

Kālbeliyās

Dancers, Gypsies or Snake Charmers

Staging of authenticity and dynamics of identity

Ayla Joncheere



Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van
Doctor in de Oosterse Talen en Culturen
Promotor: Prof. dr. Eva Dedering


UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

Promotor Prof. dr. Eva De Clercq
Vakgroep Talen en Culturen

Decaan Prof. dr. Marc Boone
Rector Prof. dr. Anne De Paepe

Nederlandse vertaling:

Kālbelyās: Dansers, Zigeuners of Slangenbezweerders? Hedendaagse artiesten in een zoektocht naar authentieke en dynamische identiteit

Kaftinformatie: Kālbelyās: Dancers, Gypsies or Snake Charmers? Staging of authenticity and dynamics of identity

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Faculteit Letteren & Wijsbegeerte

Ayla Joncheere

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2016

voor alle doorzetters - Jay Hanumān-jī!

Acknowledgements

To thank everyone feels like an endless task. I hope that I did not forget to thank anyone; if I did, I ask him or her to forgive me.

First, I want to thank Professor Eva De Clercq. Without her faith and confidence in this project, I would never have begun. I am extremely grateful for her mental support, professional advice and scholarly knowledge.

I want to thank all of my colleagues at Ghent University, Marie-Hélène Gorisse, Sander Hens, Leonid Kulicov, Claire Maes, Agnieszka Rostalska, Joanna Tokaj, Noor van Brussel, Iris Vandeveld, Tine Vekemans, and Saartje Verbeke, for their mental and scholarly support, for writing with me, and for entertaining me during lunch breaks and team activities. I especially thank Wim De Winter, Claire Maes, Iris Vandeveld and Tine Vekemans for proof-reading several of my drafts and for providing extremely useful comments.

To scholars outside of Ghent University, and particularly to the members of my doctoral guidance committee, Elisa Ganser and Heike Oberlin, thank you for your advice and support of this project. I also thank Carter Higgins, Christina Marrewa Karwoski, and Anna Morcom for providing me with scholarly advice and for answering my questions. Thank you to Jacoba Kint for providing ethnomusicological insights, for traveling to Rajasthan with me, for sharing academic works, and finally for being a good friend.

I want to thank my Bollylicious dance buddies, Tom Decuyper, Laura Neyskens and Nakoulou Leblanc, for the delightful time we spent during rehearsals and performances on stage, which were a welcome distraction and which helped me remember the benefits of a physical and embodied practice.

Thank you to Mahabub Khan, Sattar Khan and Hameed Khan for introducing me to the world of Kālbeliyā dance in Europe. Thank you Eva Baillieul (Maya Sopera) for encouraging me to become a dancer at such a young age.

In addition, there are participants in the field who are not entirely aware of their major influence on this whole project and who will likely never read this work.

Nevertheless, I want to thank them with all my heart for dancing with me, for their unlimited hospitality, for the endless conversations we had, and for sharing with me.

I want to thank all Kālbeliyās from Pratap Nagar (Jodhpur), including Apanath, Aasha, Babunath, Deepika, Dhapu, Indu, Kalunath, Lakshmi, Leela, Lumnath, Mohini, Nageena, Parasnath, Rekha, Rani, both Sangeetas, Sugni, Somnath, Vikramnath, and many others. Special thanks to Khatu Sapera, an extremely strong woman who has been my host and inspiration for many years and who insisted on helping me during all of my stays in Jodhpur.

In Pushkar, I want to thank Anita (Shanti), her husband Noratnath, and her parents for openly guiding me through the Pushkar community. I also want to thank Moriya and her husband, Santosh, Rakhi, and the many Kālbeliyā musicians I have listened to and danced with.

I thank Sayari, her husband Sherunath and Indira for hosting me in Udaipur, and Indira's wonderful children, Hina in particular, who personifies hope for many young Kālbeliyā dancers. Finally, I thank Rekha; may she rest in peace. Not only did Rekha die at a very young age but also a whole new approach to Kālbeliyā dance performance may have died with her. Her extraordinarily innovative interpretation of Kālbeliyā dance has truly enriched my research.

In Jaipur, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Gulabi Sapera. Despite prior restrictions, she received me at her home several times, supplying me with valuable insider knowledge. I want to thank her son, Dineshnath (Dino Banjara), for providing me with direct contact with his mother and for additional conversations that we had. Furthermore, I thank Kamla Sapera and her husband Sallunath, Champa Sapera and Purannath, Paphunath and his sisters, Rajki Sapera, Meena Sapera, and many others.

I also want to thank all the Laṅgā and Māṅgaṇiyār musicians that I have spent time conversing and performing with. While I am tempted to name all of them, the list would be endlessly long. Therefore, I restrict myself to a sincere *salām*!

