dance in human societies" (interview May 29, 2006), what Getrude Kurath refers to as "dance ethnology" (Kurath 1960: 233). The intensity of her interest led her to embark on a series of extended field trips to the Middle East between the years of 1971 and 1997, where she recorded and filmed the music and dance as experienced by the people of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Under her production company label, Associate Research for Arabic Folklore, or ARAF, Ali released a series of audio and video recordings that highlight the performance interactions she shared with musicians and dancers in both urban and rural settings. These recordings are categorized within the documentary genre by scholars and practitioners of Arabic folklore and are generally recognized for their rigorous methodology and attention to indigenous aesthetics. In addition to recorded ethnographic materials, Ali self-produced and released a series of instructional videos in which she demonstrates the movements she learned in the field, to aid in further disseminating the traditional knowledge observed firsthand. Video production is now her highest priority in terms of forthcoming projects, since much of the footage she filmed has yet to be archived and edited.

As early as 1970, Aisha Ali learned the processes and techniques associated with media production and refined her skills to fit the aesthetic values and judgments she learned from her subjects. Although she was inexperienced with media recording and production equipment, Ali engaged with technology allowing her to create audio-visual dance narratives that included her personal stories at the same time portraying the movements of others. However, rapid technological advances in media production within the last decade have created an obstacle for Ali and the dissemination of her materials. Rather than compromise her artistic sensibilities by putting creative decisions in the hands of another editor, Ali insists upon overseeing each production. In Ali's case, the conflicts that arise from technological advances illustrate the changing nature of

contemporary ethnographic filmmaking as she is torn between her dedication to her craft and the need to release the materials.

Dance scholars have already investigated and addressed the different facets of what Shannon Arvizu describes as "the international oriental dance scene" (Arvizu 2005: 167). Matters relating to topics such as gender, economics, globalization, exoticism, Hollywood-ization, and the situational contexts of its performance have been discussed and continue to inform the broad discipline and practice of belly dance. While these current issues within the milieu of belly dance bear examination, they are not central to how Ali defines herself and her work, and will therefore not be emphasized within the scope of this study. Rather, this project involves original research that explores how film has become instrumental in the perpetuation of culture knowledge around the world.

My dissertation investigates how Aisha Ali uses film simultaneously as a teacher and researcher. I will confront issues raised by her experiences such as authenticity, filmmaking aesthetics, and the purposes of film, in particular whether or not it can effectively convey and teach dance. By investigating these issues I hope to shed light on the collaborative ethnographic dance experience as seen on film, as well as how film itself affects the creative process. This project delineates how in one case the documentation of dance is transformed and affected by film. My study will be relevant to folklore and dance researchers and media ecologists who seek to take the art of documentary filmmaking into the future, as it will explore the boundaries between the subject and the filmmaker.

Literature Review

Notions of the belly dance as a feminine art form have historically pervaded popular representations in literature and film. Since the late nineteenth century, *Danse Du Ventre*, as it was termed by French Legionnaires stationed in North Africa, aroused the curiosity and excitement of those living within the constructs of Western Society (Van Nieuwkerk 1995). Western European colonizers adapted the image of the belly dancing girl as symbol of the exotic, sensual, and foreign aspects of the newly exploited geography of Middle Eastern culture. The display of the female body primed and staged for the pleasure and enjoyment of the viewer quickly defined the popular perception of the dance as one of feminine sexuality. Although these notions are historically situated within a Western cultural paradigm, concepts related to what is feminine continue to inform the practice of individual dancers in the Middle East and further abroad. Therefore it is not surprising that themes of gender representation and construction are frequently a focal point in the academic investigation of belly dance (Al-Rawi 2001; Buck 1991; Dox 1996; Franken 2000; Osweiler 1999, 2000; Shay and Sellers-Young 2005; Swan 2004; Van Niuewkerk 1995; Wood 1979, 1980). Although these issues are not considered crucial in my discussion of the boundaries between filmmaker and subject, it is nevertheless important to review these contributions to the belly dancing literature.

Professional dancer and scholar Laura Osweiler (stage name Amara) writes extensively on gender issues in relation to the subject of belly dance in the American

setting. She contends that dancers "negotiate and interact with the American stereotype" of the belly dance as being hyper-feminine and subsequently associated with women of "loose virtue" (Osweiler 1999: 1). Because the sexualized feminine body has classically been linked with the private and female domain, public performance of the dance can be seen as a form of subversive empowerment for many who perform it for their own pleasure as well as the pleasure of others (Buck 1991; Dox 1997). Yet it has also been argued that the freedom to express sexuality and femininity in the form of belly dancing in fact reinforces the patriarchal societal structures that are confronted through performance (Osweiler 2000). Regardless of the ultimate social repercussions of gendered expression, the dance continues to be practiced by women who assert that belly dancing delivers them from the constraints of a male dominated society (Hobin 2003; Gioseffi 1980).

Other scholars have wrestled with issues surrounding belly dance, feminine stereotypes, and identity negotiations in the Middle Eastern context. Dancer and Cairene scholar Shannon Arvisu, for example, addresses how professional Egyptian performers imitate and perpetuate Western notions of belly dance, while Karin Van Niuewkerk discusses how female professional entertainers in Egypt have economically profited from the portrayal of this image (Arvisu 2005, Van Niuewkerk 1995). Professional dancer Violet Swan (stage name Tamra-Henna), whose personal experience in the Middle Eastern club and party circuit informs her interpretations, questions the nature of the belly dancer as a symbolic feminine object, gazed upon by members of a passive audience (Swan 2004). She asserts that there is much more to the dance than the pleasure of the

"consuming" viewer that imbues the dance performance with meaning; it is the dancer's own emotional perception that partially defines the dance experience. Perhaps artist and choreographer Leona Wood conceived both the feminine and sexual aspects of the belly dance best in her seminal article *Danse Du Ventre: A Fresh Appraisal II,* in which she writes,

> Whether voluptuous dances are lascivious or not depends less on anything inherent in the dances themselves than on the individual dancer and the tastes of the audience for whom they are performed. It would be as much a mistake to underrate the sexual attraction of the dancer as it would be to overrate the sexual element in the dance. In general it is probably safe to say that insofar as a hired entertainer is wanting in skill or beauty, there would be a temptation to offer lewdness as a substitute means of holding an audience. It must be remembered, however, that when performed by professional entertainers, these dances are intentionally seductive in character (Wood 1980: 11).

Wood concludes the two-part article stating,

> Several years ago, when the President of Egypt presented Egyptian dancing to entertain an American head of state, it became apparent that there was no further need to make excuses for this dance. The pretense that it is an ancient fecundity ritual, physical therapy, or anything else, is unnecessary—its raison d'être is the pleasure of the dance (Wood 1980: 20).

A variety of accounts about the Middle Eastern dance and performance experience exist within the body of documentary literature. Aisha Ali has provided many rich descriptions of the various situations and contexts of Egyptian, Syrian, and Lebanese dance performances in her seven-article series, "Meetings in the Middle East" published in *Arabesque* magazine (Ali 1979-1981). Ali also detailed accounts of her experiences with dancers in Tunisia while she performed as a soloist for the Municipal Theater in Sfax (Ali 1979b, 2000, 2001, 2003). Dance scholar and practitioner Mardi Rollow has written about her interaction with Tunisian dancers, documenting rural celebrations and

festivities (Rollow 1979). Like Ali, Rollow refers extensively to the meanings associated with movement practice. Anthropologist Susan Slyomovics focuses on ethnography of performance by addressing the issues surrounding narrative expression in her book *The Merchant of Art: An Egyptian Hilali Oral Epic Poet in Performance*. Lila Abu-Lughod's book *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* provides an ethnographic account of expressive culture among the Awlad Ali who live in the borderlands between Egypt and Libya. Although Slyomovics and Abu-Lughod do not specifically deal with the topic of belly dance, they do explore how the performance of lyrical poetry serves as an outlet for personal creativity in the rural and urban societies (Abu-Lughod 2000; Slyomovics 1987).

Clearly, *Raqs Sharqi,* the Arabic term for belly dance, has gained status as a global phenomenon, with performers and supporting vendors located in all corners of the world. While the form and features of belly dance remain to some degree consistent throughout time and space, there remains tremendous variety among styles and representations of the dance both in the past as well as the present. Modernity--including the increased interaction among global, national, and local cultures--and, as I will discuss in greater detail, the use of film and video in the documentation of dance contribute to the widely varied dance vocabulary that is presently understood as belly dance. However, variation is not a new or modern feature of the dance. Oriental dance, a synonymic term historically and contemporaneously used to describe the rural and urban dances of "The East" (Buonaventura 1989; Said 1978; Wood 19879, 1980), has always been a richly diverse and dynamic art form. Shannon Arvizu explains:

> Oriental dance has, throughout the centuries, lent itself quite easily to processes of cultural hybridization in terms of movement and dress, incorporating elements of Turkish, Persian, Indian, and Greek dance into its repertoire as performers of these traditions traveled throughout the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region. Therefore, the evolution of Oriental dance in the twentieth century follows a progression that existed long before the modern era (Arvizu 2005: 168).

The process of change in the representations and meanings of belly dance has been documented and discussed by interdisciplinary scholars in both global and local contexts (Ali 1997; Al-Rawi 2001; Arvizu 2005; Buck 1991; Forner 1993; Kent and Franken 2000; Van Niuewkerk 1995; Wood 1980a, 1980b). Regardless of the situational setting, Western influences such as staged cultural exhibits and Hollywood productions are often cited as a major agent of stylistic change in the performance and representation of cabaret belly dance. For example, in her book, *Looking for Little Egypt*, Donna Carlton describes the development of the World's Exposition Fairs and how these events affected the creative output of musicians and dancers from North Africa and the Middle East. (Carlton 1995).

In *Serpent of the Nile*, Wendy Buonaventura explores how the West has influenced the presentation and performance styles of Middle Eastern dancers and notes that stylistic influence is not unidirectional (Buonaventura 1989). The cabaret belly dance, a formally refined dance for a consumer audience, in fact, developed in response to a growing global network and is not proved to be contrary to the belief of many, an ancient Middle Eastern art form. Buonaventura illustrates in great detail how performers born outside of the Middle East have frequently interpreted the belly dance and popularized the art form both on stage and in print. Leona Wood elaborates,

> Oriental stereotypes in the twentieth century also derive from several other relatively recent sources: the interpretation of Oriental dances created by Ruth St. Denis and the dancers choreographed for innumerable productions of "Kismet" and similarly conceived theatricals. But it was the sumptuous costumes and settings designed by Leon Bakst for the Diaghilef Company's ballet, "Scheherazade, " that helped create the special stereotype which is perpetuated not only in revivals of this production, but which, in a less elevated style, has been embalmed in the often preposterous incongruities for which cinematic ventures inspired by biblical or oriental themes are notorious (Wood 1979: 11).

Middle Eastern dance, like a variety of other regional dances, has been staged, re-represented and performed by non-natives of the movement traditions. Scholars often refer to the phenomenon of re-establishing traditional performance as revival or revitalization because it is innovated by people in new situations and contexts (Magliocco 2004). More importantly, with the passage of time the meaning of tradition changes and customary behaviors "die out" only to be "revived" again as symbols and symbolic actions take on new meanings in different places throughout time (Georges and Jones 1995). At the turn of the nineteenth century, for example, Cecil Sharp reinvigorated past folk dances when he co-established the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Sharp, with other members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, began performing English folk traditions, which they believed were in danger of becoming moribund. By consistently performing traditional dances, Sharp and his collaborators felt that they could preserve and promote true English tradition (Karpeles 1967).

When presented as a "lived tradition" the revived dances, like other artistic expressions, can serve to validate a specific cause, agenda, or creative endeavor (Bendix 1997; Georges and Jones 1995; Hogsbawn and Ranger 1987). Folklorist Sabina Magliocco suggests using the alternate terms "reclamation" and "revitalization" to better

describe specific folk movements that are based on previous models (Magliocco 2004). Often the customs on which "revivals" are based continue in the place of origin, never ceasing to exist. Hence reclamation and revitalization are more appropriate descriptions than the term revival because temporal or spatial consistency does not always rupture.

In the late 1950's North America's ethnic revival movement began (Georges and Jones 1995). Folk dance ensembles and companies staged traditional dance performances that originated in other countries. Roberta Evanchuk explained, "To be considered culturally literate, many Americans felt the need to learn about the histories and cultures of American nationality groups, and to sample their folklore as well" (Evanchuk 1987: 115). Notable among the "International Folk Dance" revival performance circuit was the AMAN folk ensemble established in 1963 and based in Los Angeles, California. Ali was affiliated with the AMAN folk ensemble from her earliest days as a professional dancer. Members of AMAN performed a variety of folk repertoires including dances from Central Asia, North America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. While most members of the AMAN ensemble performed dances that they did not directly inherit, Ali had the chance to represent her own ethnic background as a second generation Egyptian-American.

An essential component of larger folk revival movements, that of outsiders performing the dance traditions of other cultures, has been discussed in terms of nationalism, identity discourse, and authenticity (Bakka 2002; Buck 1991; Buckland 2001,2003; Dunin 1988; Evanchuk 1987; Foley 2001; Magliocco 2004; Quigley 1998, 2002, 2004; Shay 2002). Relevant to my dissertation, however, is a review of works

within dance ethnology and folkloristics that specifically deal with issues and concerns surrounding the role film has played in reviving, revitalizing, or perpetuating movement traditions. Egil Bakka (2002), for example, has described how film was used in the conscious cultivation of the Norwegian folk dance *Springar*. In Norway, he writes, dances are not conceived of as revivals, rather they are explained in terms of popular longevity or conscious cultivation. By using film to learn and teach *Springar* dances to generations outside of local Norwegian contexts, new standards of evaluating authenticity were created by tradition bearers. The method of dance transmission, that is the situation and manner in which the dance is learned, either from face-to-face interaction or from film, became a standard for judging and maintaining control over the representation of traditional dance.

Theresa Buckland discusses the use of film to record, learn, and teach dance among the Britannia Coconut dancers, a group of English Country folk performers from Bacup, Rossendale, Lancashire (Buckland 2001). She also discusses how the presence of the camera affects a performance, asserting that the filming researcher has the potential to affect the outcome of performances generated within the dancing community. In her case, a particular garland dance not normally performed for the spectating public was performed because she had a camera to record them. Jean Rouch and Robert Gardner speak about the topic of the visual ethnographer's effect on the subject in the DVD series "The Screening Room" (Gardner 1980). Rouch elaborates on how his performing subjects in West Africa react to his recording. In a way similar to Buckland and Rouch's affect on their subjects, Aisha Ali instigated numerous performances that were arranged

for her to record on film. The performers whom she documented understood her personal interest in their traditional dances and shared the desire to preserve their performances on film.

Knowing that their performance will be interpreted by film viewing outsiders, the performing community members often express apprehension. However sharing footage with the subjects appears to lessen their anxieties. In Buckland's instance, the Britannia community performers appropriated research footage and modeled movements upon film she captured essentially using her research film as a learning tool. One local dancer explained that he sharpened his personal practice by incorporating movements from the footage that she inscribed at a previous festival (Buckland 2001).

Significant in Buckland's discussion of the film recording process are the terms "incorporation" and "inscription," coined by anthropologist Paul Connerton (Connerton 1989). Incorporation requires a living, moving body to execute an activity while the process of inscription records the activity in a material medium that exists apart from the living body. As Buckland explains, "Dancing may be transmitted in both ways: as an incorporating practice, through kinetic transmission, and as an inscribing practice, through documentary techniques of photography, film, video, notation, and computer images" (Buckland 2001:10).

Incorporation of movements based on documentary film made by dance researchers is not an unusual occurrence. Sabina Magliocco investigated how Alan Lomax and Peter Kennedy's 1953 film *Oss Oss Wee Oss* influenced a network of American Neo-Pagans to re-create the annual community May Day dance ritual that is

performed in Padstow, England (Bishop and Magliocco 2006). Magliocco and her camera crew recorded the Neo-Pagan ritual in Berkeley, California and then asked the coven members to explain how they used Lomax's film as a ritual guide. Through the researcher's documentary footage the American Neo-Pagans are given the opportunity to present their version of the Mayday ritual to a wider audience. Magliocco also addresses the issue of feedback between researchers and their subjects with her Neo-Pagan informants on film (See Bendix 1997 for further discussion of *rucklauf* and the effects caused by the interaction between the researcher and subject). Her informants describe the crucial role that documentary film played in developing their performance of certain ritual ceremonies. Without the film, the Neo-Pagans report that they would not have known how to dance the May Day ritual properly and would not have had a visual model on which to base their reinvented customs.

Like Theresa Buckland's research footage, and Lomax and Kennedy's documentation of English folk customs, Aisha Ali's film productions have influenced belly dancers to study and perform various Middle Eastern dance traditions. Dancers outside of the Middle East who have not traveled to the region and have not been exposed to the diversity of dance styles that exist within the local framework have the option of using Ali's audiovisual productions to learn, enhance, or diversify their dance practice. Additionally, Ali's productions alert the viewer to the possibility of traveling to the Middle East to experience dance firsthand by offering the names and locations of specific individuals and dance events.

Documentary film influences and revitalizes dance practices. My dissertation focuses on the process of translating performance through video documentation, and illustrates the relationship between research, artistry, and audiovisual production. The information provided explains how Ali's film has the potential to shape expressive behavior and affect perceptions of various dances. This research draws upon visual as well as written scholarship; hence, a review of documentary films follows.

Film Review

Scholars and filmmakers have dealt with some of the issues associated with the experience of the researcher as it is represented on film (Asch, Marshall, and Spier 1973; Bishop and Prins 2003; Gardner and Rouch 1980; Marshall 2002-2004; Pink 2001; Sherman 1998). Sharon Sherman identifies various modes of documentary film presentation in her book *Documenting Ourselves.* She discusses documentary film in terms of expository, observational, reflexive, and performative categories and reviews a variety of contemporary films that fall within the folkloristic genre. Of mention, John Cohen, whose 1990 reflexive film *Carnival in Q'eros: Where the Mountains Meet the Jungle*, exemplifies how the researcher's presence can influence essential aspects of life such as the economy within a community. Cohen gifted his subjects with a herd of llamas when he experienced their need for self-subsistence. The process of acquiring llamas was documented and became part of his ethnographic movie. Although Ali's interaction with her subjects affected multiple aspects of their lives including economic,

she did not emphasize her relationship to the people she depicted. Ali takes an observational rather than reflexive or other approach in her work.

Often the researchers are considered a part of the society that they document. Jean Lydall and Kaira Strecker, for instance, have conducted extensive fieldwork among the Hamar people in Ethiopia, a relationship that continues to endure beyond two decades. The mother-daughter research team include footage of themselves in face-to-face interviews with Duka, the key informant in their 2001 film *Duka's Dilemma.* Strecker and Lydall negotiated the place of the video camera in Hamar daily and ritual life. Informants acknowledged the presence of the camera and sought to give the researchers "what they came for," which was good footage to take home. Similarly John and Naomi Bishop include reflexive segments in their digitally re-mastered film *Himalayan Herders*. The Bishops, who conduct on-going research in Melemchi, Nepal, regularly revisit their field site, discovering continuity and change within one village over time. In the updated 2004 DVD edition, the Bishops use an interactive menu selection that includes the filmmakers' reflections on the filming and editing process. Outtakes and portions of film that did not make it into the original film sequence were also included on the menu and discussed by the Bishops and their informants. By including options on the DVD menu, the Bishops allow viewers more complete access to the filmic documentation process.

Most notable for addressing his own role as visual researcher within a community is John Marshall, whose epic six-hour series *A Kalahari Family* intimately involves his personal story with the Ju/'Hoansi in Southern Africa. Marshall spent much of his

childhood with the Bushman and was adopted by the Ju/'Hoansi. During his life, Toma, Marshall's Ju/'Hoansi father, knew that their interaction would impact both of their lives as well as future generations of his people. When Marshall returned to Southern Africa after living in the U.S., he realized the group's desperate political and economic situation. As a special member of Ju/'Hoansi society, he chose to play the role of activist as well as documentary filmmaker. Later, Marshall donated his family inheritance, established a trust in his informant's behalf, and edited a series of films that effectively sway viewers to the situation of the Ju/'Hoansi.

The presence of the researcher and the video technology often affects the manner in which performances are presented and documented. In Ali's case, the performances that the dancing subjects presented for her to record, though improvisational, were choreographed to fit the spatial range and lighting requirements of the camera's lens. Although video and film technology are increasingly evolving to record clear images and sound, there are still limitations that require the photographer to arrange an optimal environment in which to shoot. John Bishop and Harald Prins addressed this issue in their 2003 film *Oh What a Blow that Phantom Gave Me.* They explored the way in which anthropologist and filmmaker Edmund Carpenter's documentary filming affected a Kandangan ritual performance in the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea. In 1970 ceremonial male scarification rituals were choreographed especially for Carpenter's cameras and were thus jointly inscribed by both researcher and subject. Rituals were performed in accordance with the desire of the camera crew to get the best possible footage. Likewise, the village natives wanted to have the best possible ritual version

recorded to show future generations. As a result, the subjects positioned the cameras and timed themselves to correspond with optimal filming conditions. In addition, a female researcher was allowed to attend the exclusively male ceremony because Carpenter explained that she was the best cameraperson available. In Carpenter's instance, performances that were staged for the camera leave viewers with impressions of the authentic presentational experience despite the abnormal circumstances pertaining to the presence of a film crew.

Focusing on the researcher's positioning within a dancing community, Andree Grau explained how the ethnographic product depends on the researcher's ability to situate herself within a particular society (Grau 1999). Grau, who has done extensive research among the Tiwi in Northern Australia gave details about how informants play a part in the process of documentation by directing, and constructing elements of ethnography. Grau writes,

> I would argue that to realize an adequate and truthful ethnographic account, the admittance of the truth of "unreality" is essential; only through an implicit internalized knowledge of local cultural standards can meaningful units of analysis be extracted. Accepting the "unreal" however does not mean adopting the "wooly, supernatural, mystery-monging" which Best argues still exists in the world (Best 1996: 3). We must move away not only from a so-called '"scientism" where empirical facts alone are seen as valuable, but also from "subjectivism," which has plagued the arts and popular imagination for too long (Grau 1999: 172).

Like the ethnographic filmmakers mentioned above, Aisha Ali's long-term relationships with the people she filmed and recorded influenced the manner in which she represented them. In her case, the circumstances and her presence as a visual researcher

must be examined so that we may better understand the art of documentary filmmaking and the dance research process.

In the same spirit I must acknowledge my relationship to Aisha Ali as her long-time student and apprentice. Because of the nature of our professional and personal relationship, I represent Aisha Ali from a uniquely situated perspective, but one that is subjective. As an insider and an outsider, a student, a dancer, ethnographic filmmaker, as well as graduate researcher trained in anthropology and folklore theory and methods, I offer an experiential as well as a critically observational component to this research project. Having had the opportunity to edit alongside of Ali and my extended time as Ali's pupil in both dance and documentary filmmaking contribute to an additional level of intersubjectivity throughout this paper.

Aisha Ali has read what I have written. Her contributions to the presentation of her narratives in this dissertation give this work a "multivocal" character. Folklorist Elaine Lawless discusses "multivocality" and demonstrates how it can be used in an ethnography (Lawless 1992). The subjects featured in Lawless's ethnography, for example, were ultimately encouraged to read and respond to the researcher's representation of their ideas, beliefs, and behaviors. Lawless's key informant, Sister Anna, a Pentecostal clergywoman, did not concur with some of the interpretations Lawless made regarding her beliefs and behaviors, yet Lawless gave her the chance to respond. Ultimately Lawless included both her own and Sister Anna's interpretations in a later ethnography, *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Wholeness Through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography* (Lawless 1993). Because Lawless

presented multiple opinions and explanations of specific phenomena, she was able to more clearly illustrate the dynamics of representation and her ultimate interpretation of the issues at hand.

Lawless's concept of "reciprocal ethnography" provides an ideal framework for the incorporation of a multivocal voice throughout this dissertation. Yet unlike the feedback that Sister Anna gave Lawless, Ali did not challenge my interpretations of her behavior or analysis of her activities I present in this dissertation. Rather Ali carefully reviewed the narrative passages in which I quote her, re-writing and re-organizing them to match what she felt was suitable for publication. As an author, scholar, and figure in the dance community, Ali expressed the desire to maintain continuity with the writing style that she has established in her previous publications and articles. She re-evaluated the original responses she provided me during the course of our oral interviews and e-mails. The presentation of Ali's narratives in addition to my interpretations will expand on Lawless's concept of "multivocality."

Methods And Techniques

In order to investigate the many issues associated with this study I shall employ an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of my data. More specifically, I will use an ethnochoreological approach with emphasis on semiotics as well as an in-depth behavioral folkloristic method to arrive at my conclusions.

Ethnochoreology is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of dance that generally includes applications of concepts and methods from the fields of folklore,

ethnomusicology, and anthropology. Unlike other research perspectives that focus on dance as a product of culture, ethnochoreology emphasizes the role that dance plays in creating culture. In the field of ethnochoreology, informal folk dances are treated as equally important to formal and classical dance forms such as ballet. In essence ethnochoreologists focus on the meaning of dance and why people engage in this behavior. A semiotic ethnochoreological approach positions dance as a symbol with culturally and individually encoded meanings attached to the situation and context of performance. As a symbolic mode of communicating an array of non-verbal messages, dance must be de-coded and understood within a shared system of meaning (Giurcescu 2000).

The documentary filmmaker must have competence in the dance culture order to understand the significant units of meanings within movement and the creative ability to symbolically represent this knowledge to outsiders in the filmic medium. By interpreting dance as a symbol we can better understand how Ali has been able to adapt her aesthetics and values to fit a specific style of indigenous representation in movement. Questions such as "What signs and symbols denote authentic performance?" and "How are dance meanings constructed, conveyed, and received in different contexts through audio and film recording?" will generate evidence about the responsibility of Ali in her role as documentarian and perpetuator of Arabic folklore.

The semiotic ethnochoreological approach assumes that signs and symbols, though arbitrary, are consciously designed and maintained by individuals and the networks in which they dance. So that we may understand the symbolic construction of

dance on film, I shall employ a behavioral approach in folkloristics. This folkloristic method will offer a closer, in-depth understanding of how dance traditions are symbolically constructed and represented by the individual artist. More specifically, a behavioral approach will focus on Aisha Ali and the emotions and experiences that are an intrinsic component of her creative process. Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones, authors of the book *Folkloristics,* assert that folklore can be viewed as "an expressive manifestation of physical, cognitive, and psychological states and processes" (Georges and Jones 1995:269). The behavioral approach in folkloristics centers on subjective information such as who the individual is, what her values are, her past and present experiences, and her motivations for creating, disseminating, and perpetuating folklore. This approach will shed light on questions such as "How is dance symbolically constructed and interpreted?" and " How do symbolic representations of dance relate to concepts of tradition?"

While undertaking this research, I used a variety of data-gathering techniques that include observation, participant observation, and interviews with Aisha Ali as well those influenced by her work. In addition I accessed Aisha Ali's personal archive consisting of published and unpublished biographical and autobiographical literature, studio and field photographs, extensive audio and video field recordings, as well as documentary and commercial footage that features Ali as performer.

Another vital component of the structure of this research is a question guide that addresses issues such as "Why is it important for you to represent dances from the Middle East on film and video?" "What makes dance on camera authentic?" and "What

are the meanings associated with your values and aesthetics?" (See question guide in appendix.) In eliciting the answers to these questions I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of Ali's motivations for her life-long research and her relationship to the traditions and performative customs that she documents.

The goal of my project is to present Ali's views and creative practices so as to correlate her individual experience with the art of ethnographic filmmaking. Not only do I seek to uncover the knowledge that Ali has accumulated but understand how her role is significant in the perpetuation of Arabic Folklore. By exploring Ali's work as a dancer, researcher, and filmmaker we can reveal how the documentation process affects traditional dance data and thus more effectively understand the role of film in preserving and re-presenting the universal experience of dance.

Dissertation Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an opening to my dissertation. I give an overview of Aisha Ali's work within the fields of dance ethnology and visual ethnography and discuss current trends in ethnographic film and dance research. I also outline my methodology and present the techniques I employed in undertaking this research. This information provides background and context that helps initiate an understanding of Ali's role in preserving, perpetuating, and disseminating Arabic folklore. Chapter 2 orients the reader to the Middle Eastern regions where Ali has focused much of her documentary attentions. I present a synopsis of the dances and performers that Ali recorded and I discuss how belly dance was presented in the United States up until the time when Ali first learned

how to perform it. Chapter 3 focuses on Aisha Ali and investigates who she is as an individual artist, researcher, and performer. I present Ali's biographical history and discuss her involvement with Middle Eastern dance performance and field research.

In Chapter 4 I review Ali's work as documentary filmmaker, performer, and artist and discuss how these crafts intersect. I describe and analyze the processes by which Ali constructs her art and I consider Ali's motivations for documenting and preserving Arabic folklore while exploring the importance and meaning of tradition in this process. While discussing these topics I address the personal challenges and artistic conflicts that arise as Ali engages with rapidly changing video technology. In Chapter 5 I investigate how Ali's research, specifically her documentary films and recordings, have influenced the dance and performance practices of others including the individuals whom she documented. I also inquire about Ali's field techniques in the effort to elaborate on how and why she focused on representing some dance materials while ignoring others. I specifically ask, "Can the ethnographic films the researcher produces replicate and serve as a means to perpetuate the dance movements learned during extensive time in the field?" I conclude my dissertation with Chapter 6 in which I review the significant concepts that have guided my research along with my findings. In addition I set forth several questions important for future study.

Chapter 2
Historic Context of Belly Dance, the Development of the Modern Performance, and the Role of Documentary Film

The contemporary dance form known as belly dance began to develop in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was usually staged in the North African, Egyptian, and Middle East regions as entertainment for an audience of foreign spectators (Buonaventura 1989; Van Nieuwkerk 1995; Wood 1980a, 1980b). Cabaret style belly dance, commonly known as *raqs al sharqi* in Arabic, is perhaps the most frequently performed version of the dances categorized as belly dance. Based on a combination of traditional folk dance movements from a wide geographic area including Egypt and North Africa as well as Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Persia, *raqs al sharqi* blends together a variety of kinetic vocabularies into a hybrid, yet cohesive, structured movement system (Wood 1979, 1980). As a result of these varied components the cabaret belly dance was and continues to be a diverse, international dance tradition.

Depending on the situation and context of the performance, belly dance is largely an improvisational art form. Because of its spontaneous nature ensemble performances are difficult. Choreographic decisions can be made during performance because the dancer makes choices based on her knowledge of the canon of movement vocabulary. Often, accompanying music dictates style and the emotive quality of the dance. Designed to escort the dancer through her movements, the musical scores emphasize every aspect of *raqs al sharqi* from the slow and sensuous to the rapid and vigorous. Due to the fact that belly dancing music is drawn from a range of broad regional sources, the

performer's score may be modern or old-fashioned, urban or rural. This is true of most contemporary belly dance whether performed in the Middle East, United States, and Europe or beyond.

Belly Dance from an Outsider's Perspective

Belly dance was, and remains to varying degrees, perceived as exotic by Western audiences unfamiliar with the daily life and culture of its local folk performers (Local folk performers are the people of the Middle East region who learned the art of dance and music performance through informal, face-to-face interaction. Additionally I consider folk "belly dances" traditional because they demonstrate continuities and consistencies across space and time, such as pelvic virtuosity and torso trunk separation). The concept of exoticism as it specifically applies to the Middle East region is referred to as "Orientalism," an expression that was used and discussed by Edward Said (Said 1978). Oriental, meaning the "East" in Euro-American colloquial usage, had come to describe the area that was perceived to be "East" of "The West," meaning certain parts of Europe and North America. Within Said's conceptual framework the Middle East is considered the Orient. Consequently, belly dance is often referred to in many parts of the world including Turkey and the Middle East as "Oriental dance." Said's orientalism paradigm can be applied to the manner in which the region's movements have been historically represented and perceived by foreigners. Recognizing this positioning in time and space is vital to understanding how belly dance is performed in contemporary cultures.

The term belly dance is derived from the French *danse du ventre* (stomach dance). Images of belly dancers were common during the late nineteenth century in paintings, literature, and popular Western media including photographs, paintings, postcards, journals, *carte de visites,* and later moving pictures (Buonaventura 1989; Carlton 1995; Van Nieuwkerk 1995). Knowledge of the dance was frequently relayed by French Legionnaire soldiers as well as other foreign explorers traveling in the Northern Africa and Middle Eastern region. (From hereon the Middle East refers to one or more of the following modern day nations: Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and those of the Arabian Peninsula. For more history see Wood 1979, 1980). Although men and women in this geographic region share the same dance vocabulary, the female dancer was the regular component of depictions from the Oriental world and rapidly became an icon associated with the exotic and foreign appeal of the Middle East and North Africa.

Entertainers who first performed the "stomach dances" for exhibition were often members of minority tribes from various regions throughout the Middle East. (Leona Wood uses the term "dance for exhibition" in *Danse du Ventre: A Fresh Appraisal.* By using the term "Dance for Exhibition" Wood distinguishes between categories of staged performance. The term "exhibiting" dance is used when choreography is specifically performed for the consumption of a spectating audience, foreign or not. In contrast "staging dance" more specifically refers to any process of re-contextualizing or re-representing a dance for a formal audience). Many of the public performers were Gypsies belonging to ethnically distinct social networks outside of the dominant culture.

Gypsies, more formally referred to in scholarship as *Rom*, form a distinct ethnic and social network and are frequently associated with alternative, minority lifestyles in whichever district they reside. *Rom* are believed to have descended from nomadic tribes from Rajastan, having traveled the so-called Romany trail from Northern India through Central Asia and into Northern Africa, the Levant, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe (Fraser 1997). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries musicians and dancers adapted their folk dances to suit the needs of fascinated foreign audiences creating a style based on their personal community examples. Perhaps most well known and documented from the turn of the nineteenth century were dancing women of the *Ouled Nail* from Algeria, *Shikhat* from Morocco, and *Ghawazee* from Egypt (Lane 1836; Lawrence 1956; Westermarck 1914). These are the families of people with whom Aisha Ali would later study and choose to represent in her videos and recordings.

From an ethnochoreological perspective, the body movements and vocabulary of the Middle Eastern and North African dances starkly contrasted with the nineteenth and early twentieth century Western European notion of popular, social, and staged dances regardless of class. Most Euro-American dance forms consisted of linear, non-segmented movements in which the torso and trunk do not separate. Belly dances from the Middle East and North Africa exhibit a distinct separation between the upper and lower body units. (Lomax, Bartenieff, and Pauley's 1968 publications *Dance Style and Culture* and *Choreometric Profiles* proposed a systematic method for the study of dance called choreometrics. Within the choreometrics framework body moments are categorized in terms of body units, for example single unit or multi-unit movements distinguished by

legs and feet, trunk, and upper body). Emphasis on powerfully moving the hips while maintaining relaxed yet controlled movement of the arms, head, and neck illustrates a noticeably different movement vocabulary from that of the Western European dance forms.

The movements of the belly dancer's hips, combined with the sinuous and fluid arm movements commanded the attention and sparked the imagination of the late nineteenth century colonialists. These outside observers made assumptions based on associations with Judeo Christian principles concerning the feminine body. Analysis of a sexualized colonial response can be based upon the belly dancers isolated pelvic movements, which has the potential to create a sexually charged system of signs and symbols (see Giurchescu 2000). It is understandable how eroticism became rapidly associated with vigorous pelvic movements, particularly in light of how "the Judeo Christian bible tended to focus on what should *not* be done, and sex was high on the list" (Reiley 1997: 180). Within this perspective it is easy to see how belly dance was licentious because it featured movements highlighting body parts, such as vigorously shaking buttocks, with sexual associations. "Dancing involves the human body, the body and sex are coupled together, and both are taboo subjects" (Snyder and Johnson 1999). Further compounding this relationship, the body parts associated with sex--pelvis, hips, and thighs--are not highlighted in traditional dance forms. Therefore watching the quivering, thrusting pelvises of North African and Middle Eastern dancers, especially performed without shame, aroused the early Western observers and promoted an association with sexual freedom that continues today.

Popular contemporary belly dance syncretizes movement vocabulary from regions throughout the Middle East. Leona Wood describes the origins of belly dance movement in *Dance Du Ventre: A Fresh Appraisal Part 1*,

> The main technical elements that distinguish this kind of dancing are to be found in widely separated places: from Spain to Turkey, Africa to India, and even Oceania. Indigenous cultural development may account for some incidence: Southern Nigeria and Tahiti, for example; but in the ancient world Punic distribution probably accounted for some of its original diffusion throughout the Mediterranean. In more recent times, entertainer-caste tribes wandered from India as far afield as Samarkand and Morocco, Central Europe and Spain. By the time they reached France in the early fifteenth century, they were known by a variety of names, but at least one group called themselves "Egyptians" (hence Gypsy). They may have passed through Egypt, where *Nawars* and other Gypsies have assimilated the local styles of music and dance, and made them their own. In Europe they have brought an orientalizing influence that separates their art from their native folk culture. (Wood 1979: 9-10).

The canon of movement vocabulary varies from place to place. The quivering pelvis, for example, is a key component in Upper Egyptian Ghawazee dance, and typical of rural performance style in the regions of Thebes and Luxor (Ali 1980a, 1980b, 1980c). Movement elements that typify the style of "cabaret" arms and upper torso are often attributed to Persian and Central Asian origin. The horizontal, side to side thrusting of the hips is stylistically a feature of North African Tunisian dance vocabulary (Ali 2003, 2001, 2000; Wood 1979, 1980). The *Shikhat* of Morocco and *Ouled Nail* of Algeria typically bounce the pelvis vertically, while in Turkey, where belly dance is often romantically associated with the Ottoman harem and court prostitutes, movement styles emphasize overt sexual movements such as sharp pelvic thrusts and undulations that are performed while the dancer lies on the floor. Popular modern belly dance, when removed from the situation and context of the rural and urban gypsies who perform similar

movements within their own cultural background, ranges from a high art performance (on film or stage) to nightclub acts for audiences with a variety of socio-economic backgrounds (Potuoglu-Cook 2006).

Middle Eastern performers and audiences view belly dance movements as familiar, common, and customary rather than mystical or exotic (Al-Faruqi 1978; Van Niuewkerk 1995). This is not to deny the movement's sensual or carnal qualities (see Wood 1979, 1980), however the dance is frequently performed within a celebratory or leisure time context where pelvis movements do not necessarily convey an explicitly sensational or sexualized message. Choosing to disregard the sexual nature of the shaking pelvis, Middle Eastern dance in the informal context is performed by all members of the community. Men, women, and children perform belly dance motions such as quivering hips, stomach undulations, and movements which are learned at social celebratory situations where senior community members versed in traditional movements set examples for younger generations. Even if the movements appear sexual, they are not always interpreted as such by those dancing for fun, celebration, or other socially interactive events (Ali 1990). Illustrating the joyous nature of dance in this part of the world, the Arabic word for dance, *raqs*, is rooted in the Assyrian word *rakadu*, meaning to celebrate (Buonaventura 1989). In essence native insiders do not always view belly dance movements, no matter how sensual or erotic they may be perceived to be by outsiders, as extraordinary or peculiar.

Considered a public entertainer, the dancer becomes a spectacle capable of defining, challenging, or reinforcing cultural ideas about beauty, femininity and sexuality

(Osweiler 2000, Van Nieuwkirk 1995). For this reason, in predominantly patriarchal Muslim societies, professional dancing is presently not a popular or encouraged career choice among young women. Professional entertainers in the Middle East are often of a minority background and are stigmatized for their choice of career. Moreover, the neighborhoods and districts that became known for nightclubs and cabarets, such as Muhammad Ali Street in Cairo, are historically associated with the prostitution industry.

Belly Dance as Popular Entertainment in Live Performance and on Film

As the Middle East became a destination where travelers could experience their Oriental fantasies, an adapted stage presentation for belly dance was necessary to fulfill the expectations of the foreign visitors. These presentations were performed as the city began to tailor sections of the environment around the tourism industry. Belly dance as a solo form began a renaissance in the early twentieth century as it was performed as a curiosity for visiting tourists but also as theatrically staged entertainment for locals. In Cairo, Beirut, Tunis, and Algiers folk dances from the provincial territories were represented in venues and nightclubs that featured live entertainment for the purpose of spectacle (Van Niuewkerk 1995). The solo cabaret dancer as a performer moving for the enjoyment of others emerged as the focal point of performative attention. This is opposed to group oriented social dance situations in which the audience-performer boundary is less defined.

Spectacle is a consistent element in consumer-focused entertainment (Bogdan 1990; Desmond 2001; Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1998; MacCannell 1999). Like many other

contemporary dance styles, belly dance is performed in many different contexts, including the modern commercialized entertainment that evokes the wondrous "appetite" of regional locals and foreign consumers (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1998:72). Commercialized dance systems incorporate elements of spectacular attraction and aesthetics by dancers performing around the world often exemplified, for example, in costume attire (Foley 2001). Costumes that historically covered most of the belly dancer's torso are re-fashioned into two-piece, body revealing outfits adorned with sequins and jewels to maximize theatrical allure. In the 1960s and 70s costumes worn by Turkish dancers such as Necla Ates and Princess Banu often dispensed with entirely as the of small jeweled nipple covers known as "pasties" became acceptable (Ozdemir 2002). Innovation in dance attire continues today often following current fashion trends. It ranges from full-length cocktail dresses to two-piece costumes strategically constructed to show more flesh.

Belly dance quickly gained popularity as an exotic art form in the United States not only through its representation in paintings, literature, photography, and live performances but also films made by Middle Easterners, Americans, and Europeans. Popular performance of belly dance outside of the Middle East with a particularly exoticized air began at events such as the Centennial Exhibition World's Fairs and Expositions in North America in Philadelphia in 1867. Various nations and corporations sponsored events and displays at the expositions. These often featured large-scale re-creations of various global communities, complete with costumed individuals representing the particular geographical place on display. Musicians, dancers, and

entertainers representing their "village" of origin performed various folk dances associated with their cultures.

In the case of the Middle East and North Africa, locales such as *Street in Cairo* at the Chicago World's Fair's "Midway Plaisance" in 1893 featured various belly dancers selected to represent their place of origin. The planning committee sought to bring the world to Chicago to titillate and educate the public. Displays of cultural wonder were placed side by side with the latest technological advances (Bertuca, Hartman, and Neumeister 1996; Bolotin and Laing 2002). For example, at the Colombian Exhibition in 1893, Edison's kinetograph, a precursor to the film camera, was put on public display. Moving images were shown in a machine known as the kinetoscope, which was chiefly used to provide a peep show experience for male patrons. Thus the association between film and pornography was formed. In this variably exploitive enterprise of adult entertainment, dancing girls were the subjects. Moreover, several examples of the dances encapsulated in these visual recordings were Oriental in style further cementing the erotic connections in America (Stone 1991). As devices that recorded and projected moving images evolved, and the market for visual entertainment expanded, dancing remained a central topic for filmic depiction.

The rise of the Hollywood film entertainment industry in the 1920s inspired a similar picture producing movement centered in Cairo. Much like contemporary Bollywood with its production of Hindi speaking films in India, Cairo became the center of movie making for the Arabic-speaking world. These films mimicked Hollywood plots with themes of romantic love, fame, and fortune. Cairo-produced cinema habitually

included cabaret belly dancing whether central to the storyline or not. Inevitably the choreographies that were constructed for the camera influenced the style and representation of popular Oriental dance. As a result innovative theatrical components, which were influenced by Hollywood ideals and stereotypes, color the presentation of belly dance on film (Stone 1991).

In the 1930s and 40s various Egyptian dancers such as Samia Gamal and Tahia Carioca achieved celebrity status and were among the first to help inscribe the Cabaret style in popular cinema. Gamal and Carioca represented dances found on the streets of Cairo and helped legitimize the Cabaret style. These dancers disseminated new and innovative ideas about the staging and movements based on traditional folk dance. Once viewed as a dance performed only in public by women of ill repute, dancers gained the respect and admiration as some of the Middle East's most beloved creative artists (Van Niuewkerk 1995). The appeal of the celebrity solo dancer and the widespread distribution of film has propelled the performance of *raqs sharqi* into an iconic and celebrated tradition enjoyed by individuals throughout the Middle East.