To my always present and supportive family, I feel tears the moment I write this; my gratitude to them cannot be expressed in words. To my dear parents, Willy Joncheere and Katrien Van Steenkiste, I truly believe you to be are the primary sources of inspiration for this project; thank you for raising me with such loving care, and thank you for boundlessly supporting me in all of my not entirely 'mainstream' activities. Thank you for being proud, for boasting about me to the outside world, and for providing me with a stable and secure place to escape to and to clear my mind whenever I need it. Very special thanks to my 'sissies!' First, to Margriet, my Priya, my soul-mate and closest friend, your presence in my life means everything; our conversations, our being together, our mutual mental and physical support, and watching one another grow, fall and stumble to grow again makes me happy and very fortunate. Your accompaniment into the field with me at the start of this research project was extremely meaningful to me. Additionally, to my older sister, Zoë, 'zoetje':

while you may not realize your importance, you have served as my example of independence and emancipation. Thank you for leading me onto this path. Charel, my brother, you unconsciously started the ‘Gypsy’ fire in me; how could I ever thank you for that? I will begin by declaring “Hallelujah!”

In a miscellaneous category, I also want to thank Jon (my food buddy), Fernand and Magda (my supportive ‘in-laws’), Uncle Gilbert (for providing technical advice and photography skills), Aunt Monique (for photography skills), Jessica Olsen (for proofreading), Karine Vandermarliere (for patiently aiding me through all of the administrative misery), Gitte Callaert (for graphic design) and Nathalie Demeester (the department librarian).

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the man of my life, my pillar of strength, Tillo Detige, who does not want to be publicly flattered; however, I will do it regardless. Tillo first convinced me that I was able to write a PhD dissertation; he constantly pep-talked me through this process and wiped away many of my tears during stressful moments. Tillo was my (physically or occasionally only mentally present) bodyguard and *patidev* in India; he was the most critical reviewer of my writings. In addition, Tillo was my networking colleague; most impressively, he has survived all of the hours of my whining. Thank you for being my life partner.

Note on transliteration and translation

This dissertation contains names and terms in Hindi and sporadically includes terms in Rajasthani languages and Sanskrit. All Indian terms used in this dissertation employ international schemes of transcription currently followed for South Asian languages. Place names (such as Jodhpur or Delhi) and proper names (such as Leela Saper or Babunath) have been spelled in the text without any diacritical marks. Otherwise, newly introduced words appear italicized and with diacritical marks. Community names (such as Kālbeliyā or Māṅgaṇiyār) appear non-italicized and with diacritical marks.

All translations of interviews that I recorded from the field are my own. Several of the Kālbeliyās I have been working with switched between using their own Rajasthani dialect and Hindi in everyday speech contexts. While Rajasthani was recognized as an official language rather than as a mere Hindi dialect by the national State Assembly in 2004, the multiplicity of regional dialects is myriad. Not only did I encounter regional alterations of speech while traveling from one area of Rajasthan to another, but also Kālbeliyās appear to have their own *kālbeliyā bhāṣā* that differs slightly from the other local dialects. Robertson (2004, 20-21) wrote that Kālbeliyās seldom use this language and solely use it when in need of secret information from outsiders. Thus, Robinson views *kālbeliyā bhāṣā* as an “argot” rather than as “a fully-fledged separate language.” Whether *kālbeliyā bhāṣā* is truly a separate “secret” language may be debated. This *bhāṣā*, moreover, distinctly changes depending on the region in which a Kālbeliyā community lives. While conducting fieldwork, I found the everyday use of *kālbeliyā bhāṣā* to be minimal. Certain elderly Kālbeliyā participants blamed the loss and bastardization of their *kālbeliyā bhāṣā* on modern society. Indeed, younger generations of the Kālbeliyā community are often incapable of speaking this language and are occasionally unable to understand it. Instead, younger generations of Kālbeliyā dancers speak local Rajasthani dialects (such as a form of Marwari in the Jodhpur area or Dhundhari in the Jaipur region), and they are well acquainted with Hindi.

Due to this confusing use of multiple languages and dialects, I limited myself to Hindi conversations with all of my participants during fieldwork. My exclusive use of the Hindi language was not really limiting throughout the study, as most people in

Rajasthan are well acquainted with this Indian lingua franca. However, certain elderly Kālbeliyās struggled to answer my questions in Hindi. I allowed these elderly persons to answer in the language they felt most comfortable speaking in; most often, this was Marwari, Dhundhari, or an altered form of *kālbeliyā bhāṣā*. At the start of my research project, younger Kālbeliyās acted as Hindi translators; however, I soon came to understand the general content of the conversations. Ultimately, conversations were held in Hindi by me and in Rajasthani/Hindi by the Kālbeliyās.