In the West, Oriental dance has been recontextualized in numerous representations. The portrayals have emphasized mystical, exotic, or ancient aspects of belly dance especially because they were fashioned by those born and raised outside of the Middle East region (Buonaventura 1989). Euro-American modern dancers and Russian ballerinas portrayed Oriental themes as early as the turn of the 20th century (Wood 1979, 1980). Consequently dancers of non-Oriental descent performed hybridized forms of belly dance most widely disseminated throughout the world. Outside

of the Middle East belly dance traditions took on a global exotic nature as compared to a familiar regional one. The notion of belly dance as an ancient, spiritual, or magical art form persists in a number of modern performances particularly by women (and men) from outside of Middle Eastern culture (Hobin 2003; Gioseffi 1980).

Popular Representation of Belly Dance in America

Twentieth century American modern dancers such as Isadora Duncan (1878-1927) and Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968) experimented with movements and costuming inspired by Oriental iconography. Their movements were inventive, based on personal experience and interpretation, but styled on Western dance. St. Denis, for instance, used dramatic arm movements that mimicked Egyptian pharonic tomb paintings to reference the Orient, yet incorporated balletic whirls, kicks, and postures in her choreographies. Both artists had traveled to the Middle East yet chose not to educate themselves in field-based research methods and techniques. Choreographers like Duncan and St. Denis reflected their personal fantasies and experiences as modern twentieth century Western women (Shelton 1981). Through the representations presented by these choreographers many of the non-sexual stereotypes were perpetuated. Thus in contemporary times, dances performed as Oriental may be strictly Western in movement vocabulary, especially if they are based on these early choreographic interpretations of Oriental dance.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Hollywood movies frequently portrayed biblical tales that conjured images of historic or ancient pasts often set within a Middle Eastern inspired background. The connection between Oriental style and ancient, biblical times was further reinforced with Western theatrical dance representations depicting the woman as a seductress (Wood 1979). The role of the biblical Lilithian seductress was frequently portrayed as a dancing femme fatale. St. Denis for example, choreographed the movements in D.W. Griffith's 1918 film *Intolerance* that depicted the Denishawn dancers costumed as harem girls in ancient Babylon. Oriental themes in commercial dance were also popularized in ballets as well as film. Russian choreographer Leon Bakst gained recognition for Sergei Diaghilev's 1910 premiere *Scheherazade*, in which the protagonist commits acts of vengeance against his favorite, but unfaithful wife. In Bakst's vision, a female was portrayed as seductress, betrayer and faithless, leading to a continuation of the stereotype associated with the Oriental genre (Stone 1991).

Images of the belly dancer as an exotic seductress continued in popular American film, television, and radio. An "immense vogue" for Middle Eastern dance and music took hold of audiences when Turkish dancer Necla Ates and Egyptian singer Mohammed El Bakkar featured their talents in the 1954 Broadway production *Fanny* (Ali 1983a, 1983b; Wood 1979, 1980). *Fanny's* popularity prompted the mass marketing of Arabic music. Greek and Turkish themed nightclubs complete with live musicians and dancers were quickly established in major cities across the United States. Heightened interest in Middle Eastern dance and music was perpetuated with the popularity of *Zorba the Greek*,

released in 1960. New demands for professional belly dancers had arisen yet few of the American performers were skilled in the traditions on which Danse du Ventre are based. As a result American belly dancers developed a haphazard movement style called American Cabaret, which highlights a blend of specific old world dance traditions including Armenian, Turkish, and Greek.

The Role of Film in Dance Revivals and Revitalizations

Dance ethnologists, dance anthropologists, and folk dance revivalists interested in preserving and performing traditional dance forms learn systems of movement experientially through the process of replication and imitation. By repeating a movement demonstrated by a dance practitioner, a less experienced dancer can learn the kinesthetic knowledge necessary for a variety of performance styles. This participatory and observational method often includes the use of film, which can be studied and employed to disseminate knowledge about the dance's choreologic qualities (Buckland 2001, Bishop and Lomax-Hawes 2003, Magliocco 2004, Bakka 2002). Since films are viewed as truthful and authentic representations of human behavior, they are often used as a model for learning dance accurately (Bakka 2002, Buckland 2001, Magliocco 2004, Stone 1991). Dance ethnologist Judy Mitoma writes,

> The invention of film and video technology has had a profound impact on dance: on access to it, and on the creation, understanding, and appreciation for it. For the first time we could see dance across boundaries of race, class, and geography, a dissemination process critical to the development of the field. Dance did not (and still does not) have a practical notation system; consequently, recording on film and video provided the first practical means of documentation. Dancers use cameras as research tools, to study technique, to review and analyze choreography, and to build performance skills. The ethnologist, who previously

> relied on written and photographic accounts, is able to capture moving images of dance in cultural contexts, providing a valuable tool for research...Whether a documentation tool, medium, the recorded moving image has forever changed the way we perceive and experience dance (Mitoma 2002: xxxi).

Early twentieth century dance revivalist Cecil Sharp was one of the first to use advances in visual technology to capture and record dance for the purpose of preserving and reviving performative traditions that he feared were in danger of becoming moribund (Karpeles 1967). By using film to study movements, traditional choreographies, as well as individual styles, Sharp could visually notate aspects of dance, for example how the body moved through space, which are impossible to convey through written, oral, iconic, or photographic representations. Individuals interested in learning dance for the sake of reviving the English folk traditions and customs reference Sharp's filmed materials for accuracy and authenticity of representation. Known as the father of the English folk dance revival, Sharp and the materials he filmed and referenced set examples for others involved in the folk dance revival.

As in Europe, American folk dance revivalists referenced dances recorded on film in order to learn precise details about movement, choreography, and costume. Unlike the folk dance revival movement in Europe, individuals involved in reviving or revitalizing customary traditions in the United States were not always representing their own ethnic traditions (Evanchuk 1987). Essentially, the American folk dance revival movement provided many people with the opportunity to explore and perform various traditional customs regardless of heritage, social background, or place of origin (Cohen 2002; Evanchuk 1987). Extended folk dance networks from professional to informal continue to flourish in the United States where many of these networks center on the performance

of belly dance. Despite the availability of audio-visual resources, ethnographic accuracy in the depiction of Middle Eastern folklore is not often a chief concern in the performance repertoires of American belly dance folk movement troupes.

The Aman Folk Ensemble, established in Los Angeles in 1963 and reaching its peak in Mid-1970s was primarily responsible for representing folk dances from the Middle East with a high degree of ethnochoreological accuracy. Known as an international folk dance company with professional standards, the Aman ensemble staged a variety of traditional performances choreographed and re-represented for an American theater audience. Aman choreographer and artistic director Leona Wood often referenced film materials, which served as a source of accuracy. Wood's Aman dancers studied and learned movement and staging techniques from film sources in addition to interacting with living tradition bearers. Leona Wood would later serve as Aisha Ali's artistic mentor influencing her to preserve and perpetuate the performance of particular customary styles of kinetic expression that specifically originate in the Middle East.

Using Film to Study Dance: An Ethnochorelogic Approach

At present various images of belly dancing are encapsulated in mainstream visual media such as how-to videos and photos in popular American and European belly dance magazines. Often these featured images are based on foreign and personally creative representations of the Middle Eastern folk dances. These are performed for consumption by an unfamiliar audience who are generally not from the Middle East. Dance manifested in Middle Eastern custom or ritual is not frequently emphasized in

productions. Although various representations and styles of belly dance are perpetuated in these visual media, little of the material falls into an ethnographic or documentary category. As a result alternative forms of belly dance have rapidly developed throughout the world based on multiple filmed examples. This is particularly true in America where unconventional styles continue to develop in dialogue with modern and post-modern dance traditions.

Film is thought to assume an ethnographic quality when it is used with the intention of making socio-cultural, folkloristic, and in this case ethnochorerological research. Visual anthropologist and documentary filmmaker Paul Henley describes ethnographic film as a genre that is situated in a native's perspective (and the native is always right). Stylistically, according to Henley, the ethnographic film is naturalistic, with attempts to depict reality as it is understood through the subject's life experience. Embedded within this naturalistic style is a "stance of humility before the world on the filmmaker's part" that implies a unique resonance with the subject. From an ethnographic filmmaker's point of reference, "culture is always a good thing" (Bishop 2001). Most often, the unique relationship between subject and the ethnographic filmmaker is an outcome of the shared fieldwork experience. As a result, ethnographic films are "based on a set of ethical considerations" that compels filmmakers to assume a reflexive stance and acknowledge their own role in the documentary process. Ethical considerations include the filmmaker's responsibility to the people filmed, who unlike the subjects of other film genres, are ultimately more important than the cinema audience. Because of these considerations, the ethnographic filmmaker must often self-censor in

order to protect the subjects and present their particular worldviews (Bishop 2001). For this reason ethnographic films are presented and frequently perceived true and authentic documents of human culture and behavior.

Early ethnographic filmmakers visually made the connection between dance, cultural expression, and daily life. Robert Flaherty, known as one of the founding fathers of documentary film, for example, depicted dance sequences in his 1926 documentary about Samoa in *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age*. The dance sequence, though brief, suggests the importance of performance in the Pacific Island community. Another early, yet significant ethnographic work that features performance is Edward Curtis's representation of a Pacific Northwest Kwakiutl ritual in the 1914 film production entitled *In the Land of the War Canoes.* In one scene, a masked performer balances on the prow of a war canoe portraying Raven in a mythological event. These two filmic representations set the stage for further ethnographic documentary portrayals of dance.

Ethnographic filmmakers often record dance performances in an ethnochoreological manner, meaning dance is the center of the camera's attentions. Visual anthropolgists Aaron Glassman (2004) and Robert Gardner (1951) have both made films focusing on the dances of the Kwakiutl, Franco Norelli illustrates Apache dance at a Sunrise Ceremony (1994), Sophia Vaccaro (2000) focuses on Tango in Buenos Aires, and Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling (1998) feature the traditional dance, music, and music of the Yupik, Eskimo. Of particular note is anthropologist Jean Rouch, who elegantly filmed a Dogon women's sorghum mashing ritual (Gardner 2003). Done in a single nine-minute shot, Rouch uses movement within the film to convey the

experience of women in Dogon village life. Rouch employs a cinematic style that can only be attained through intimate interaction with the featured performers. Filmed in wide frame, Rouch "dances" along with the women as he makes the camera pan smoothly across their moving bodies while they sing a supporting melody. A physical sense of Dogon expressive culture can be gleaned from watching this footage.

Other visual anthropologists such as John Marshall and Naomi and John Bishop visually represent performance in order to show the range of expressive behavior in everyday life. John Marshall included scenes of music and dance performance throughout his documentary *A Kalahari Family* (Marshall 1951-2001). The dances presented show intimate visual details about performances at Ju/'hoansi funerary and celebratory rites and how these performances intersect with Ju/'hoansi daily life. Similarly, Naomi and John Bishop show life-cycle and civic performances in *Himalayan Herders*. The Bishops integrated sequences of significant ritual dances performed in the Nepalese village of Melemche, a high altitude pastoral society (Bishop and Bishop 2004). Performances mark important individual and cultural events. By being shown cultural performances such as dance in ethnographic film, the viewer may gain a deeper understanding of a foreign way of life.

While the inclusion of dance footage in ethnographic films provides insight into movement performance in a diverse range of cultural contexts, a detailed account of dance from an ethnochoreologists perspective is generally not available to the public consumer. For example, a focus on the meaning of expressive movement and kinesthetic subtlety is not usually translated when the filmmaker is interested in dance as a product

of culture. Because of this anthropological centered perspective, dance performance sequences are often edited in ethnographic films in order to illustrate details about human life in a particular culture as a whole. The filmmakers above include dance sequences as they reveal how culture is performed while Ali, as an ehnochoreologist, concentrates specifically on how dance informs culture. A documentary film that focuses specifically on the situation and context of the dance event(s) or on performance of the dance itself concerns the study of ethnochroeology (Ali 1991; Bishop 2000; Bishop and Hawes 2003; Flanery and Siebens 2004). By looking purposely at expressive movement, the audience gains knowledge about how culture is embodied and performed at a variety of social events. Viewing dance enhances the viewer's ability to relate to a culture particularly through customary.

Many ethnochoreologists are performers as well as scholars, dance photographers, and videographers. Therefore when dancing researchers film they typically pay close attention to movement and performance details overlooked by other videographers. The final product is a film represented through a dancer's perspective. This perspective is often one that is sensitive to the needs of individuals trying to learn or notate dance by watching and imitating the work the ethnologist produces. It is an important perspective to represent especially in the case of using film to teach and perpetuate movement traditions.

Ali's depiction of Middle Eastern culture and folklore elicits facts about people and their life experience. Like the ethnographic filmmakers mentioned above, Aisha Ali situates her work from an insider's perspective. Her documentary films and recordings

have resulted from extended fieldwork and personal interaction with dancers in their residential environment. Ali's consideration for representing the people and folklore associated with belly dances of the Middle East in a positive manner has resulted in work that is naturalistic in style and perceived as visually factual by those living within and outside of traditional Arabic culture. As a result Ali's documentary and instructional videos serve to educate those who are interested in learning about the dances as they are performed in the Middle East. Her production materials and documentary work are viewed as an accurate source of information and can be categorized as ethnochoreologically informed.

This review of the origin of belly dance from its modern invention in Western popular culture has identified its associations with exoticism. The variety of filmic and theatrical representations of belly dance was discussed. A definition of ethnographic film and the ethnochoreological approach to filmmaking was provided as clearly as possible. Aisha Ali's films are "situated" within the framework of both perspectives. The next chapter investigates who Aisha Ali is as an artist, researcher, and entertainer. After presenting Ali's biographical history her involvement with contemporary belly dance performance and ethnographic research will be discussed. Included are Ali's narratives that she conveys during dance classes, in publications, as well as in interviews.

Chapter 3
Aisha Ali as Artist, Researcher, and Performer

This chapter examines Ali's character and personal history as they relate to her work as a professional dancer and visual ethnographer. The section begins with her formative years and discusses her involvement with Middle Eastern dance and performance as she conveys it in classes, articles, and interviews. Various influential experiences fostered a commitment to Middle Eastern folklore and the extended Arabic community, which led her to seek traditional dancers and musicians through ethnographic fieldwork. By examining her foundational experiences we can more readily understand how Ali became an accomplished artist, dancer, and filmmaker and continues to sustain a career that has lasted over four decades.

Because of the bias toward a cultural approach to the study of customary dance there are few studies that specifically address the role of individual artists in the selection, management, and construction of traditional performance. Exceptions are ethnochoreologist Anca Giurcechescu's articles "Interpreting a Dancer's Discourse on Improvisation" (Giurchescu 2000) and "The Process of Improvisation in Folk Dance" (Giurchescu 1983) which have discussed the performer's role in the creation, composition, and improvisation of traditional dance. Giurchescu reminds us:

> The trend of individualization is present in any dance performance. However its choreographic expression ranges from almost identical repetition of a given model to the most inventive recreation, depending on the one hand upon the individual's creative power, dance knowledge and expressive capacity, and on the other hand, by the degree of cultural and structural restrictions (Giurchescu 2000:259-260).

Giurchescu asserts that it is equally as important to understand the individual's conception of tradition and their "conscious, active, and creative involvement" in the presentation of traditional dance as it is to understand the broader social, cultural, and political framework in which dance is constructed and performed (Giurchesu 2000:261). Despite her interest in the methods and processes by which the individual dancer creates a repertoire, she does not emphasize the dancer's biographical history in relationship to the creative and choreographic choices they make.

Within the field of folklore there is existing scholarship that specifically address individual biographies in relation to the creation of traditional arts. Of note is Colin Quigley's study of Newfoundland fiddler Emile Benoit (Quigley 1995), Varrick Chittendon's investigations of a "woman made" yard by Veronica Terrillion and Vietnam dioramas by Michael D. Cousino, Sr. (Chittenden 1984, 1995), Gladys-Marie Fry's study of bible quilts made by the former slave Harriet Powers (1990), Linda Pershing's book about the fabric art of Mary Milne (1995), and Simon J. Bronner's article about Mennonite painter Anna Bock (1981). A small selection of films/videos address the relationship between individual life experience and expressive behaviors including *Eduardo the Healer*, *Being a Joines: A Life in the Brushy Mountains, and Beyond*, and *"Women with Cake": The Spiritual Drumming of Layne Redmond.*

Michael Owen Jones, who has written extensively individual artists and craftspeople, maintains that an understanding of the individual's biographical information, including early childhood experiences and family relationships, is relevant for the comprehensive study of tradition (Jones 2000). In his article "Tradition" in

Identity Discourse and An Individual's Symbolic Construction of Self" about the icon painter Gary Robertson, Jones establishes the clear connection between life experience and the creative frameworks in which artists operate. Jones discusses Robertson's ethnic, religious, and socio-economic history and links these issues to the artist's aesthetic interpretations (Jones 2000). Earlier works by Jones, notably "The Handmade Object and Its Maker" (1975), "Craftsman of the Cumberlands: Tradition and Creativity" (1989), Why Make (Folk) Art? and "Icon Painters in Western Canada" (1995) and "The Conundrums of Classification: Who Creates Folk Art, When, and Why ?" (1997) illustrate the significance of explaining biographical information in association with creativity and arts production.

None of the aforementioned essays concerns a traditional dancer who is a researcher, professional performer, and documentary filmmaker. In this chapter I seek to contribute to the lacunae within the ethnochoreology and folkloristic literature by including an overview of Aisha Ali's life history and demonstrating how her biographic background factors into her motivations for creating, preserving, and perpetuating Middle Eastern folk dance using modern media. I also establish a connection among Ali's process of art making, dancing, and video production. Questions generated by the outcome of this research will guide future studies particularly those concerned with media ecology, folklore preservation, and tradition and the intrinsic relationship to the individual.

Including painting, design, dance, and music, Aisha Ali's creativity was manifest in a number of ways. Ali's inclination towards representing the world accurately was

evident in her early childhood, when she began painting murals on the walls of her family home. Natural and surrounding environments were constantly subject to Ali's reinterpretation and reproduced with a paintbrush and palette. Although her lifelong artistic endeavors indicate perpetual concern for creativity and aesthetic handling, depicting a sense of reality is often the focus of her work. Filming and editing ethnographic film is an extension of Ali's creative efforts and the artistic tradition that she learned and practiced.

Aisha Ali was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1939, the daughter of an Italian-Egyptian father and Italian mother. Ali had an appearance and background of what the local population considered atypical. Her looks were exotic and out of the ordinary in the suburban South Park neighborhood of Windover Hills where she spent her youth. Ali and her family stood out not only because they were of Mediterranean and Arab descent, but also they were some of the only inhabitants in their area not of an Anglican background.

Early in her life, Ali became familiar with the attention she attracted from others based on her exotic appearance. An olive complexion, especially dark in summertime, brown eyes, and long thick black hair signaled difference to those in her community. Complicating the matter was Ali's curious talent as visual artist, highly skilled in creating lifelike depictions beginning at the age of two. Ali had an unusual ability to accurately portray three dimensions in her paintings and drawings. This talent contributed to her initial reputation not only as the foreign outsider but also the eccentric virtuoso artist.

Her first years were spent in a well-to-do, predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Schenley Park in East Liberty, Pennslyvannia. After immigrating to the United States from Egypt via Italy at the turn of the century, Ali's paternal grandfather, Nicco, established a profitable Pennsylvania marble business that specialized in tiles. According to Ali, her grandfather's business was successful because he was a fine craftsman and a good businessman (interview May 29, 2005). He was familiar with the art of tiling and marbling from his youth in his native Egypt and had refined skills in the quarries of Southern Italy where many North Africans had migrated in search of work. Ali's father Dominic followed the family's vocational example and pursued a prosperous career as a craftsman and cabinetmaker, working with wood as opposed to stone. Ali attributes her family's successful foray in business to heredity as they come from a lineage of quality craftsmen.

Other artistic traditions were maintained in Ali's family, particularly on her mother's side. Her mother, Inez, was the daughter of Calabrian engineer and artist Jerome Chircosta, who had immigrated with his wife to Cleveland via Rio de Janeiro in the early twentieth century. Ali's grandmother Macriena de Blazzo was of elite parentage while Chircosta, though educated, was of a more ordinary heritage. The Chircosta's left Italy mainly to avoid the social stigma of a mixed class marriage. Jerome Chircosta's artistic talents were many including traditional oil painting and photography. He opened a successful photography studio in Cleveland. The photography studio operated through the Depression allowing the family to remain in comfort throughout the recession. In 1930, Chricosta moved his family to Los Angeles where he enjoyed a

prominent career in Hollywood studio photography and films. Inez Chircosta displayed interest in her father's art, and began assisting him in his studio, allowing her to develop her own artistic talents. Inez Ali continued to paint for income as well as enjoyment throughout her adulthood, but her main mode of expression was through her writing. She enjoyed writing poetry and essays and then later when they relocated in Los Angeles, she wrote a column called "West Words" for a Westside Newspaper for many years.

Ali's parents downplayed their Southern Italian and Arabic heritage by consuming popular American goods, maintaining the outside of their home in a manner the neighbors considered acceptable, and attending community organized events that included Protestant church functions. Ali's father did not publicize his Muslim identity as local Pennsylvania social networks often misunderstood their religious background. Regardless of attempts at assimilation Ali believes the community never fully accepted her family (interview May 29, 2005).

Aisha Ali was the first of four children to boast creative abilities in the visual arts. Lifelike depictions of people, objects, and landscapes indicated Ali possessed the innate skill to translate what she experienced into a variety of visual media. She went on to develop her painting skills with the encouragement of her family and local patrons. Neighbors hired her to paint murals and sculptures. Ali enjoyed the time she spent alone because it allowed her to create art; she profited from in both the social and financial realm. She feels that her identity as an outsider did not affect her in a negative manner during these formative years (interview May 29, 2005). In fact, her ethnic background

defined an early-established persona as an exotic artist whose unique talents could be available for hire.

Financial remuneration served as a positive reinforcement to Ali (for more about the impact of reinforcement in the creation and perpetuation of folklore see Georges 1990). She reasoned that by increasing her artistic skills and abilities, the quality of her art and reputation improved and therefore business opportunities would expand. Recognition and the subsequent demand for products served as encouragement and inspiration to continue a career as an artist and later a filmmaker.

In addition to earning income, Ali recalls other benefits related to looking, behaving, and exhibiting creative talents that were considered out of the ordinary. One particular anecdote concerns an event that occurred in her year at kindergarten. Noticing Ali's aptitude at painting, teachers excused her from age appropriate lessons so that she could advance into the senior grades for art classes. Classrooms were enhanced with Ali's murals and she provided an example to other children. Her ability at a young age, and the quality of her art making, allowed her artistic independence permitting development separate from her peers at school. She was able to mandate her own activity schedule and avoid any potential unproductive use of time.

Folklorists have devoted attention to the manner in which audience or customer response influences the continuance or innovation of traditional behaviors. This attention to audience and customer feedback helps answer the larger question of why people create folklore and why these behaviors stay in existence (Georges and Jones 1995: 231-312). For example, Colin Quigley discusses the role of the audience regarding the repertoire in

performance in his book, "Music From the Heart: Compositions of a Folk Fiddler" (1995). Emile Benoit, the Newfoundland fiddler Quigley concentrates his study on, tailored his performance repertoire to correspond to the requests of each audience he played for. Michael Owen Jones (1989) illustrates how the desires of the customer shape even the construction of functional objects in *Craftsman of the Cumberlands*. Jones discusses craftsman Chester Cornett and his tendency to create traditional chairs based on the individual needs of his paying customers. In these studies the authors reveal how, often, the performance or product consumer stimulates the performer or artist's final creation despite the artists' reputations for particular specialties.

The mention of audience and consumer response and positive reinforcement is relevant to my study on Aisha Ali. In Ali's case the early display of artistic talents brought her attention from others, freedom to create her own schedule, and provided economic advantage. However, the questions of why she developed an interest in focusing her talents on traditional dance performance and why she perpetuated specific artistic traditions that ultimately resulted in the multi-media depictions of Middle Eastern folklore still need to be answered. These questions will be addressed in the following section of this chapter.

Traditions and customs maintained within her home significantly affected Ali's partiality to Arabic arts and folklore. Décor was influenced by their foreign heritage. For example, Nicco Ali's Arabic-style tiles and Dominic Ali's handcrafted Arabesque woodwork accentuated the Ali family home. Fine antique carpets and woven tapestries lined the floors and walls, while old family photos gave examples of fashion and styles

from the Mediterranean region. The family heirlooms in the home served as a significant source of inspiration in the years to come.

Visual arts and crafts were only one avenue of traditional expression in the Ali family household. Her father often indulged in musical performances playing instruments such as piano and accordion. His impromptu repertoire included traditional compositions as well as jazz and classical arrangements. Ali was adept at imitating a range of performative skills and learned how to play piano by observing her father and then practicing alone. For a brief time during early adolescence she accompanied her father to private music lessons at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Hall. Playing piano remained one of Ali's artistic outlets, which she still enjoys as well as an appreciation for music and rhythmic structures.

Growing up in Ali's expressive family atmosphere impacted Ali's siblings, who, not surprisingly, display a range of creative abilities. Brothers David and Jerome developed their talent by exploring the world of jazz and blues and worked as paid professional musicians. David was an artist and graphic designer by day while he pursued a musical career. Mari paints as a mode of creative expression and source of income. Youngest sibling Jerome performed music full time during his youth and now he works as a cabinetmaker and plays on weekends at local nightclubs in Northern California. Ali credits their heredity for the creativity and talent explaining, "It's in the genes."

Ali continued to develop her various artistic skills throughout her youth. In particular she learned how to design and draw to three point perspective scale, critical

techniques for realism. Grandfather Chircosta showed little patience with children and he was not shy about correcting Ali's work with constructive criticism (interview May 29, 2006). Thus some of her earliest artistic experience promoted particular standards through feedback from a respected and accomplished elder. These personal artistic standards coupled with the ability to accept constructive criticism would prepare her for a future with mentor Leona Wood.

Ali was offered an art scholarship to attend the Sorbonne but the financial constraints of moving to France discouraged her from attending the prestigious institution. Ali describes her choice to move to Los Angeles instead as a "consolation prize" bestowed by her family who anticipated her continuing education at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she could live with her maternal grandmother in Westwood. (interview June 7, 2005).

Ali's experience and identity as an Arab-American and a belly dancer began to compartmentalize upon her arrival in Los Angeles. Living in the metropolitan city were thousands of immigrant Arabs and first generation Arab-Americans who publicly expressed their cultural identity through language, clothing, and aesthetic values. Ali describes the cultural makeup of Los Angeles at that time:

> During the '50s, and 60's, most of the Arabs living in the United States were Christians whose families had come from Lebanon and Syria before World War I, or Palestinians who had immigrated to America before World War II. Even the few Egyptians who had settled here were mainly Coptic Christians. Most of the Muslim Arabs living in America had come with student visas and were attending universities around the country (Ali 1983:7).

In contrast to the suburbs of Pittsburgh, the cultural events, festivals, ethnic restaurants and nightclubs, and specialty boutiques in Los Angeles offered a variety of

fashion, music, foods, and dance. Moreover Ali's new home city provided artists an opportunity for earning a living as professional entertainers, particularly in the case of belly dancing. Ali seized this opportunity after experimenting with varying daytime occupations and performance genres to finance her new independent lifestyle.

Ali's first job at Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills enabled her to interact with a variety of Middle Eastern clients, many of whom were members of the elite circle of Middle Eastern royalty who had made Los Angeles a second home. She became increasingly familiar with the local Middle Eastern community and noted similarities with her own experiences as an Arab American.

Beginning in 1959 Ali enrolled in a series of acting and dance courses in order to expand her professional repertoire. Ali's interest in studying belly dance grew as she came to acknowledge the Middle Eastern part of her heritage. However the availability of belly dance instructors in Los Angeles was minimal and so pursuit of other dance forms such as Afro-Haitian and Afro-Cuban took precedence initially.

Enrolling at the Nico Charise Academy of Dance where American dancer Ellie Johnson served as Ali's first formal dance teacher, Ali learned the fundamentals of a movement-based practice as well as a basic understanding of dance from an ethnologist's point of view. She recalls,

> I wanted learn the most ethnic dance I could find, alternatives to common American dance, so I enrolled in what was then referred to as Primitive Dance classes, which is a misnomer because it was in fact Afro-Caribbean… I can't remember much about the 'Primitive' dancing other than we used to lift our legs high and leap. We also did some limbo…From Ellie Johnson I learned how to do the warm ups and stretches that I still use at the beginning of class (interview June 23, 2005).

Ellie Johnson, trained by dance anthropologist Katherine Dunham, made basic distinctions between learning from an emic versus etic perspective. An ethnological approach to the study of dance appealed to Ali, who had already favored investigating the contexts of various performance and production processes. Moreover, Ali's personal interest in her cultural origins and concerns for historic preservation prompted further inquiries. Influenced by Johnson with the methods and theories associated with ethnology, Ali became interested in the study dance.

In addition to stimulating her creativity and curiosity, studying dance made Ali look and feel physically optimal. Mentioning how dance changed her body, she notes that strength and flexibility remain a core reason of why she continues to practice,

> I liked the way I felt after taking those first dance classes, and soon I noticed my body began to change, to look sleeker and stronger. Once I started taking dance classes, I was hooked and I got used to the exercise and of course the added attention that I was attracting. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to keep dancing and never stop; I wanted to dance until I got old… Now I am old but I don't intend to stop dancing (interview June 23, 2005).

Ali began to perform dance at informal parties frequently hosted by her colleagues from Rick Walter's Theatre Craft Workshop. Dancing in an Afro-Caribbean genre, her early performances exhibited innovation and individual interpretation. Although she does not refer to these early party performances using the descriptive term belly dance, the amalgamated style of movements learned from classes and personal experience were prototypes for a more refined belly dance. Ali's choice of musical accompaniment for these early performances frequently included selections of popular Middle Eastern music available in Los Angeles. Ali recalls,

> At the time of my first dance performances I selected whatever Middle Eastern music I had access to. In those days it was LP recordings of the Flames of Araby and Mohammed Al Bakkar... I wouldn't call what I was first doing belly dance even though I played the music, but it was a beginning (interview June 7, 2005).

Performing gave Ali the chance to design and create handmade attire, with a consistent flare for Middle Eastern style. The costumes were inspired by favorite Orientalist paintings, history books, and biblical themed Hollywood movies as well as her own imagination. Ali recollects that the first Oriental dance costume she wore was rented from an atelier in Hollywood and had previously been worn by Betty Grable in one of the On the *Road films with Bing Crosby and Dorthy Lamour.* A week after renting the costume Ali had fashioned "a better design with more style" based on the model she rented. Ali's art background included precise attention to fine details. Costume design became a significant part of what Ali considers a complete presentation (interview June 7, 2005).

Although the early routines in casual and familiar party atmospheres did not earn Ali income, she received positive reinforcement from the audience who complimented her "unique skill and extraordinary ability." Ali was aware of being an object of curiosity during performance and this caused her to explore the idea of self-transformation as an artist on stage. Increasingly, Ali considered a career in the performing arts. Yet professional belly dancing was not a consideration until 1961.

While working as a draftsman at Hydel Systems in West Los Angeles in 1961, Ali was invited by her collegues to a party given for a group of engineers. There she met George Raabia, an Arab PhD student at UCLA. When Raabia informed Ali of his Arab heritage, Ali responded that she too was of Arabic descent. Recognizing their

commonalities and wishing to see more of her socially, Raabia invited Ali to an upcoming international festival sponsored by the UCLA Arab Student Association. Informed that there would be belly dancers at the event, Ali replied that she too was a belly dancer, in spite of the fact that she had never even actually seen a belly dancer. When Raabia asked her to perform a belly dance at the approaching festival, Ali said she would think about it.

The decision to perform belly dance for the Arab Student Association at the Festival was not taken lightly. Before committing to performing, Ali wanted to observe belly dancers so she could know on what to base her performance. The search for belly dancers in Los Angeles led her to the Moulin Rouge Nightclub in Hollywood where a dinner showcase featured some of the most popular belly dancers at the time. The performers included Maya Medawar, Helene Kalinotes, Josephine Kshatriya and Leona Wood. Wood performed with her group Friends of Arabic Music and. Ali remembers,

> They performed a choreographed routine, I remember the song they danced to was Heyla Hob and they did a line dance of sorts. I didn't know who Leona was at the time and I wasn't that impressed by the performance, I just remember thinking that I could dance like that as well (interview June 23, 2005).

One night of firsthand observation did not satiate Ali's budding interest in belly dance. On a subsequent evening in the same week she went to The Fez, a Hollywood nightclub that featured Middle Eastern cabaret performances. Ali's mother, who had recently relocated with the family to Southern California, accompanied her. Besides herself and her mother the audience members consisted of Libyan male college students from the University of Southern California. Ali missed the scheduled belly dance

performance by Zanouba, but she was persuaded to dance informally with the Libyan students.

> I got up of course, already thinking that I could belly dance based on the one time I had seen it performed. Everyone kept telling me how good I was and I believed them… I stayed friends with those Libyan boys for a long time after and I would see them at the campus events where I would later dance. They became like my brothers, and always treated me with respect, as though I were part of the family. (interview June 23, 2005).

Receiving a positive response from the nightclub experience gave Ali a new level of confidence. The comments of praise proved her ability as an artist transcended beyond the visual into the physical realm. Accepted by her Libyan peers as a proficient Oriental dancer, Ali believed she had the skills to perform in a public setting for other Arabs with whom she felt increasing affinity. This new self-assurance coupled with the personal enjoyment gained from dancing for an audience motivated her to accept Raabia's earlier proposal for a belly dance at the approaching UCLA International Student event at Sproul Hall. Coincidentally Raabia worked part time at F & S Fabrics and supplied Ali with four yards of black chiffon fabric, which she and her mother used to construct her first Oriental dance costume.

This 1961 debut as a belly dancer at UCLA would mark a major turning point in Ali's life and career as a professional entertainer and dance researcher. Her active participation with the Arab Student Association allowed her to meet a network of individuals who became her future colleagues, teachers, mentors, and sources of ethnological inspiration. Most notably, the UCLA event provided Ali the opportunity for a personal introduction to the American Orientalist Leona Wood who was performing with her in the program. Leona Wood was an accomplished painter and designer whom

she had seen performing at the Moulin Rouge several weeks before. Ms. Wood had been impressed with Ali's grace and taste and asked to be introduced to her after the performance because she wanted to recruit her to her Friends of Arabic Music group (interview June 7, 2005).

Leona Wood's assured demeanor and hand-beaded costume--an elegant white cabaret style bra and belt, with rows and rows of pearl fringe--drew Ali's attention. After complimenting her on her attire, Wood responded by explaining that the quality of their costumes was "the difference between a few months work as opposed to one night's" (interview June 23, 2005). Besides receiving a subtle criticism pertaining to her own meager handmade attire, the remark signaled to Ali that Wood was someone with equally high (if not higher) artistic standards and skills. Learning that Wood was a fine painter, Ali accepted an invitation to join Wood's group, Friends of Arabic Music, where she would later appear as an Oriental soloist.

Leona Wood has a meticulous concern for staging folklore in an artistic manner, and felt that Oriental dance should be performed, whenever possible, by someone with a Middle Eastern background. In Wood's opinion, Ali's Arabic descent made for a more legitimate expression of cultural heritage when she performed her belly dance. Wood's concern for representing cultures appropriately caused her to cast Ali in her later group called the AMAN Folk Ensemble. According to Wood, the important elements of staging dance lie in the attention to atmosphere, costuming, and music (interview May 22, 2005). By having Ali perform belly dance, Wood gave the impression of staging a more genuine cultural experience.

In the years that followed her initial performance as a belly dancer Ali would become Leona Wood's favorite protégé. The relationship provided Ali with a mentor who was intellectually well versed in the subjects pertaining to Oriental dance performance, history, visual art, design, music and literature. Simultaneously Ms. Wood gained an apprentice who, especially with her guidance, had the physical and creative abilities to execute the highly disciplined level of what she considered an aesthetically pleasing art. With Wood serving as her creative consultant, Ali embarked on a professional belly dancing career officially beginning in 1961 that, for the decade following, expanded out of Southern California into Central and Northern California and Las Vegas, Nevada.

Participant observation with several international musicians and dancers provided Ali with her initial sources of data for her early belly dance practice. Working alongside foreign-born dancers such as Maya Medawar and Leila Elwi (also known under her stage name Zanouba) from Egypt, and Soroya and Fatima from Algeria inspired Ali to observe, replicate, and innovate (Ali 1983). Similarly, working in the company of American born dancers such as Greek-American Helene Kalinotes, Syrian-American Antoinette Aweyshak, Sicilian-American Josephine Kshatriya (now known as Jamilla Salimpour), Dahlena, and Leona Wood gave Ali familiarity with the current movement fashions of the growing American-based Oriental dance.

Personally interacting with diverse audiences caused Ali to mold and shape her performance according to specific aesthetic and cultural expectations. For example, Ali explains, "A Greek audience in San Diego expected a different dance vocabulary and

proficiency than an Armenian audience in Fresno. I would have to learn the different styles of belly dance that each audience preferred and perform them accordingly" (interview January 14, 2006). By learning an array of movement vocabularies in face-to-face situations Ali established her own unique style. Her aesthetic tastes continued to develop and change as she gained more exposure to the variety of belly dances originating in the Middle East.

This period was also formative in terms of her appreciation of music. American cabaret music encouraged an innovative synthesis of Middle Eastern performance traditions. Ali notes,

> By 1962, I had become a professional dancer and begun working in nightclubs. Since dancers were in great demand during the years that followed, I worked in most of the Middle Eastern clubs in California at one time or another, and the following observations are mostly firsthand.
>
> At that time many of the musicians working in the clubs were Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Armenian, Greek, and Turkish background and naturally sang and played music that reflected their homelands' styles. Many of the Arab musicians had little or no experience playing for dancers so the dancers developed routines to fit the music being played, and new styles of Arabic music and dance emerged. This format was generally composed of 4/4 rhythms, interspersed with one or two *taksims*, depending on how many musicians were in the group. Towards the end of the dance the tempo would accelerate, and as the drummers became more proficient it was popular to accompany the dancer with a drum solo. Because it was lively, and because there was often a Turkish or Armenian musician playing with the orchestra, Turkish music was frequently used for the finale. At one time it was popular to use a 9/8 rhythm or *karsilama.*
>
> One of the factors that made the American Oriental dance music different from its overseas counterpart was the general lack of cooperation between musicians and dancer. This is less of a problem in the Middle East where the dancer hires the musicians to play for her in the manner she chooses, whereas here, the musicians are independent and usually play to suit themselves. The new Arab-American dance music became a standard for dancers in America, and when an occasional musician came directly from the Middle East or Europe he was expected to follow the same format (Ali 1983a: 7).

Popular films were also a method of learning, understanding, and analyzing movement tradition. Ali asserts, "Imitation plays a large role in the teaching and comprehension of dance" (interview March 2, 2006). She articulates how the popular Cairo cinema essentially influenced Leona Wood to focus on Middle Eastern dance performance:

> Leona's serious interest in Middle Eastern dance really began in Manhattan. Nearly every weekend she would go to Brooklyn to see Egyptian films at the Minerva Theatre. While her ballet background was of little technical help in assimilating what she saw, it nonetheless provided the kind of discipline that enabled her to learn quickly (Ali 1983a: 9).

Modeling Wood's experience of learning more about Oriental dance from films, Ali sought movies depicting cabaret scenes in the 1960s. She remembers,

> Musicals with dance sequences produced in Cairo were often shown in the basement of the St Nicholas Church in Hollywood, a community center where young Middle Eastern Christians gathered to socialize and assert their cultural identity. As I referenced the popular Cairo cinema to learn more about Oriental dance performance, I simultaneously began to comprehend the severe lack of existing documentary materials exclusively dedicated to the subject of belly dance, and more, a lack of knowledge about the variety of people that perform it (interview May 1, 2006).

Ali contends that in addition to an absence of non-fiction films portraying belly dance, there was also a deficiency in the number of audio field recordings. She writes,

> There was little access to dance music recorded in the Middle East, although many of the major stores carried a wide selection of records featuring popular singers from Egypt and Lebanon. In a regular store one might find albums by Eddie "The Sheik" Kochak or Artie Barsmanian, two of the best known musicians of the American-Middle Eastern genre. Along with Egyptian singer Mohammed El Bakkar, their albums helped to bring Middle Eastern music to the attention of the American public (Ali 1983a: 7).

Ali credits Leona Wood and her husband Phillip Harland with introducing her to the non-commercial audio field recordings of folklorists Alexandru Tiberiu, Fumio Koizumi, and Hans Hickman. Ali recalls how the trio used to spend evenings together reviewing scarce ethnographic materials, including photographic essays from the Middle East. Captivated by folk music from Upper Egypt in particular, Ali noticed that unlike the popular cabaret compositions she knew from American nightclubs, the sounds produced in the regional Egyptian context differed in tonal and rhythmic qualities. She elaborates,

> Having listened to whatever Egyptian folk music was available in the United States, I yearned for more of the thrilling sounds of the *mizmar* and *tabl,* and I was eager to see for myself the various folk dances associated with this music especially those of the "notorious Ghawazee" (Ali 1980a: 18).

Ten years after beginning her career as a professional belly dancer in California, Ali set out to become the first American folklorist and dance ethnologist to document and record the music of the Ghawazee, a distinct category of Egyptian entertainers, as well as other urban and rural community networks in the Middle East. Having read about the frequently romanticized Ghawazee by authors such as Gustave Flaubert and Edward Lane, and seen ethnographic photos taken by Hickman and Koizumi, she wanted to experience, witness, and possibly study their famous dancing techniques. Ali believed the music of the contemporary Ghawazee would most likely exhibit similar qualities to the field recordings she had heard with Wood. She remembers,

> Leona and I spent much time discussing my proposed journey to Egypt to locate the Ghawazee…She spent hours reading and researching everything that was published about them in various languages, finally deciding which regions in Egypt would be the best places to locate them (interview May 12, 2006).

Having determined where to go in Egypt, Ali embarked on a three month long journey to Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and ultimately Egypt (see Ali 1980-1981). Though she was "resistant to the rigidity of scholastic methodology," Ali was not unfamiliar with theoretical and practical applications of folklore, anthropology, dance ethnology, and ethnomusicology (interview January 14, 2006). From 1961 to 1991 Ali, although not officially enrolled, regularly audited many UCLA courses in the department of ethnomusicology. Familiar with the scholarly approaches of lecturers such as Hazel Chung, Mantle Hood, and Harjo Susilo, she felt prepared to conduct her own ethnographic fieldwork based on her unofficial yet extensive university classroom experience. Participant observation in particular became one key methodological approach Ali favored from her interdisciplinary training at UCLA.

In 1971 Ali spent four weeks in Lebanon and Syria. She was still determined to see performances by the Egyptian Ghawazee and Ali left Beirut for Cairo after the month. Through friends in Beirut, an upper-middle class Egyptian family welcomed her and immediately shifted her from bustling Cairo to a vacation house in Alexandria. Ali explained to her newly encountered supporters that she had work commitments in Cairo, including finding Ghawazee performers. Writing about the initial response of her relatively affluent hosts, she comments:

> When I spoke about having come to Egypt to observe traditional dances and wanting to find a particular group of Ghawazee, they were appalled. They could find no justification for seeking out, "...something which has long been dead and was only dirty and unappealing when it was alive." After that I didn't bring up the subject again and I became more anxious than ever to be on my own (Ali 1980a: 20).

Ali quickly became "concerned that educated musicians and dancers in cities like Cairo were eager to blend into the world of Western music and that successful Arab artists were often contemptuous of their traditional country music and instrumentation." (interview, March 2, 2006) Her discovery of the lack of official attention to the folk music and dance genre in Egypt, especially to the lower classes, gave her reason to pursue interest in documenting them.

After vacationing with her hosts in Alexandria Ali moved to a flat in Do'ke, Cairo. New Egyptian friends, among them a local woman named Fadilla who admitted to a fascination with Ghawazee dance, suggested locations in urban Cairo where Ghawazee may perform (Ali 1980a, 1980b, 1980c). A telephone call to the Granada nightclub preceded a formal invitation by famed *Gazheya* and nightclub owner Sofia Helme. Ali and Fadilla were invited to enjoy a cabaret show in which Helme's troupe performed a variety of staged cabaret and regional dances. At this time, Ali came to appreciate the broad range of Ghawazee dances and subsequent choreographic interpretations created for the stage. She describes Helme's dance:

> She appeared in a delicate pink chiffon costume with iridescent crystal beads, fluttering a pale green veil across her arms. This might have presented a delicate image if it were not for the expanse of chiffon fitted over her ample mid-section. The first part of her dance was typical of the modern *raqs esh sharqi* style. During the *taksim* she produced a *rasha* or shivering shimmies while shifting her hips from side to side and waving her fingers softly. During the finale she played *segat* and moved in a *beledi* style (Ali 1980a: 20)

Ali's first field trip to the Middle East did not take place without an effort at visual documentation. She was introduced to Egyptian choreographer Ibrahim Akeif. With the assistance of Akeif and that of choreographer Mahmoud Reda, Ali recorded live

music that accompanied Akeif's private dance practicum at his studio in Cairo (Ali 1980b). These initial recordings first made on Reda's audio recording equipment would later serve as music for Ali's staged dance performances in America. Ali credits Reda for his initial encouragement and maintains that he did not expect payment or other subsidiaries for their help. In Ali's words, "Reda was happy to assist me and appreciated my interest in documenting Egyptian folkdance" (interview April 9, 2007).

In addition to audio recordings, Ali took hundreds of ethnographic photographs during the first field trip. Using a Rolli 35 Ali visually captured still frames of dances as well as fashion styles, costuming, and other material customs in the urban and rural areas she visited. Unlike a casual or tourist photographer, Ali's heightened attention to detail helped formulate her documentary perspective. Moreover, visually representing daily life activities, which surrounded the dance experience consistently factored into her ethnochoreological viewpoint. As a result, Ali possesses a valuable still photo archive depicting Middle Eastern customs and dance events between the years of 1971 and 1997. Ali explains the importance of her photo archive:

> The images show continuity and change in traditional customs… When I first arrived and began documenting the region in 1971, global trends and fashions were still limited, you wouldn't see as many people wearing Western clothing or incorporating as many Western-Ballet and Jazz type dance moves like you do now…The first series of pictures I took in 1971 are some of the best that I have…Since I did not have a video camera at that time, I spent a lot of time taking still pictures of people, costumes, and geographical landscapes (interview, May 12, 2006).

Upon return to the United States after three months abroad, Ali incorporated the subtle styling of her Egyptian colleagues in her own dance performances. Determined to share her knowledge about what she observed and practiced in the Middle East, Ali

began to teach dance and give lectures as well as perform her new movement vocabulary, accompanied by the audio recordings she made, in nightclubs and at hired parties. She spoke with Wood about her experiences in Egypt and in particular, about the Ghawazee dances she observed. Together they concluded a return field trip to Egypt was necessary in order to further document the network of individuals. Ali writes, "Although I had seen a variety of dancers in Egypt, defined by the locals as 'Ghawazee,' I was still determined to locate the group whose life style, costumes, and music were those that had originally excited my interest" (Ali 1981: 18).

Before leaving on her second journey to the Middle East in 1973, Ali purchased a used portable monaural Uher "Report L" reel-to-reel tape recording deck for five hundred dollars. Although she was unfamiliar with audio recording technology, she learned the basic principles from Phillip Harland, who had served as her technological advisor. Unaccompanied and toting the weighty device in a specially designed, handmade tapestry bag, she again set off to non-commercialized destinations.

Vivian Hammamjian's family in Cairo hosted Ali on her second journey. Acquainted with Hammamjian's relatives living in Beverly Hills, Ali explains her willingness to accept their hospitality. "They offered me the security of a large family, and I didn't have to be apologetic about my profession with them" (Ali 1981: 18). Ali made the decision to travel to Luxor, after inquiring about "the kind of Ghawazee I hoped to find." Lolo, Vivianne's brother in Cairo, suggested that the Nawar family of dancing girls known as the Banat Mazin would exhibit the characteristics most similar to what she had described.

Leaving south for Upper Egypt, Mahmoud arranged for Ali to attend a recording session set up by the Ministry of Culture for a group of Japanese musicologists. She writes:

> Since this was to be my first opportunity to tape live music, I was somewhat nervous and one of the musicologists made some helpful suggestions about sound levels and where to place the microphone. I conceded to their professionalism and sat back quietly while they requested particular kinds of music. It soon became apparent that they were mainly interested in recording short samples of each instrumental and vocal style. The artists seemed to be trying to guess what we wanted of them and were not given the opportunity to develop the music in a natural manner. When the musicologists had everything they wanted, I requested some dance music and proceeded to amuse the musicians by dancing until they relaxed and began to enjoy playing the music (Ali 1981: 18).

Unlike other ensembles of that era, the musicians brought together in the Al Summar Theatre did not normally perform together. Rather, they had been hand selected by the Ministry of Culture to represent the best players of particular instruments such as *mizmar, argul* and *rababa.* As a consequence, the audio recordings that Ali engineered document a rare combination of improvisational medleys performed by a temporary collective of musicians deemed most talented by official agents of Egyptian culture in 1973. More significantly they demonstrate continuity in performative expression from earlier recordings. (Once recorded on audio, film, or video the specific performer or performers often serve as an authentic representation of folklore for the mass media consuming audience. Although the community may not always regard the documented performers as specialists, the fact that they are recorded can denote authority to those viewing the performance outside of its original context. See Bishop and Prins 2003, Bishop and Magliocco 2006, and Brady 1999).

Ali was referred to Upper Egypt's cultural ambassador, Mohammed "El Baron" Khalil. Khalil was a powerful patron in the region and arranged for an escorted "horse driven buggy ride through the narrow streets of the village where the Banat Mazin live" (Ali 1981: 18). She writes about her first interaction with the Nawar Gypsies, daughters of Yousef Maazin, revealing how they exemplified the photographic images and audio recordings made by Koizumi, Tiberiu, and Hickmann. She remarks:

> I saw the Banat Mazin for the first time waiting for the musicians by the boat. Their costumes were covered with long black dresses and they wore veils over their hair crossed under the chin for protection from the evening breezes on the river...The girls removed their veils, each revealing a glittering, cresent shaped headdress which they referred to as *Taj*, and pulling their gowns over their heads, I saw they were wearing costumes the same as those in Koizumi's Ghawazee photographs...(Ali 1981: 19).

Ali witnessed living examples of prior fieldwork. She learned the dances of the Ghawazee firsthand during her encounter with the Banat Mazin.

> As the music accelerated, they added a rapid vibrating shimmy to their little stamps and changed the segat pattern to a double straight time. Then they stepped back and motioned for me to go forward and dance. The music was wonderfully familiar to me, as I had been dancing to the Koizumi and Hickmann recordings for many years, and although their style was different then anything I had seen, I was able to imitate them at once, being accustomed to the technique required for their walking vibrating shimmies... (Ali 1981: 19).

In the weeks that followed, Ali learned more dance patterns from the Banat Mazin and gained a deeper understanding of their movement style and musical relationship through participant observation. Connections between daily life, choreographic expression, and identity as entertainers became more apparent as her time spent in the Mazin household increased. Khalil continued to assist Ali in the Luxor region with her endeavor to record traditional folk music that were deemed free of popular components

from urban and Western influences. Sections of audio recordings made during the 1973 trip to Egypt appear on tracks of *Music of the Ghawazee* and *Music of the Fellahin.*

Ali traveled to the Tunisian city of Sfax as well as the Algerian oasis town of Bou Sada where she surveyed and collected additional audio performances by a variety of folk artists. Edited portions of the recordings appear on the audio releases, *Tunisian Rhythms* and *Music of the Ouled Nail.* Ali was given the opportunity to perform at the Municipal Theatre in Sfax where she danced the informal and staged customs of her North African colleagues. A direct result of this interaction was a better understanding of Egyptian, Tunisian, and Algerian music and dance.

Upon returning to the United States, Ali disseminated her embodied knowledge by teaching similar movements, improvisational and composed choreographies, and musical appreciation to members of her Los Angeles based dance company, established in 1972, as well as students in her instructional workshops and classes. She used her field audio recordings as accompaniment to her performances during these on and offstage interactions. As one of the first American-born belly dancers to promote awareness about the variety of regional dances from Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia, Ali gave importance to movement vocabulary as well as performance customs. By disseminating knowledge about Egyptian folk, Ghawazee, Tunisian, and Algerian dances through face-to-face encounters as well as onstage performances, Ali intended to preserve the folkloric repertoire she learned during her research abroad.

In 1974, Ali, living in Los Angeles, received an invitation from the Omar Khayyam nightclub in London to bring her dance company to perform under a six-month

contract. Making Egyptian and North African folkloric repertoire an equal priority to the popular cabaret *raqs sharqi* dance, her dancers performed composed choreographies mimicking dances of the Ghawazee and other individuals she encountered. Ali writes,

> By 1974, I had choreographed a Ghawazee dance in the style of the Benat Maazin as a part of my dance company's repertoire for the Omar Khayyam in London. Wadia, the lead musician in our orchestra, was from Cairo and had worked for the Egyptian Ministry of Culture. He told us he was delighted to see that we faithfully copied his favorite dancers. I was surprised that he knew about them since just a few years earlier they seemed to be known only by the locals and a few musicologists. He explained how the Ministry of Culture had recently taken notice of them and had brought them to Cairo for a television special (Ali 1981b: 20)

Returning to Egypt from London in 1974, Ali borrowed an 8mm film camera with no sync sound from the Bedouin merchant Ali Gabry. The apparatus recorded up to four minutes per role of film and required her to simultaneously record audio on a separate device. She captured segments of a variety of Egyptian music and dance performances that would later appear in her documentary release *Dances of Egypt* and the audio recordings *Music of the Fellahin, Music of the Ghawazee, Tunisian Rhythms* and *Tunisian Dances*. The materials she had accumulated by the end of 1974 made her aware of the necessity of collecting more audio and film footage so as to reveal continuities and consistencies in the documented research.

Citing advances in technology as a temporal and motivational factor in her subsequent field research trips, Ali asserts a belief in the enormous potential of film and audio production in preserving, perpetuating, and disseminating folk dance and music (interview June 7, 2005, interview June 22, 2005, interview May 12, 2006). She began to realize that a greater number of individuals could more deeply understand the music and

dances of the Middle East by watching or listening to various documentary recordings, especially if the chance to experience live performance on location in the Middle East did not present itself. With new audio visual technologies, she planned to return to the region in order to collect and document more music and dance performance; however, she would have to wait until 1977 when advances in audio-visual technology, specifically super 8 film and real-time sound were available to the common American consumer marketplace.

Before returning to Egypt and North Africa Ali purchased a Sanyo super 8 camera for five hundred dollars with the intent of filming the individuals she had interacted with in the years previous. She did not embark on this particular journey alone, as her brother Jerome accompanied her to assist with the technical challenges that included carrying the bulky equipment to and from various field sites. Again with assistance and an invitation from "El Baron," Ali proceeded to document the current dance events taking place in the Luxor region, including weddings, informal gatherings, and a celebrity party for the Hollywood cast of "Death on the Nile." Prior social contacts in Tunisia also arranged for a stay among the performers associated with the Comite des Affaires Culturelles in Sfax after the research in Egypt ended. The segments of the audio-visual materials she collected during the 1977 field research trip in Egypt and North Africa make up an important component of Ali's *Dances of Egypt and Dances of North Africa* video and DVD as well as the ARAF audio releases *Music for the Oriental Dance, Tunisian Dances*, and *Tunisian Rhythms*.

Steady advances in audio and visual technology continued to enable successive field research trips because they represent the subjects in what she feels is an accurate and culturally sensitive manner. Receiving positive feedback from audiences at guest lectures, various workshops and performances helped Ali understand how her documentary materials, could supplement the surprising lack of knowledge about Middle Eastern folklore outside of the immediate region. She elaborates:

> Over the year's I've seen a considerable change in attitude by American dancers towards dancers from the Middle East. Coming from a culture where "*more* is better", American's used to complain that Arab dancers didn't put enough movement into their dance. Now we have learned to appreciate the ease with which the Orientals isolate their hips and the pleasure they derive from the music as well as from the audience response (Ali 1982: 22)

Ali's documentation preserves an alternative view of popular belly dance and provides the viewing audience with a sense of contrast to existing representations of Middle Eastern dance.

Between the years of 1977 and 1983, Ali worked on finishing productions of her existing materials in addition to performing and teaching workshops worldwide. After the purchase of a Panasonic Prosumer VHS video camera, Ali returned to the Middle East in 1983 where she continued to conduct research among her established social networks from prior years in the field. This time, a small, borrowed Sony playback monitor allowed Ali to review the recorded video footage without having to develop film. Upon her return to Los Angeles, Ali was encouraged to release her collected materials on video. This required editing her previous field material. With the support and assistance of a variety of technically inclined friends and specialists, Ali's skills at linear and non-

linear editing were polished. The video *Dances of Egypt* resulted from her first editing project.

Advanced video production became readily available for non-professional consumers in the 1980s. Ali invested her time and profits from professional dancing into audiovisual equipment. Technological advances offered her crisper, cleaner images to work with accompanied by stereo sound captured in real time. .Ali states, "As soon as there was a viable means, making *Dances of Egypt* was the natural thing to do" (interview May 5, 2006).

Subsequent research trips to the Middle East in 1988 and 1997 followed as Ali could afford the changes in camera and recording technology. In 1988, the purchase of a Sony 3 CCD High 8 analog camera preceded a field trip to Egypt and North Africa. She re-recorded the Banat Mazin along with dancers and folk musicians in Tunisia. In 1997 she purchased a Sony TRV 310 High 8 Digital before her return to Egypt. On this trip she filmed an urban wedding in Cairo at which she performed. At present the footage collected in 1997 is awaiting post-production. Ali feels that the progressive improvements in recording equipments facilitated better representations of individuals living and performing Middle Eastern folk traditions.

The progressive miniaturization of field recording equipment allowed Ali to more easily undertake the procedures associated with recording live performance in the field context. As a result Ali invested the majority of monies she earned through performing in cabarets, lectures, and workshops in rapidly changing audiovisual technology. The developments in technology essentially enhanced her sensibility as a visual artist, which

compelled her to produce the highest quality work possible but one that is rooted in her own experience rather than one of an outside researcher.

Ali's gradual accumulation of archival material prompted a sense of a responsibility to circulate her intimate knowledge from her years in the field. She believes her numerous audio and video productions and extensive archive of field recording could be put to greatest effect offered by utilizing digital technology for global dissemination. Though costly in terms of time and money, the acquisition of the most up-to-date technology is necessary for dance researchers like Aisha Ali, who seek to preserve and perpetuate folk performance for future generations.

Transferring hours of documentary recordings into contemporary digital formats, learning Macintosh Final Cut pro editing system, and graphic design programs for creating cover art and advertisements occupies a majority of Ali's daily work schedule today. Because much of her collection exists in non-digital formats such as analogue audio, VHS video, 8mm and super 8 film formats, more time, effort, personal funds, and persistence is required to learn new forms of digital technology, an investment that demonstrates Ali's compulsion to represent Middle Eastern folkdance and music to a global audience in a manner that she deems as truthful and aesthetically acceptable.

To reach her potential expanded worldwide audience, mastery of filming with a video camera, and video and film editing in addition to audio editing became a necessary component of Ali's creative ability. By expanding her artistic practice to include media capable of global distribution Ali has reformed her creative focus to include recording and portraying a broader range of dance events on film. Now situated among her easel,

canvas, sewing machine, and mirrors are camera decks, computer hard drives, sound mixers, and an expansive collection of tapes and videocassettes. Practical knowledge of equipment and editing technology forms a major component of Ali's contemporary artistic production. For a self-directed, self-supported artist and dance ethnographer like Ali, this specialized knowledge has become crucial in order to represent performance traditions in a variety of formats.

Chapter 4
The Intersection of Performance, Filmmaking, and Ethnography

This chapter reviews Ali's work as artist, ethnographic filmmaker, and performer and discusses how these crafts intersect. Of particular importance is how she developed skill, persistence, and ethics associated with documentary filmmaking. The processes by which Ali constructs her art and the aesthetic framework from which she operates are described and analyzed. I consider Ali's motivations for documenting and preserving Arabic folklore. I explore the construction of tradition in this process. In addition the personal challenges and artistic conflicts that arise as Ali engages with rapidly changing digital and video technology are addressed. The analysis of her process, aesthetic framework, and motivations provides a deeper understanding of not only her sources of inspiration that encourages perseverance despite technological challenges, but also provides insight into her significant contribution to the preservation of Middle Eastern folklore.

In the 2000 article "Interpreting a Dancer's Discourse on Improvisation" (2000) Anca Giurchescu begins by citing John Blacking's motto "What we think and what we do depends on who we are socially, so that the essence of a sign or symbol rests not in the object, the product, so much as in the creative process of making and using it." Giurchescu follows this statement with a discussion of the dance making process. Giurchescu, an ethnochoreologist who specializes in Romanian folklore, dedicates much of her attention to the creative processes of individual performers. She writes in 1983,

> The creative process, regardless of how expressed, is implicit to the dance's existence and, with reference to the folk dance, each new reproduction

> demonstrates a creative approach. Therefore, in a broad historical perspective, each actual performance is in fact only a "link" in the unbroken chain of all of the creative enactments realised in the past by all its predecessors, and which are potentially to be continued in the future by the successors" (Giurchescu 1983: 25).

By considering techniques, material resources, and process of learning expressive behavior, we better understand the final creative product. Scholarship within the field of folklore often affirms the significance of creative processes in the production of traditional arts and crafts. Jones (1989) describes the behavioral and technical processes of Cumberland chair maker Chester Cornett in "Craftsman of the Cumberlands." Cornett's selection of materials, innovative techniques, and his aesthetic framework are all discussed in detail. Jones concludes, "Technological and creative processes...are intertwined; evaluations of products admit considerations of both fitness for use and appearance (Jones 1989:xi). Folklorists Sabina Magliocco (2004), who explores the processes of constructing altars in her book "Neo-Pagan Sacred Art and Altars, Making Things Whole," and Patrick Polk and Timothy Correll, who describe the technical process of reconstructing mass-produced objects in the book "The Cast-Off Recast" (1999) also consider the art making process specifically.

Folklore and ethnochoreology studies fall short of exploring media production as an art making process, as an aspect of their production especially significant at a time when many performers are learning how to dance via video or DVD. How dance tradition is passed down through multi-media and the technical processes of inscribing it in history are the subjects for further reasearch. This chapter bolsters the body of folklore and ethnochoreology literature using Aisha Ali as a case study.

Ali's field recordings formed the foundation for her first LP releases, *Music of the*

Fellahin and *Music of the Ghawazee* in 1973. Producing the first discs required an understanding of sound mixing and engineering. With the assistance of Leona Wood and Philip Harland, she gained knowledge of the tools and technology associated with audio editing and production. She recalls,

> Phil did all the preparations and some editing, and it was he who taught me what kind of equipment to buy and how to work the audio controls… Leona wrote the liner notes for the book giving the history of the Ghawazee on DA 700 [*Music of the Ghawazee*] and Phil wrote the music notations. On DA 702 [*Music of the Fellhin*], all the liner notes and music notations were written by Phillip. We spent a long time discussing how the albums should look, and what text should be included… For the DA 700 cover, we used the photoengraveur *Danse du Sabre* by Jean-Leon Jerome. For the cover of 702, Leona did the painting "An Egyptian Wedding" (interview August 25, 2006).

Positive reinforcement about the content of the LPs and the appearance of the covers and the liner notes confirmed Ali's notion that the audio recordings had value for those interested in Middle Eastern folklore and performance. The quality of the LP established an intended association between Ali, her documentary products, and traditional styles of dance and music specific to certain regions. Successfully editing, packaging, and distributing the audio field recordings stimulated Ali's desire to learn how to edit and release her film footage.

From her first efforts at field recording Ali accrued and compiled footage in three different visual formats: 8mm, super 8, and VHS. Each successive data collection process increased in visual and audio quality and decreased in cost and size making the field collection process more manageable. Although the visual and audio quality was consistently improving Ali preferred the idea of editing her earliest 8mm film footage together with later video formats to demonstrate continuity through time.

Linear Editing

Before the existence of non-linear, computer-based, digital editing systems, the assembly of homemade documentary and ethnographic films occurred in a linear fashion. The linear editing system that Ali first worked with required physically cutting and taping together pieces of 8mm film from the 1974 and 1977 trips to Egypt. A tedious, costly, and time consuming process, linear editing meant that Ali often had to destroy quantities of her original footage in order to re-sequence and effectively re-represent the series of the dance events she had recorded. Ali recalls how she informally gained the practical knowledge associated with linear editing.

> I was working with Ali Hasan Ali on his thesis between 1976 and 1978. He was attending the UCLA [film school] and taught me everything that he learned about editing. We used to work with white gloves and handle the tiny strips of 8mm film hanging the strips on the wall in sequences… The white gloves were for cleaning and dusting the film and preventing finger prints… We worked with video at UCLA in Melnitz Hall for his project, and for my project he helped me cut my 8 mm film… I remember in 1978 we were working on the film that I took of the Ghawazee, Tahtib, Housney, Abdl Khrem, etc. in Egypt, and Nabila and all the Tunisian materials… The subject of his thesis was folk dance of Upper Egypt. The video he produced consisted of performances of Egyptian folk dances by my dance company, my slides from Upper Egypt with my music as background and a narrative that I helped write... working on his project eventually inspired me to portray my own version of the Dances of Egypt and North Africa (interview August 25, 2006).

Learning the production process by observation and imitation, Ali gained the experiential and technological details necessary for a basic and primary understanding of film editing (for more on learning and transmitting folklore see Georges and Jones 1995). Similar to the manner in which she first learned to paint and dance, a general comprehension of the tools and approaches to film editing occurred via practical and

hands-on experience.

Ali labored over sensible and feasible editing choices by making careful yet experimental cuts on her 8mm film negatives. Her goal was to preserve and share valuable dance footage, notably the Banat Mazin performing on a Nile riverboat in 1974. The labor-intensive process reminded her of the value of the footage. She recalls,

> I would send my film cassettes to the Kodak lab. They came back in little 4-minute reels, which I edited and taped together ... After I had finished editing and splicing my material on a longer reel I would take it to be copied onto a master reel.... It was an expensive process for the time... (interview August 25, 2006)

Ali maintains that aesthetic choices made during the earliest editing processes were initially based on visual fluidity. For example, the 8mm camera she borrowed in 1974 recorded short, four-minute time sequences with no sync-sound. This presented brief sequences of 8mm film limiting the palette of documentary material she had to choose from. She was further challenged by non-synchronized audio, as it did not allow her the choice of editing by ear according to a smooth sound. "I learned how to sync sound through trial and error," she recalls (interview August 25, 2006).

Ali states that making the aesthetic choices about where and when to edit her 8 mm footage was "purely instinctual, polished in the only obvious way they could be" (interview August 22, 2006). Yet as an improvisational and stage choreographer, her experiential knowledge about the dynamics between among, musicians, and audience likely facilitated an understanding of representing movement in mediated formats. Directing the filming and editing live performance gave Ali an "instinctual" understanding of re-representing specific dance event on film and video. She recalls,

> When I was at UCLA with [Ali Hasan] Ali in 1976, we were editing live performances on the fly with mixers and switchers. I was on the sound stage with headphones to give directions to the people mixing the footage on the technical end. I didn't see any other kinds of editing going on, I was not in the editing room but on the stage pointing the cameras in the right direction… Later I remember him giving me a tour of all the cutting rooms with film strips hanging everywhere and I felt excitement about the possibility of making dance films from my own field footage. It seemed a natural, progressive step after directing so many live performances… (interview August 22, 2006).

Ali's first full-length documentary video, *Dances of Egypt,* was released in 1992. Before its release Ali "traveled around the US with a large projector" showing the shorter, edited versions of her field experiences at academic lectures and dance workshops. Ali recognized this was a significant pedagogical tool for effectively communicating various situations and contexts associated with dance performance in the Middle East. By watching, film students who were unable to travel abroad and experience regional dance firsthand gained knowledge about the range of dance vocabularies and the event contexts that foster them. Ali saw how film could promote kinesthetic as well as cultural and customary knowledge. She writes,

> Films can be a valuable study aid… When I first began showing my films and slides of Egyptian and North African dancers from the countryside, I sometimes got the feeling that the "real thing" did not match the students' expectations… Folk dances from all over the Middle East once considered far afield of Oriental dance are now not only being recognized as the source of the movements, but the folk versions themselves are becoming popular (Ali 1982: 22).

Concerned with making a documentary film with VHS equipment of that period, Ali began to explore new editing techniques with colleague and friend, UCLA ethnomusicology professor Nazir Jarazbhouy. Jarazbhouy and his wife Amy Caitlin home-produced documentary style films and videos from their fieldwork experiences throughout India. Ali describes the processes and equipment encompassed by her

learning of VHS video editing and production in detail,

> I remember my first purchased video recorder was by Technicolor and it was 1/4 inch. It was a very good system, but they never got off the ground and were discontinued. We first began in the early eighties on VHS machines and we used Nazir's consumer editing equipment. Later we used a Sony Umatic VO 9850 and VO 9800 with a SONY Controller and a separate titler... Nazir's main influence was telling me what equipment to buy, teaching me to use it, and motivating me to work on things.
>
> Next, around 1985... I used the Umatic editing equipment that was in the film and video lab at UCLA. I used to go there around eight PM and work until dawn. Of course I was alone, so I taught myself the intricacies connected with the whole process. I still have the rough cuts that I made of *Dances of Egypt*. It was during that period that I shared my articles with the field and lab classes at UCLA in the dance and ethnomusicology departments.... Next, Nazir showed me how to use the very two VHS machines that I still have in my rack, which are the Panasonic AF 50 pro-line. I bought them from Nazir later when super VHS came out and he bought the Super AG 60 equipment. I sold the (Panasonic Digital AV Mixer JMX12) controller about 15 years ago. That goes with the AG 5 but the VTRs are still running. Next, sometime in the late eighties, Nazir bought the Panasonic Umatic SP and I would rent that from him for months while he was in India (interview August, 22 2006).

Using the borrowed equipment of Jarazbhouy as well as the equipment that she purchased, Ali gradually arranged in a linear fashion the 8mm, super 8, and VHS footage accumulated during her field trips to Egypt. While steady advances in her camera and recording equipment allowed for enhanced qualities of field material to work with, a myriad of often-unpredictable situations prevented Ali from capturing dance events and performances in their entirety on video or film. The discontinuities on super 8 and VHS film include the finite lengths of blank cassettes that required breaks in filming to reload stock or dance event participants moving in, out, or in front of her camera's focus on the performer. As a result, the choices of material appropriate and appealing for *Dances of Egypt* were often restricted and required editing despite improving video technology.

The entire process from the time she began to edit her footage expressly for the purpose of making a complete documentary took more than six years. She remembers,

> The film you see in *Dances of Egypt* was not transferred into a different medium until the middle 80's when we began combining it with video footage. At that time a Telecine machine was used to convert the film... *Dances of Egypt* was made solely on linear equipment rented from Nazir and was released in 1991... I used my two VHS decks to do the rough cut before I rented the pro equipment, which, I used to make the finished product (interview August 22, 2006).

After fully mastering and producing work on linear editing systems, Ali began her next film project in 1993. Non-linear editing on Avid, Amiga, and Macintosh Final Cut Pro editing systems would be the next creative and mechanical challenge.

Non-Linear Digital Editing

Presently, most home-produced film editing is performed on nonlinear computer editing systems. The specialized computer systems store both audio and visual images in digital formats. The editing systems are called nonlinear because film editors can promptly conjure up images and sound tracks from the computer's digital files, rather than sorting through a length of tape in linear fashion and syncing sound at a later time. The editor works in a timeline, which is non-destructible, because she always has her original files to return to. Looking and listening for the proper scene or audio clip, nonlinear systems allow the editor to carry out alterations in film almost instantaneously. With a nonlinear editing system, an editor can immediately review edits on a television monitor and choose the appropriate sound accompaniments, special effects such as cross dissolves, and image sequencing.

In 1995 Ali purchased an Amiga computer system combined with Newtek's

Video Toaster and Flyer software in order to keep up with the changing methods of home audio and video production. This system allowed her to experiment with non-linear editing techniques and digitally generated effects. She recalls,

> The whole set up including hard drives cost fifty thousand dollars. Hard drives used to be really expensive. Part of that quote includes the eighteen thousand dollars and something for the Sony Betacam SP VTR… Newtek still produces the Flyer and a Special effects generator called Lightwave, but now everything is IBM based (interview August 24, 2006)

In order to process audio and video tracks in a manner that she considers acceptable mastering the Amiga computer equipment became a necessity. Ali had experience on Dan Neuman's home Avid system and this practice assisted in learning the Amiga's programs. A friend and colleague of Ali, Neuman, former chair of the UCLA ethnomusicology department, encouraged her to produce a second full-length documentary solely focusing on the dances of North Africa from an ethnochoreologist's perspective. Sitting alongside Neuman while he performed the main technical procedures related to editing her footage, Ali grasped the key concepts and methods associated with non-linear computer editing such as digital effects and rendering. She reminisces, "As Dan Neuman said when we were working on *Dances of North Africa*, "you're the editor, I'm just being the mechanic" (interview August 24, 2006).

Ali learned the most modern computer editing by interacting face-to-face with friends, colleagues, and technologically knowledgeable acquaintances. "Tekkies" is the term Ali uses for the cohorts who have guided her knowledge of her computer-based work; friends who have continuously made themselves available. Ali occasionally pays for the "Tekkies" technological services and counseling, but also trades dance lessons or

use of her equipment. Over time, Ali became skilled with non-linear, digitally based workstations, and produced her second film *Dances of North Africa*.

Dances of North Africa was released in 1995 and was edited in using both an Avid and Amiga technologies. Ali explains,

> First we did all the editing on Dan Neuman's Avid and then when I took it to Santa Monica Video to be mastered, they found sound-track discrepancies. They recommended an expert who would fix it for me but it would have cost an arm and a leg. At that time I had just bought the Amiga, so Jason (Norris) helped me transfer the video master where I was able to correct all the sound... The sound track corrections were adjusted after capturing the finished SP 1/2" tape on the Amiga... The person who first told me about the concept of non-linear editing, and talked me into getting the Amiga, was a friend of David Herman's called VideoMike. He spent a year teaching me how to use it. Jason (Norris) came after VideoMike and Jason also donated countless hours helping me. Originally Jason worked for Anti Gravity Solutions in Santa Monica, which was run out of a garage on Montana Avenue... When Jason moved to Texas, Alex (Nivichanov) was recommended as the last of the Amiga techs, and that's how we became friends (interview August 24, 2006).

Experimentation and self-education forms an important component of Ali's technical learning process especially with digital media. Ali affirms, "I did all my tape to digital editing on the Amiga by myself. The Newtek people thought that was really innovative and used to brag about it at their conferences" (interview August 22, 2006). She explains that once fluent in the basic principles of a particular computer program, repetition makes a significant contribution to the productive process. Using the Amiga editing system as an example, she said,

> I practiced editing on the Amiga by doing a lot of audio work. After the soundtrack of *Dances of North Africa* was cleaned and completed, I used the Amiga to work on the video *Dancing with Aisha Volume I: Tunisian Raqs Shaabi*... What I mostly used the Amiga for was audio editing and making short clips for various presentations... I did have some help with *Dancing With Aisha (Volume I Tunisian Raqs Shaabi)* but for the most part I put it together on the Amiga by myself learning the program with the usual trial and error... In 1997 I

> was finally able to digitally re-master and re-release the entire collection of audiocassettes and LPs on CD format (interview August 25, 2006).

Another challenge in non-linear editing began with her purchase of a Macintosh G-4 computer in 1998. She explains,

> In order to share our work, we have become so dependant on the Internet and digital technology... I stopped producing LPs and cassettes when they were no longer in demand. I absolutely had to start working in the digital realm if I wanted to continue distributing and selling ARAF productions. This included making all of the videos available on DVD format. I don't even bother putting the new releases out on NTSC or PAL because everyone asks for DVDs now which can be programmed to play in any region.... I had to buy the Mac because the Amiga was becoming rapidly outdated and there was little support available. (interview September 16, 2006).

Using the Final Cut Pro program for Macintosh, which she still works with today, Ali has the ability to home produce digital media such as CDs and DVDs. The complexities of the Macintosh, like the other editing systems Ali had used, requires an informally trained editor to spend lengthy amounts of time testing what works and what does not. While able to produce materials in a home studio setting, producing materials in a rapid manner presents a challenge for home users. Ali explains her unique situation,

> Between the time that I bought the Amiga and the Mac the main projects I worked on was learning how to use that equipment, traveling, and getting more footage... I was doing a lot of festivals for the city with my dance company, so I was more active as a choreographer and performer and I was conducting workshops in Germany, New Zealand, Australia, and all over the US. I was unable to spend the excessive amounts of time necessary for releasing my products on a regular basis. That is why the release dates of the videos and CDs are often pushed back, sometimes for years (interview September 9, 2006).

In addition to editing Ali designs the cover art, oversees the liner notes of her materials, and supervises advertising in outlets such as dance magazines, scholarly journals and the Internet. Working in Adobe Photoshop and Quark is also necessary for

Ali to complete the product. The complexity of these programs requires a considerable additional amount of time, thus contributing to the irregular release of her abundant documentary dance data.

Even though Ali has produced multiple audio-visual productions and continues to work daily on forthcoming releases, she identifies herself as an artist. She expresses the desire to eventually return to painting on canvas, explaining,

> Video and preparing the graphics for the covers and ads, as well as dancing and filming dance has occupied much of my creative energy over the last twenty years. I expect that I will eventually go back to painting, that is, after I complete all of the unfinished work that needs to be done for the future *ARAF* productions... I still have an abundance of valuable footage I have acquired over the years waiting on the shelves to be (digitally) archived, edited, and suited for public release. I just need time to do it all (interview May 6, 2006).

Dance researchers such as Ali frequently continue working as teachers and dancers in order to financially support production endeavors. For self-taught and self-funded filmmakers the necessities of earning a living from other professions prohibit the full time pursuit of making documentary productions. Therefore it is not surprising that the accumulation of unedited field footage collected by ethnochoreologists far exceeds the number of complete documentary productions available for public consumption.

Aesthetics in Documentary

Ali judges her audiovisual productions according to the same rigorous aesthetic standards as her other creative endeavors such as painting, choreographing, and costume design. It is not possible to develop a product with little artistic appeal for an instant or immediate release. Her penchant facilitates the responsibilities of developing, designing, and

creating the packaging materials associated with *ARAF* audio, video and digital media. In addition to saving the cost of hiring professional editors and CAD trained artists, Ali explains that none of the specialized computer experts could meet her aesthetic criteria. She explains, "More than several times I tried to turn it over to someone who was supposed to be expert, but the results were always far from acceptable to me by my standards" (interview September 12, 2006). She explains her aesthetic taste:

> My taste runs toward traditional dance and music forms, and I am open to all cultures and eras. If the dance is staged, I enjoy good dancers beautifully (or if not beautifully, appropriately) costumed, presented in magical lighting, whether illuminated by nature or by talented lighting designers, in settings devoid of visual distractions whether they be in the form of functional equipment, furniture or simply bad set design, and I want the sound of the music to be clear and (if amplified) without too much distortion... A good dance is performed with vitality, grace, truthfulness, and skill... The best dance is the one that seems best at the moment or for the occasion. When I think of any of my favorite dancers of the past, I cannot always remember exactly what it was that they did well, only that their performances left a good impression. I think that possibly my idea of the best dance is an embodiment of all the good qualities of movement that I have ever observed. (January 23, 2007).

Ideally Ali would prefer to depict her recorded observations and experiences with little editing, but she believes the value of ethnographic data becomes maximized with postproduction practices. She gives an example of her filmmaking philosophy,

> When I am filming dance in the field, I make no value judgment as to whether or not it is good or bad. I am mainly interested in recording what is there to be seen at that time, in that particular place. For this reason all the dancing is interesting to me. Since it was always done with a single hand held camera, most of my dance footage has very little editing other than trimming the footage before and after the shot... Oddly enough most of the music that I recorded in the 1970's was perfect as is and needed little editing. Later in the 80's I started to get more relaxed when I did the field recording and that material, audio and video, will need some editing (interview August 22, 2006).

Attention to detail and documentary truth as she experienced it is utmost in Ali's mind during her filmmaking process. She recognizes her responsibility to the dancers who represent living Middle Eastern folklore to her media audience. Having been filmed herself Ali understands the needs of her subjects, who are likely to be concerned about being viewed at their peak of performance and appearance. She mentions her own apprehension: "I often wonder if any of the footage taken of me...could best demonstrate my teaching" (Ali 1983:21). Ali's goals are to produce an accurate depiction of Middle Eastern performance and folklore and to present her subjects in the most flattering way possible. She edits to enhance the dancing subject and present their performance in a positive and complimentary manner (i.e., the most visually appealing, steady, and appropriately lit backgrounds) and at the same time reach a wide and varied audience.

Ali's productions qualify as reliable, visual documents of history and folklore because they represent the field dance experience in a candid manner. She comments, "Without experience in the field, how can one judge what is realistic or accurate?" (interview January 14, 2006). Consequently, in her process of depicting dance on film she undertakes meticulous measures to ensure that minute details of costume and subtle nuances in movement vocabulary, typically noticed during face-to-face interaction, are as clearly represented as possible.

Ali considers it vital to present in-depth notes that seek to explain cultural, historical, and other contextual data, such as costuming, dance, and music in her productions. In addition to saving the cost of hiring professional web designers and CAD trained artists, Ali explains that none of the specialized computer experts could meet her

aesthetic criteria. She explains "More than several times I tried to turn it over to someone who was supposed to be expert, but the results were always far from acceptable to me by my standards" (interview September 1, 2006).

By inscribing presentational and kinesthetic details generally overlooked by commercial depictions of folk and belly dance on film, Ali feels she contributes to the preservation of structured movement system that establishes Middle Eastern dance as a unique regional genre (interview April 9, 2007).

Aisha Ali's Motivatition for Contributing to the Field of Ethnochoreology and Documentary Film

Before the release of her ARAF productions there were few available documentary sources of music, film, and video, devoted to the subject of Arabic folklore or performance. While a number of written descriptions, historic accounts, and ethnographic audio recordings of performers existed such as those made by Alexandru Tiberiu or Fumio Koizumi, the majority of available regional dance and music from the Middle East captured on film resulted from non-research based productions made specifically for a consumer and widespread audience. Due to the fact that detailed information about folkloric dances and costumes was so difficult to obtain (interview January 23 2007), Ali's productions were further valued for their educational potential and are recognized by other researchers, dancers, historians, and media ecologists. She explains why her footage has particular significance as visual records of Arabic folklore and performance:

> The filmed images were extremely valuable towards our endeavors to learn the movements in the approved manner of the communities in which they are performed. Luckily many traditional dance forms were captured before they were changed by influences brought on by the rapid increase in tourism and access to Western television programming (interview September 30, 2006)

In the course of multiple field trips to Egypt and North Africa, Ali observed that many locals at nightclubs and family celebrations appeared more interested in performing popular dance and music as opposed to their own distinctive regional movement expression. She wrote about the phenomenon in 1982:

> During the summer of 1971, the most popular nightspot in Beirut was a discotheque called "Blow-up." As the name might suggest, "Blow-Up" featured a powerful sound system and an atmosphere of space-age neon and chrome. I had been introduced to the owner, Karim, and his brother, because they were reputed *debka* experts, and for this reason the program of rock and disco dancing at "Blow-Up" was interspersed with *debka* lines and oriental dances. The latter were usually performed by some of the female patrons; attractive, middle class Lebanese girls who were not opposed to showing their midriffs when wearing "harem-look" disco fashions from Paris (Ali 1979a: 19).

Audience demands for new and inventive representations of previous Middle Eastern folk dance traditions increased. Professional dancers and entertainers composed choreographies for the stage, which innovated upon local dance vocabularies while incorporating foreign movement systems, structures, and presentational style. Ali commented on the choreographic staging process:

> Mahmoud Reda and some of the others traveled throughout the Egyptian countryside to gather folk material for the new choreographies that would represent the various cultures within Egypt. '"We try to take the traditional dances and costumes and present them in a theatrical way that will be entertaining to everyone," he said. "I believe that if you present a folk dance exactly as it is in the village, it will not be as exciting on a large stage" (Ali 1980b: 14-15).

In contrast to Reda's approach, Ali prefers ethnochoreologic accuracy and seeks to record and present distinctive regional continuity. Her documentation, recordings,

and performances preserve dance traditions as practiced or customarily staged by non-professional and professional dancers alike. From her point of view, documenting stylistically more conservative, established, and time-honored material creates an alternative record to the numerous commercialized or fantasy based representations of folk and belly dance. She explains,

> It is important for us to understand that in their native countries, these dances have only recently been considered a worthwhile area of study and many Middle Eastern dancers have been influenced to believe in the superiority of Western music and dance techniques. In the government sponsored dance companies, promising young dancers are often given scholarships to study choreography and techniques in Europe, thus creating similarities in the repertoire offered by the troupes from all over the Middle East... there is no guarantee that every teacher from the Middle East will know everything about traditional dance styles, or give accurate information about the origins of his/her country's dances, regardless of how good a performer he/she may be (Ali 1982: 22).

In her perspective, traditional dances exemplify (continuities and consistencies) a consciously lived connection with dancers of the past from whom present style and techniques are derived (interview September 9, 2006).

Tradition as a Learned Process

The documentary materials Ali produces are critical points of reference for her definition of traditional dance. In her perspective, traditional dances are structured movement systems based on improvisational and/or choreographic compositions, staging manners, and customary presentations that exemplify a lived connection with dancers of the past from whom present style and techniques are derived (interview September 9, 2006). Establishing clear and identifiable continuity with past expressive behaviors

signifies that, for Ali, sources of personal originality and innovation are obvious, acknowledgeable, and tangible and must be preserved.

Leona Wood exerted influence on Ali's notion of tradition and systematically reinforced the significance of tradition as an action as a way of doing. Wood earned her living representing themes associated with cultural and folkloric heritage on the stage as well as canvass and developed paintings, costumes, and dances well known for their traditional and folkloric qualities. According to Wood, these qualities include handmade dance attire, musical composition negating non-regionally derived instruments, and movement conservation in live performance. For Wood, the execution of traditional arts required habitual repetition in order to perpetuate the often-strict boundaries involved in adhering to the style, aesthetic framework, and movement vocabulary of her subjects, which were intrinsically attached to the final creative product.

Wood is particularly concerned with epistemology of movement and performance. In her work Wood carefully specifies *whose* tradition she perpetuates, frequently crediting her own teachers, such as Kazan Ballet Master Ivan Novikoff and family, with instilling a tradition of rigor and discipline, particularly in the performing arts. Commenting, "A work done right is the only work worth doing," Wood's judgment of "right" often directly relates to what her teachers deemed as appropriate and tasteful (Wood 2005). In her article, "Leona Wood From the Kamarinskaya to the Danse du Ventre," Susan Marshall elaborates upon the motivation behind Wood's emphasis on tutelage and the role of the student in bearing tradition for future generations,

> When Joffrey became a member of the Balanchine and Kirstein's New York City Ballet, he never mentioned publicly that he had been trained by Novikoff, for he

> was told that would risk Balanchine's disapproval. Leona has always done the opposite, making sure that Novikoff's contribution to dance is not forgotten (Marshall 2002: 2-3).

Like Wood, Ali always mentions by name the performers and teachers responsible for passing on their customary knowledge of expressive movement and forms of traditional presentation to her. But Ali also made pioneering shifts in techniques and methods of representing traditional folklore. By crossing into the realm of film, video, and digital arts, Ali gained the ability to preserve on film the traditional styles of performance expressed by those who preceded and taught her. Ali remains candid about who qualified her as an authority to bear, represent, and disseminate dance customs worldwide, as it was more than merely her ability to use digital formats to perpetuate and disseminate traditional performance.

Innovative tools such as film and video give Ali the chance to preserve and globally disseminate the structured systems of traditional expression that she observed and performed in the Middle East. Drawing on variety of artistic techniques and skills, Ali has aesthetic control over the entire production process. Personally assembling the finished product including filming, editing, and designing the packaging materials Ali's representation of Middle Eastern folk and belly dance in various media forms becomes an ethnological art that informs the dance perspectives of others.

Chapter 5
The Dissemination of Aisha Ali's Work and the Perpetuation of Dance Tradition

This chapter investigates Ali's research, documentary films, and recordings and how they have influenced the dance and performance practices of others including the individuals whom she documented. Interviews reveal Ali's field methods and explain how and why she focused on representing specific dance materials while overlooking others. Ali distinguishes and elaborates on the differences between the processes of learning dance from face-to-face interaction versus the cinematic medium. Specifically the question, "Can the documentary films the researcher produces be used to replicate and perpetuate the dance movements learned during extensive time in the field?" is asked. Also included are narratives from those within the global belly dance community to illustrate the issues and points brought forward by Ali.

Once captured on film, or in today's usual medium of digital video, a dance performance becomes an itinerant portrayal of customary movement. By being represented on film or video, the ephemeral performance acquires the ability to transcend temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries. Taken out of original context and experienced in another, the staged or improvisational choreography of a filmed dance performance may then be re-interpreted, imitated, re-staged, or improvised upon within the boundaries of a similar or alternative aesthetic judgment system (Buckland 2001; Glassman 2004; Magliocco and Bishop 2006). Depending on the reasons for viewing dance documentaries, the footage may serve as a reference for imitation or a basis for significant innovation. A documentary viewing audience does not always have familiarity with the performance customs and habits prior to experiencing the filmed

dance event. Thus one specific movement system can easily gain new and varied meanings as the situation and context of the performance experience is altered to exclude live interaction between the dancer and the audience.

Audiovisual recordings have the potential to acquaint the viewer with beliefs, traditional practices, performance manners, and physical vocabulary of individual dancers and are used by dance ethnologists to inform an audience separated from the original time and place of a particular dance event. Having filmed an array of dance events in a variety of situations and contexts within the Middle East, Ali's work reflects her role as a dance ethnologist. Through her continuity, fluidity, and aesthetic appreciation, Ali hopes to enlighten her viewing audience about the deeper meanings of movement within larger indigenous social networks. Simultaneously she aspires to assist in preserving and maintaining some continuity of practice in subsequent performance of particular regional dance vocabularies, which were recorded at a specific time and place in human history.

As a consequence of public distribution, Ali's videos, DVDs, and musical recordings have contributed to both the stability and change of Arabic folklore and performance expressions, style, and the social situations in which they are performed. In addition, her documentary materials have influenced Arabic themed performance genres in America and beyond. Although the extent of Ali's ability to affect the presentational habits of others through the use of the film and video media cannot be quantified, this chapter offers particular representative examples that directly relate to her creative influence on the global belly dance performance community.

According to Ali, her documentary efforts resulted in a deeper appreciation of local folklore on the part of Native Egyptians living in Egypt (interview August 27, 2006). She notes how one particular audio recording of the Nawar Banat Mazin, from the year 1973, generated a new interest from Egyptians living in urban centers to explore and take pride in the folk music from the Luxor region (interview August 30, 2006). In contrast to the popular music of the period (i.e. disco and other metropolitan produced genres), the recordings Ali produced feature songs and rhythms of artists working outside the commercial music industry. Shortly after sending her LPs (with liner notes) to the Egyptian Ministry of Culture the Banat Mazin received national attention, particularly by officers of Departments of Cultural Affairs who had previously only heard the field recordings of Romanian folklorist Tiberiu Alexandru (interview August 30, 2006). Ali's "Music of the Ghawazee" and "Music o f the Fellahin" received nationwide attention and as a reaction, the Mazin girls were recognized not only for their Nawar heritage but also as contributors to a unique performance style.

Members of public heritage organizations concerned with preserving and perpetuating regional folk culture and performance in Egypt took interest in Ali's albums, appreciating the talent of the featured performers. She remembers:

> In 1974 I worked with my dance company in London, fulfilling a six-month contract at the Omar Khayam nightclub in London. The previous year I had recorded and released *Music of the Ghawazee.* I had left a copy with the Ministry of Culture in Cairo. Wadia, our Nai player had recently been back to Cairo, and although I never met him before, he knew who I was and knew about my recording. He reported that in the month's prior, the Banat Mazin had been called to Cairo to perform on public television for the first time, possibly prompted by the informative nature of the liner notes legitimating the *Ghawazee* as interesting talented artists as opposed to lower class gypsy entertainers (November 3, 2006).

By playing a role in the recognition and success of the Banat Mazin within their national community, Ali's experience exemplifies how the documentary-producing ethnologist may contribute to the stability of a regional performance repertoire by inscribing for others the particular talents of, in this case, rural artists. Acknowledging the dynamics between urban curiosity and folk performance Ali writes,

> Even in the Middle East attitudes are changing and as the rest of the world shows more scholarly interest in Arabic folklore national pride in traditional arts are being reinforced. Consequently talented folk artists who were once known only in their villages are now given the broader public recognition that they deserve and dance companies are looking less like early Hollywood productions and more like the real people they represent (Ali 1982: 22).

Ali's input and unique situation places her in a position of cultural negotiator as her releases have the power to instigate transnational exchange. International recognition for artists ensued when she acted as a primary networking coordinator for the Met'qal Qinawi folk ensemble in Los Angeles during their first American performance tour in 1976. French ethnomusicologist Alain Weber recorded the ensemble some years after Ali released *Music of the Ghawazee* (and later acted as the ensemble's overseas manager), promoting their performances in the United States within the established commercial category of world music. Following the success of the American tour, Weber arranged additional performances, both live and studio recorded, from the ensemble as they gained international recognition. Partially because of Ali's initial documentation of the Qinawi clan, they continue to enjoy ongoing global attention while performing their local traditions.

The researcher's presence in a community can affect the performance style of specific individuals within the performance network. Because face-to-face interaction

and observation operates in dialogue, the subjects of visual ethnography frequently gain exposure to unfamiliar performance styles, repertoires, and staging customs of a visiting dancing researcher. Such is the case with Shadia Maazin on whom Ali focused some of her dance investigation. Ali gives details regarding one instance of induced change in the performance style of this individual dancer,

> One evening I danced with the Maazin girls for a group of German men at an inn owned by a man called Sheik Ali on the edge of a Theban desert. This party was arranged by Khalil's friend Ibrahim, and they cautioned me once again not to mix with any of the guests and to speak only when necessary, in Arabic. At dusk we met Rais Quinnawi and his mizmar group at the river and took the ferry boat to the West bank. When we arrived at Sheik Ali's, the Germans were seated at the tables waiting for dinner to be served. The musicians were to eat in the courtyard, and we were led to a room upstairs where a table had been laid out for us. After changing into our costumes, we sat down to a large meal, unconcerned with the fact that we had to dance in a short while. After dinner we heard the mizmar and tabl music begin and hurried downstairs playing our sagat as we entered. We danced in pairs on either side of the room, sometimes changing sides for variety. The Germans watched us with amused curiosity and occasionally reached out to throw an arm across our shoulders and pinch us on the cheeks. The younger Khairiyeh and I were much slimmer than the others, and the Germans seemed to prefer us to our corpulent sisters.
>
> Khalil told me to change into a cabaret costume, and then announced there would be an Oriental dance. I frequently find myself in a situation where I must perform folk dances accompanied by Oriental musicians who don't play traditional instruments, and now, ironically, the situation was reversed and I was expected to perform raqs al sharqi to a mizmar and tabl band. My audience didn't seem to notice the difference, and they cleared the center table to serve as my stage. This Oriental dance seemed to go over in a big way, probably because they preferred the exposed midriff and cleavage. None of this went unnoticed by the sister-in-law, Khairiyeh, and it is possible my success that evening influenced her decision to train her daughter, Shadia, in the Oriental dance...(Ali 1981c: 8).

Three years later Ali returned to Luxor to dance with the Banat Mazin, this time at a formal dinner performance arranged for the cast and crew of *Death on the Nile*. She writes,

> The party was held outdoors in the garden of the Hotel Savoy and most of the artists from the area were present to entertain.
>
> The Benat Maazin were now a trio consisting of Khairiyeh, Rajat, and a new girl named Farida, who was pretty and petite but somewhat tight in her movements. Khairiyeh, the sister-in-law, was there- this time not as a dancer but as a chaperone for her daughter Shadia who was to perform an Oriental dance. Housny was dancing with an *asaya*, and at one point the Maazin girls joined them with their canes. Even the musicians danced and Rajat leaned her shoulders against the large tabl and pivoted with the drummer as he played, swinging her hips from side to side while in a backbend I danced in a pink Asyut dress and was later joined by little Khairiyeh who outsparkled me in her long Lurex gown spangled with large sequins. When I returned to the dressing room to change into an Oriental costume, Shadia and her mother were waiting for me because Shadia wanted to wear my Asyut dress for her next dance. (Prior to my earlier visit in 1973, I don't believe any of the present day Ghawazee from that area had seen dresses in made from *tulle bitelli*, although they must have known about them…) I was surprised that Shadia didn't prefer wearing her own toub which was flashier but her enthusiasm touched me, and I agreed to let her wear it.
>
> Several days later I was awakened by the desk clerk at the Etab Hotel, telling me that I had visitors in the lobby. Since receiving visitors in one's hotel room is frowned upon in Egypt, I dressed and went downstairs to find Shadia and her mother, who had come hoping to purchase my costumes. I tried to explain that I would be needing them to perform even after I left Luxor, but Khairiyeh wanted Shadia to have them. Finally I promised to bring her the materials to make a costume similar to my beaded one, but I had to point out the dresses from Asyut were scarce and expensive in the United States, and supposedly no longer available in Egypt (Ali 1981c: 10).

Ali views her work with the daughters of Paterfamilias Yusef Maazin as a correlate to their international recognition outside of Egypt. After releasing her early film and audio recordings of the Maazin family outside of Egypt, there developed a heightened awareness of the various voluptuous dance styles and movements, which stimulated a response from both locals and American dancers abroad. Ali writes,

> At first the Egyptians were puzzled by the great number of American dancers interested in their oriental and folkloric dances, but when they became aware of the commercial possibilities of such an interest, they began to respect and encourage it (Ali 1982: 22).

Learning more about the customs and performances of the Nawar Ghawazee through Ali's productions, American belly dancers began to include Luxor in their tourism destination list, often with hopes to experience a firsthand dancing encounter with members of the Maazin family. As a direct result of dance tourism, female dancers in the Maazin family gained new possibilities of earning money from performance as well as teaching opportunities. This also raises their status among peers and in the community because they are able to earn a decent wage for sharing their talents (interview August 22, 2006). Leona Wood comments,

> Today Egypt has once again become a place of pilgrimage-but the ancient mysteries sought for are now those of the lingering dance traditions in the keeping of a few scattered families of the hereditary entertainer caste. Since 1973, when Aisha Ali's recordings of actual performances by the Luxor Ghawazee were first released, a trip to Egypt has become almost obligatory for serious students of Egyptian dance (Wood1980:11).

Ali's Film As Research Material Outside of the Middle East

Ali's unique position as dancer and ethnographer has been recognized for contribution to ethnomusicology, particularly for highlighting the subjects' emic perspective. Dance scholar and practitioner Danielle Van Dobben remarks,

> Inside of the American belly dance community, the cabaret style of Egyptian dance has dominated. It is rare to find a teacher, a workshop, an instructional video, etc. that includes the folk styles and traditions of Egyptian dance. Aisha Ali's video, *Dances of North Africa*, was the first dance video I saw that opened my dance style up to other influences and my research to the origins of belly dance... I am much more interested in the "'real thing" because of Aisha's influence. I also make distinctions for my audiences between styles, and educate my students about where the dances come from...My Master's Thesis refers directly to the work Aisha has done on the Ghawazi, in particular, and cites her video "Dances of North Africa." It's possible that Aisha has influenced dance

> scholarship more than she has influenced people's way of dancing (interview November 19, 2006).

ARAF productions in a studio and classroom context, Ali's materials serve as a reference point for dancers, scholars, and dance educators. Because the footage Ali includes signifies her actual experience in the Middle East and North Africa, the audiovisual materials are authentic for the viewing audience who are often concerned with genuine representations of traditional dance. Ali explains in 1983,

> Attitudes have changed considerably over the last few decades and folk dances representing a variety of Middle Eastern cultures are now recognized as the proper source for movements to be used in the belly dance (Ali 1982: 21).

American performing artist and dance ethnology researcher Sahra Kent (stage name Sahra Saeeda) comments about Ali's reputation for reliability, "I hold Aisha in the highest respect. Sometimes she was the only beacon of truth out there. She paved the way. And I trust anything that she says, and I don't trust that often" (interview November 29, 2006). Kent considers Ali's productions authoritative due to the punctilious representation of Arabic folklore and performance as it is lived and experienced in various social networks that are associated with belly dance origins. She elaborates further,

> Before Aisha, belly dancers in the United States were listening to things like Eddie "the Sheik" Kochek and George Abdo, we danced to these fantasy themed musical representations of what Middle Eastern performance was thought to be... When Aisha returned from her field trips to Egypt and brought back the recordings those of us in the dance community finally had a reference for accuracy. We took what she said to be the truth because she had actually been there... The recordings she made were considered authentic because they were based on reality, not invented or made up as was the trend in the American folkloric and belly dance scenes. When Aisha said something we knew it was true. She would teach us what music goes with what dance, understanding the particularities of each movement and meaning. As a result she inspired many of

> us to go to Egypt and study firsthand with the dancers and musicians whom she recorded... Her videos influenced us a lot, as you know a dancer can learn so much about movement vocabulary and regional style variations by watching videos. It is one thing to go there and experience the culture and folklore firsthand but it is another thing to have a recording to watch over and over and over again... Aisha's work inevitably helped us polish the dance dialect that we have taken from Khariyeh and the others by watching and experimenting with the possibility of infinite repetition (interview November 29, 2006).

Ali's reputation in association with American belly dance is considerable, not only for her fieldwork and her material sources but also for her aforementioned attention to detail.

Video productions depicting Middle Eastern music and dance provide a foundation on which to conform to or elaborate on traditional physical expression in new situational contexts. Mediated depictions of dance predispose some American dancers to conform to specific stylistic movements because of the opportunity afforded by repetitive viewing. Ali comments on the outcome of dance dissemination via multi-media:

> Dance workshops conducted by native Middle Eastern instructors and folk dance films from the Middle East's rural parts have helped make American dancers conscious of the variety of legitimate styles that exist. As a result, there are probably more knowledgeable and well-trained Middle Eastern dancers in California than ever before (Ali 1983b: 15).

Within Ali's conceptual framework, what legitimizes dance movement and performance vocabulary is their expression on film as staged by natives in the region of the Middle East. Although the nature and quality of belly dance performance and related folk dances fluctuate depending on the abilities and aesthetic judgments of the particular audience and dancer, Ali believes that the significant contribution made by film is the tangible reference point it provides, which has the potential to change the performative behavior of the viewer. Acknowledging the manner in which the lived dance experience becomes mediated by film and video, Ali reiterates, "...With the increasing accessibility

of home video equipment, American dancers can now study performances by a variety of dancers from the Middle East without ever leaving home" (Ali 1983b: 15). Globally distributing her observations and dance experiences with the use of film and video media, Ali reaches a varied audience of multiple dance networks in both professional and amateur social spheres.

By providing an ethnochoreological account of dance on film, Ali seeks to promote performative conservatism by allowing the viewing student of dance to imitate and repeat the movements and stylistic particularities of those presented. Yet, for some dancers, the viewing materials serve as a model on which to cognitively diversify and individualize personal style. The considerably varied of nature of expressive movement systems and presentational staging often loosely based on Ali's documentary materials continue to form a sizeable component of belly dances performed in the United States. Ali comments,

> It was inevitable that many of the American women involved in Oriental dancing would begin to explore some of the cultures from which it came, and a few of the more imaginative among them even added theories of their own (Ali 1983b: 15).

The relationship between Ali's media productions and the performance style and practice of dancers outside of the Middle East continues to intertwine in contemporary American belly dance performances. Performing artists, professional and amateur, rely on Ali's materials for ethnographic details, music, or as a source on which to develop, diversify, or compare their kinetic repertoire. Her media productions are intended to "motivate groups to learn a variety of Middle Eastern dance styles and develop choreographies that demonstrate various regional dances" (interview August 25, 2006).

However, Ali also accepts how her work has become a reference for different, distinctly American dance forms that incorporate traditional Middle Eastern movement vocabulary as a foundation.

Carolena Nericcio, artistic director of the San Francisco based performance group Fat Chance Belly Dance, and an innovator who has made essential contributions to the American Tribal Style of belly dance, refers to Ali's audio recordings as a "fantastic inspiration" (interview January 23, 2007). Nericcio acknowledges using Ali's audio-video resources for defining ethnographic elements in contemporary performance and asserts, "I have read the liner notes over and over... Aisha Ali helped me to understand the difference between what was becoming ATS and what is folkloric dance" (interview Jauary 23, 2007). Making a distinction "between what is authentic and what we have created," Nericcio categorizes the currently popular American Tribal Style belly dance as an invented tradition dissimilar from the "real" forms of belly dance that Ali recorded in the Middle Eastern field (interview January 23, 2007). In this situation Ali's materials help individuals to discern what is authentic and what is not.

Another of Ali's important contributions to American dance includes opening the roles for men's participation in Middle Eastern dance ensembles. Her work has penetrated the network of male dancers in America, inducing a portion of men to take part in the performance of Middle Eastern dance at various staged and community events. As opposed to many of the earlier, historic accounts and depictions of *danse du ventre* as a gyno-centric art form, Ali's productions portray the confluence of genders in native dance and music performance. By providing the details, including costuming, music, and

regional nuances of both female and male performance, men outside of the Middle East are given a model on which to base movement, musicality, and presentational style. Ali recalls,

> Because my dance company performed frequently at folk festivals, it was important to have men as well as women in the group to give it verity. It has always been difficult to find male dancers who were interested in performing Middle Eastern materials and who were willing to pay for instruction. Although most of the Arab men that I knew loved to dance in general, none of them would commit to learning to a performance schedule and learn choreographies, although occasionally some of them would agree to a special performance for the fun of it. During the 1970's, I was fortunate enough to have two young boys, Mundo from Mexico and Carlos, from Spain, who were very interested in learning the folk dances and wanted to be part of my company. Although they attended my regular classes along with the women, by showing them my footage of male dancers from Egypt and Tunisia, I was better able to demonstrate to them how Middle Eastern male dancers moved and dressed. Afterwards during rehearsals I could correct them when they were off, and they would understand what I was talking about. Both of them were very artistic and dedicated to representing the dances accurately (interview January 23, 2007)

She notes that on contemporary American stages, "Traditional folk dance groups are being used more often in Oriental dance concerts where they provide some contrast to the numerous belly dance performances" (interview August 23, 2006). Because traditional folk dance includes men, Ali's video and DVDs exhibit the potential to teach both sexes movements and routines for any type of recital. At present the regional Middle Eastern movement repertoire is performed by both American women and men, sending the message that belly dance, as a female art of seduction, represents one fraction of the various regional dances originating in the Middle East.

Field and Editing Techniques, Methodologies and Focus

Ali's focus on representing particular styles of dance traditions such as those belonging to the Egyptian *Ghawazee*, Algerian *Ouled Nail*, and Moroccan *Shikhat* has caused her to gain recognition as an expert oinsuch cultural performances. During her time in the field, however, she documented more than what she has thus far presented in released ARAF media productions, recording numerous styles of regional and global dance forms. As mentioned in Chapter 4, a variety of factors contribute to, or prevent, filming a dance event in a field situation thus affecting the amount or type of material an editor has to select from for a final, comprehensive representation of expressive behavior. Frequently, filming a dance event in the field is an act of chance despite preparation on the part of the researcher.

When capturing assorted styles of dance and performance on film, Ali has thus far excluded particular documented dance sequences from her media productions such as break dance and disco. Deciding between selected shots from a wide range of performances, Ali chooses to edit, produce, and distribute the recorded segments that in her opinion constitute the best examples of traditional dances rooted in local ethno-historic frameworks. These examples are informal and formal events including personal celebrations and rituals in both rural and urban environments. Not coincidentally, the dance traditions on which Ali has focused her camera's attentions are those documented earlier by historians, ethnomusicologists, travelers, and artists because they appear to maintain continuity throughout time (interview May 29, 2005).

Ali is interested in preserving and perpetuating specific kinds of dance performance, style, and aesthetics, which she views as authentic, have influenced her decision as to what to film. Therefore, some dance forms that she recorded do not represent the majority of her film and video archive. These include Western forms as jazz, ballet, or post-modern based performance. Describing and depicting locally derived dance in a general Middle Eastern community context continues to govern Ali's production interests. The dances she perceives as global expressions such as disco and break dance do not engender the same attention or excitement as those of the local community's traditional dances. As a result, most of the footage in her archives and material consists of specific dance sequences, which are considered to be and interpreted, as authentic and more important to document.

Ali's heritage and background enabled her to move in situations that an average visitor or dance scholar would not have the opportunity to experience. In a personal unpublished biography statement, she writes,

> Being an experienced Oriental dancer of Arabic appearance and an understanding of the culture, I received special ingress to gatherings and events that would have been difficult for most ethnologists. My American upbringing made me interesting to Arabs and exempted me from some of the limitations usually imposed on native Arab women. (Ali, N.D.).

The audio-visual materials Ali collected during her successive field trips are a valuable resource for ethnochoreologists because they portray the situation and context of the dance event from an observational standpoint. At the same time they were constructed through the eyes of someone who enjoyed uncommon access to various dance events—as both an insider and an outsider. Operating the camera from a uniquely

privileged perspective, Ali's productions present rare glimpses of the many themes and meanings associated with Oriental dances not often presented publicly such as private celebrations and ritual performances.

Similar to other independent dance ethnologists, Ali personally finances the buying and processing of film as well as the costs of her camera and computer editing equipment. The expense of supplying film cassettes is great. When Ali began making audiovisual recordings in 1973, the cost of film was five U.S. dollars for a four-minute cassette. Presently a sixty-minute mini DV can be purchased for eight dollars in addition to the cost of the equipment. Despite a reduction in cost of recording tapes, Ali generally takes a conservative approach to filming, choosing to turn on the camera when the situation appears most optimal for capturing the dance event. Recording when there is the possibility of least interference, Ali's edited footage represents only those times curing which she experienced the least distraction around her camera space and had a clear, stable view of a particular dancer.

Common types of interference during recording in a field situation prohibit documentation of comprehensive picture of a dance in its entirety. Individuals moving in front of the camera's frame, an unsteady position of the camera operator, a riotous dance act, ecstatic participants, battery failure, or poor lighting may account for one or more of the many reasons the dance sequences that Ali films must be edited. If the footage is to be comfortably analyzed, then the distractions of the unpredictable field setting must be eliminated in postproduction, in order to provide the audience with seemingly continuous

kinesthetic knowledge. For this reason the edited material in Ali's documentary productions corresponds with the archival footage that is most free of field disruptions.

When recreating a dance event on film or video Ali mediates the viewer's experience by showing what she considers to be the best examples from her entire audio-visual archive. Translating her dance experience onto film and video, she compresses time and space giving the impression of movement continuity and temporal fluidity. Although the images on film and video represent Ali's total lived experience, she edits portions of her documentary materials to depict performance, which, in her opinion, is most informative and aesthetically pleasing from a cinematic as well as kinesthetic perspective. Therefore the resulting productions reflect Ali's personal research focus in addition to the character of the events she happened to have the chance and opportunity to record.

Lights, Camera, Dance

Ali incorporates unedited sequences of dance into her productions if an establishing shot offers a steady view of the performers and shows them in best light. In order to gain a steady, acceptable shot of dance that requires minimal editing in postproduction, Ali found it helpful to have certain performances staged specially for her camera so that things like lighting, situating the performers, and sound could be prepared within the field space. Examples of arranged performances in her dance documentaries include Nabila's Tunisian performances in *Dances of North Africa* and Abdel Khrem's dance from Port Said in *Dances of Egypt*. These recorded images serve as illustrations of

contrived performances and at the same time depict the range of improvisation present in choreographed routines.

Because various field circumstances can prohibit a clear and concise capture of dance in its entirety, restaging performance expressly for the camera to additionally illustrate kinesthetic knowledge becomes a possibility for furthering the study of dance. Although there are many situations in which Ali had special performances arranged for the camera while abroad, her home recording studio offers an alternative situation that can be controlled to a higher degree than the field. Ali feels she can better expose the student of dance to the proper detailed style of a regional movement system on film without the distractions typical in many of her field recordings by controlling lighting, make-up, sound, and costuming in a studio environment. Moreover, work in postproduction allows her to focus the viewer's eye on images of body and costume movement as the visual close-up and long shot edits correspond with musical accents.

In her documentaries *Dances of Egypt* and *Dances of North Africa* Ali includes several dance-for-camera routines that she demonstrates based on her experience in the Middle Eastern field. She films herself dancing with black background and proper lighting in order for the audience to more closely observe the movement subtleties. Ali's complete routines are presented juxtapose with documentary footage, implying the transformation of dance from field to stage, social event to formalized performance. Because she envisions her documentary productions as instructional tools for learning how to re-represent specific dances, demonstrative sequences emphasizing the

relationship among music, movement, and regional costume visually reaffirm the process of restaging dance with care for ethnographic accuracy.

Believing it was important to isolate examples of music, costume, and movement in a context where the viewer can exclusively concentrate on the dances apart from the field setting, Ali made the audio-visual productions consisting solely of choreographies for which others could base their own study and practice. The ARAF DVD series *Aisha Dances* features dance-for-camera sequences set in a studio background and make obvious Ali's expertise in the various regional movement dialects that she documented as she re-represents them with the same kinesthetic fluency as native performers depicted in her documentary productions. Although Ali does not verbally break down or explain movements in the *Aisha Dances* instructional series, she includes extensive text notes within the menu of the DVD. The DVD menu notes, like the liner notes to ARAF albums and cassettes, are intended to give details about the ethno-history, costuming, folklore, and subtleties of the dances. In this case, instruction is tacit and takes place through the physical examples set on film by Ali as a model.

Documentary Production, Dance Perpetuation, Dissemination, and Innovation

Film is a valuable tool for instructional development as a student of dance with access to home audio and video equipment has the opportunity to replay a dancer's movements on a movie, TV, or computer screen. Because film and video offer the ability to extend or replicate the moment in which dance occurs, it becomes an observable phenomenon that can be repeated, practiced, and followed at a time and place

separate from original performance. With the opportunity for consistent repetition, observation, and home participation, expressive traditions portrayed on film can easily become incorporated into artistic repertoires perpetuated in new contexts, often times imbued with new meanings.

In Ali's situation learning to dance, like learning other artistic disciplines, required attention to detail in performance as well as during participant observation. For her, the ability to imitate and replicate tangible examples of artistic expression was crucial in the process of acquiring performance skills. Distinguishing between learning via face-to-face interaction versus film, Ali explains,

> My study of dance continued when I got home from the Middle East and I began to watch and edit the field footage…the film functioned as data and I would review and study it as such. I actually learned more about movement from watching the footage (interview September 9, 2006).

Although her productions are meant to preserve and perpetuate specific styles of movement, performance, and presentation, not every documentary consumer will adhere to the boundaries of traditional dance defined by Ali. Ali concludes that ultimately the individual viewer/performer will choose how to kinetically re-interpret her audiovisuals works. She explains,

> Video is a valuable learning tool in several important ways. First, it can be used to demonstrate a particular style or movement, which, because of cultural or physical differences, an instructor may be unable to perform satisfactorily themselves. Also, most natural dancers respond primarily to a combination of sound and visual references. Video footage is excellent for that purpose because the student can watch the subject performers learning by imitation, as often as they like. Verbal directions are most valuable after the student has already experienced the dance by following an instructor or following an image on screen. At that time it is easier to decide what was not understood, and the guidance from an instructor will not only have more impact, but will more likely be retained. The most obvious benefit of using video, is the fact that the images are captured in time allowing one to research

> movements that were performed decades ago, from performers who may no longer be available to learn from (interview January 23, 2007).

Ali's documentary materials have the potential to shape expressive behavior. While some individuals use Ali's films to learn, understand, and perpetuate the performance of specific regional movement systems, others use them to form a basis for creating different and distinct categories of contemporary global dance style. By disseminating dance via means other than technology such as workshops, studio classes, written articles and lectures, Ali tries to more wholly inform the audience of her dance experience.

Discussion

I have presented Aisha Ali's biographical history, her creative process, and values and aesthetics. I have reviewed her documentary efforts including what and whom she has recorded, and I have described the circumstances that led to the capture of Middle Eastern dance on film. Ali's personal relationship to the materials she produces has been explained. In Chapter 1 I discussed some of the key topics of concern in media ecology, ethnochoreology, and folklore studies. I now consider these issues as they arise in light of Aisha Ali's accomplishments in video and film production.

Using documentary film to learn, teach, or reinvigorate traditional dance is common at this time when the presence of the camera is ubiquitous and archival film footage is more accessible to the public. Scholars within the disciplines of folklore, media ecology, and ethnochoreology have already illustrated how social networks such as the Kwakikiutl, the English Coconut Dancers, American Neo-Pagans, and Norwegian

folk performers reference film as a model for constructing contemporary dance tradition (Bakka 2002; Buckland 2001; Glassman 2004; Magliocco and Bishop 2006). In each case the dances that result are labeled different things.

The term "revival" has been used and applied to dances that are partially generated based on filmed examples, in situations and contexts removed from the original time and place of performance. Frequently mentioned in the discussion of dance "revival" are Cecil Sharp and members of the English Folk Dance Society, who concerned themselves with filming dances that they believed were in danger of becoming moribund (Karpeles 1967). By creating dances for the camera Sharp and his associates hoped to re-establish and perpetuate true English folk customs such as Morris and Sword dancing. Like Cecil Sharp, Aisha Ali has filmed herself and others performing dances in the attempt to preserve and perpetuate true and traditional folk dance movements. Yet Ali does not "revive" an unpracticed dance custom. Rather she attempts to preserve and perpetuate the models of dance that she observed during her times in the Middle East. The dances she films and performs are not revivals.

Considering the fact that dances do not always become moribund, Sabina Magliocco offers the use of the terms "reclamation" or "revitalization"for additional clarity in contrast to the umbrella usage of "revival" when discussing contemporary performances that may be modeled on archival examples such as film. Magliocco explains that contemporary versions of folklore cannot be considered a "revival" if they have not "died out" in their place of known origin (Magliocco 2004). Although the dances Ali recorded continue to be practiced in the place of their origin, the terms

"reclamation" and "revitalization" do not apply to her endeavors because she does not intend to reclaim, re-enact, or revitalize folk customs or culture.

Ali is not creating work to inspire a social movement, she is creating work to inspire physical movement. While she does not revive, reclaim, or revitalize true Middle Eastern traditions and customs, she does preserve and perpetuate specific dance idioms. Using film to stabilize the moment of its performance, Ali hopes others may learn how to dance based on her field experiences. Ali's dances most closely resemble a "conscious cultivation," the term Egil Bakka has used to describe the phenomenon of film influencing the presentation of the Norwegian *Springar* in the present. Bakka explains that not only do dancers reference film to consciously cultivate a specific dance but also film becomes a new standard by means of which to evaluate authenticity (Bakka 2002).

A major characteristic of folklore is that it exists in "multiple versions or variants" with each version being distinctive because it is "generated at any given time and under a unique set of circumstances" (Georges and Jones 1995: 11). In this sense, the subsequent performances of those who have learned from these videos folk dance. When Ali and others re-perform the expressive movements she has captured on film, they are performing real, authentic, and true dance variations framed by specific tradition-bound systems.

Ali's work in post-production is limited to enhancing the quality of old film such as color correction, perspective edits for continuity, and sound engineering. Although she endures the detailed process of editing to create "beautiful," "natural," and "truthful" depictions of dance on film, her manipulation of the recorded data in post-production is

minimal. John Bishop explains that the creation of documentaries requires "acuity of observation and rigorous storytelling" and comments how making "reality-based film is itself an art." Although it ultimately subjective, he makes clear that documentary film "tries to be true" (Bishop 2002: 246). Ali's productions are "reality-based" and documentary because her subjects are performing in their own terms, in their own movement vocabulary, created according to their own aesthetic criteria. Moreover, her media products are accurate representatives of actual performers at actual filmed dance events.

In Chapter 1 I quoated Andree Grau:

> I would argue that to realize an adequate and truthful ethnographic account, the admittance of the truth of "unreality" is essential; only through an implicit internalized knowledge of local cultural standards can meaningful units of analysis be extracted... We must move away not only from a so-called '"scientism" where empirical facts alone are seen as valuable, but also from "subjectivism," which has plagued the arts and popular imagination for too long (Grau 1999: 172).

In Ali's aesthetic and ethical framework, portraying truth is of utmost concern. However, she cannot and she does not need to admit the "truth of unreality" to have her work classify as "adequate" and "truthful" ethnographic accounts. "Meaningful units of analysis" can be exacted from Ali's films in terms of knowledge about lived, practiced movement, kinetic subtleties, and dancer repertoire. Ali's productions serve as a tool that record and preserve a moving body, thereby lending themselves as data to empirical studies of dance continuity. Ali's films are adequate in that they represent lived performances that were captured in the Middle East at a specific place and time without

questioning the status of their truth or reality. When ethnography is translated onto film John Bishop reminds us:

> A good ethnographic film considers the whole culture. Even when you look at a specific activity, you set it within the social context. Since most music and dance are made within an ethnic community, an affinity group, or a professional company (and often combinations of these), the whole-culture model is particularly appropriate (Bishop 2002: 246).

Ali's documentaries are good ethnographic dance films because they show professional and informal dancers in various social contexts and staged situations and strive to represent that reality. Although dance is Ali's focus and the center of most her records, she provides her viewers with a sense of the community and society where the performances are generated. Contributing to their ethnographic appeal, Ali includes liner notes and, now, DVD menu study guides that more fully explain the cultural significance of particular dances.

Some ethnographic filmmakers include what Sharon Sherman classifies as a "reflexive" approach in their films. Sherman identifies various modes of documentary film presentation in her book *Documenting Ourselves.* She discusses documentary film in terms of expository, observational, reflexive, and performative categories. She makes special mention of John Cohen, whose 1990 reflexive film *Carnival in Q'eros: Where the Mountains Meet the Jungle*, exemplifies how the researcher's presence can influence essential aspects of life such as the economy within a community, and incorporate these effects in to the film narrative. Because researchers are often considered a part of the society that they document, a reflexive approach may be appropriate to the story. Jean Lydall and Kaira Strecker, John Marshall, and John and Naomi Bishop all employ a

reflexive approach by documenting their own relationship to the individuals whose life stories they represent on film.

Because her fieldwork focuses on dance Ali does not need to explain on film how her presence affected the lives of her performers. The reflexive approach in Ali's films is demonstrated within by the inclusion of her descriptive narrations and her own dance performances. It is clear she does not tell any story other than her own dance experience in the situation and context in which she observed. If her presence with a camera affected anything represented in her films, it was getting dancers to dance, performers to perform. Unlike the contemporary ethnographic filmmakers mentioned, Ali's personal relationship to the dances she filmed is not a focal point in her multi-media work. Ali's films, made with the specific intention to document dancing, dancers, and dance events are observational in character. We know who Aisha Ali is and we can understand why her films are observational and perceived as truthful, adequate, and ethnographic.

While film documents preserve movements performed at a particular moment in time, recorded versions often may also give rise to new dance forms, movements, and meanings. Although Ali's goal is to preserve and stabilize dance forms, by encapsulating performance on film the movements lend themselves to reinterpretation as well as replication. Anca Giurchescu implies that the generation of folk dance inherently lends itself to preservation and perpetuation. "In time, along with the developmental processes of societies, the supra-individual rules of social and cultural behavior govern and set the common shared movements, binding them into stabilized forms, which therefore can be

preserved and transmitted (Giurchescu 1983:24). Ultimately film is only one way of generating, preserving, and perpetuating Middle Eastern folk and belly dance.

In this chapter we have explored how Ali's research, documentary films, and recordings have influenced the dance and performance practices of others including the individuals whom she documented. Ali explained how and why she focused on representing specific dance materials while overlooking others. In light of the information presented in this dissertation I assert that contemporary audiovisual media technologies permit the capture of dance on film or video. Once inscribed in a mediated format, dance can be disseminated and perpetuated separate and apart from the original tradition bearers. Visual ethnographies are considered truthful. As a consequence, documentary film is a powerful and frequently persuasive device used in the presentation, perpetuation, and dissemination of dance. Following a review of the relevant points discussed in previous chapters I will bring forward avenues for future research in the next chapter.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

This chapter concludes my dissertation. The significant concepts that have guided this research along with the findings are reviewed and questions important for future study are addressed.

As the maker of audiovisual documentary dance media Aisha Ali substitutes the interactive dance experience with her artistic productions offering the viewing audience an understanding of embodied knowledge. The audiovisual documentaries she produces are based on her personal encounters as well as her artistic creativity. Awareness about the dance researcher's relationship to the materials presented in the documentary genre is important especially as video and film communicate expressions of movement tradition in lieu of face-to-face, community interaction. Exploring Ali's craft as a dancer, artist, researcher, and filmmaker reveals how her individual experience and her creative process affect the presentation of traditional dance on film. By investigating how traditional dance movements are constructed and interpreted on film, a better sense of communicating dance performance with modern technology can be realized.

In this dissertation I have uncovered some of the knowledge that Aisha Ali has accumulated through her years of research and explained how her role is significant in the perpetuation of Middle Eastern folk and belly dance. I have presented the views and creative practice of Aisha Ali and correlated her individual experience with the art of documentary filmmaking. I considered the footage Ali acquired in the Middle East and established how it was edited to demonstrate particular styles of dance. The analysis of her processes, aesthetic framework, and motivations provides a deeper understanding of

her considerable contribution to the preservation and perpetuation of Middle Eastern folklore. I have given details about the process of translating dance performance through video documentation and discussed how the presence of film shapes performance and behavior. I specifically addressed how Ali's films have contributed to the global dissemination of Middle Eastern dance, thus more effectively realizing the role of film in documenting and presenting the universal experience of dance.

Investigating the many issues associated with this study, I employed an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of my data. Specifically I used an ethnochoreological approach and in-depth behavioral folkloristic method that facilitated my conclusions. While undertaking this research, I used a variety of data-gathering techniques that included observation, participant observation, and interviews with Aisha Ali as well those influenced by her work. In addition I accessed Aisha Ali's personal archive consisting of published and unpublished biographical and autobiographical literature, studio and field photographs, extensive audio and video field recordings, as well as documentary and commercial footage that features Ali as performer.

In Chapter 1 I give an introduction to my dissertation topic. I present an overview of Aisha Ali's work within the fields of dance ethnology and visual ethnography and discussed current trends in ethnographic film and dance research. I outline the methodology that guided this research and the techniques I employ in undertaking this research. This information helps initiate an appreciation of Ali's role in preserving, perpetuating and disseminating Arabic folklore.

Chapter 2 included an orientation to the Middle Eastern regions where Ali has focused much of her documentary attentions. I give a synopsis of the dances and performers that Ali recorded and how these belly dances of the Middle East were recorded and documented in a historical context. I described how belly dance was presented in the United States up until the time when Ali first learned how to perform it.

Chapter 3 focuses on Aisha Ali and investigated who she is as an individual artist, researcher, and performer. I presented Ali's biographical history and her involvement with Middle Eastern dance performance and field research. I include Ali's narratives presented during dance classes, in published articles, and from personal and filmed interviews.

In Chapter 4 I review Ali's work as documentary filmmaker, performer, and artist and discusse how these crafts intersect. I give attention to how she learned the skills, talents, and values associated with ethnographic filmmaking. I describe and analyzed the processes by which Ali constructs her art and the aesthetic framework from which she operates. I explore Ali's motivations for documenting and preserving Arabic folklore and the importance and meaning of tradition in this process. While discussing these topics, I address the personal challenges and artistic conflicts that arise as Ali engages with rapidly changing video technology. This information provides insight about the various sources of inspiration on which Ali draws in order to pursue the documentary art despite technological challenges.

Chapter 5 investigates how Ali's research, specifically her documentary films and recordings, have influenced the dance and performance practices of others including the

individuals whom she documented. I described Ali's field techniques and methodologies in the effort to elaborate how and why she focused on representing specific dance materials while ignoring others. Ali answered the question, "Can the ethnographic films the researcher produces replicate and perpetuate the dance movements learned during extensive time in the field?" Chapter 5 also included narratives from those within the global belly dance community to illustrate the issues and points discussed by Ali.

In contrast to the abundant commercial media that does not depict cultural context, documentary films produced by ethnochoreologists emphasize views of the perspectives of their subjects in relation to dance. While this dissertation specifically focused on how and why Ali obtained dance footage and investigated her process of re-representing dance on film, further exploration of using video and film as a device for the study, preservation, and perpetuation of dance is warranted. Comprehending how ethnographic knowledge is constructed and presented by the researcher is only one key component for fully comprehending how dance is communicated in the modern world.

The concern for maintaining continuity with the past in order to preserve, perpetuate, and innovate within a movement tradition must be explored on a situational basis. As customary dance constantly changes with urbanization, globalization, migration, and mass media, it is increasingly important to analyze filmed performances for their individual as well as cultural meanings. Because audiovisual recordings increasingly serve as a reference point for defining traditional dance, how film or video directs innovation or conservation of movement by the performer deserves more exploration in the fields of folklore and ethnochoreology. Ethnographic knowledge about

customary performance is vital in the case of folk dance and music because it provides an emic framework for performance values, aesthetics, and judgments. Knowing that elements of tradition are consciously selected and re-represented by the filmmaking ethnochoreologist, an investigation of how these elements are constructed by the dancing subjects can also help shed light on the entire recorded dance experience.

Dance on film and video encapsulates ephemeral performances and presents a chance to quantitatively analyze a broad range of movement systems, presentation styles, and kinesthetic values and judgments. By comparing and contrasting dance footage over time, similarities and innovations can be charted to determine which movement styles might perhaps define a region, a culture, or the expression of a smaller community or an individual; visual archive materials can serve as measurable data in a way equally as valuable as edited documentary film.

As demonstrated by this dissertation, digital technology offers vast potential for researchers interested in preserving, perpetuating, and disseminating performative folk traditions to large numbers of widespread and diverse populations. Yet more in-depth investigations about how dance on film informs performance practice are necessary in order to more fully learn from the panhuman experience of dancing in the modern world.

Appendix
Question Guide

1. Sociodemographic

   A. Name?

   B. Place of birth?

   C. Age?

   D. Years Dancing?

2. Background Questions Regarding Dance Performance and Media Production

   A. When, how, and from whom did you learn about the Belly Dance/ Middle Eastern Folk Dance? Explain.

   B. From whom and how did you learn media production? Explain.

   C. What activities do you presently engage in on a daily basis? Explain.

   D. Do you work at home?

   E. What audio-video and computer equipment do you use?

   F. What audio-video and computer equipment would you like to have?

   G. Why are producing documentaries about dance important? Explain.

   H. Do you think film is valuable for the process of learning to dance? How?

   I. What dances do you film and what dances do you not film?

   J. How do you decide what footage to edit?

   K. When do you choose to film yourself dancing?

   L. How did you learn choreography for the camera?

   M. Do you prefer to watch live performance or performances edited on film?

N. What other events (where) would you film if you had the chance and where?

O. Do you purchase other dance documentaries produced by others; if so, which ones? How do they influence your own performance or staging practices?

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