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Introduction

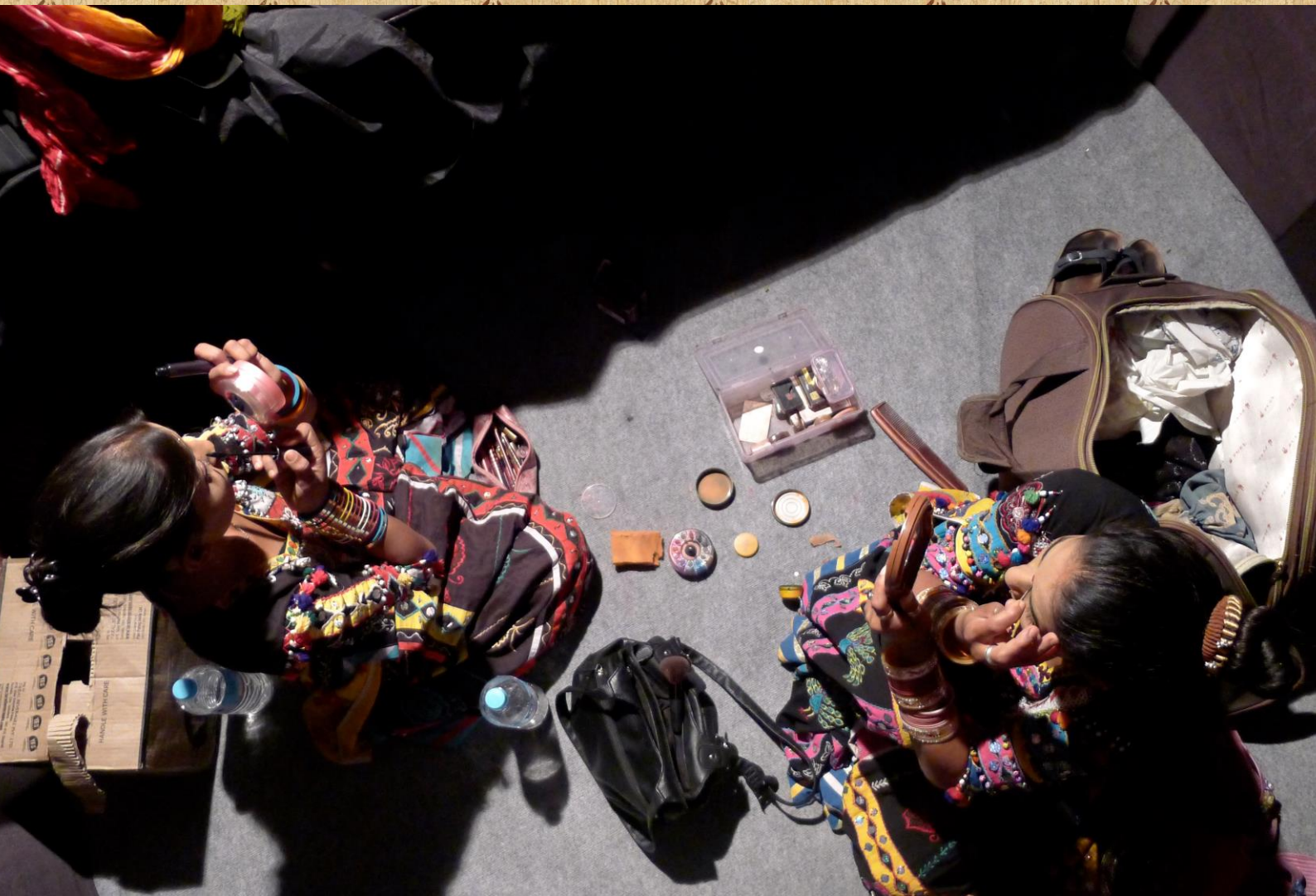


Figure 1

Kalmeliya dancers in the dressing room, Udaipur, February 2013



In recent decades, several women of the Kālbeliyā community in Rajasthan (Northwestern India) began to adopt the profession of public dancing, performing on both national and international stages. This dissertation gives an account of the swift development of Kālbeliyā dance from its first appearance on stage in 1981 to the present, elucidating how this inventive dance practice was romanticized in national and transnational narratives with the aim of commercializing it globally and of generating a new, lucrative livelihood for these Kālbeliyā families. It discusses the purpose served by dance as an expression of contemporary sociocultural dynamics, along with its potential as a means for the appropriation of social statuses, a space for narrative commercialization, and even a tool for illuminating and influencing shifting cultural norms. I will analyze how dancers utilize dance for socioeconomic purposes and how the dance plays various roles within Indian society and in a transnational cultural marketplace. By focusing on these subjects, the dissertation aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How did a staged form of Kālbeliyā dance evolve from a new phenomenon in the 1980s, to a distinctive dance genre today? How do occasionalism and the complex web of political and sociocultural discourses on the local, national and international levels figure in this narrative? What is the role of embodied practice as a processual and ephemeral cultural product in such multiple discourses?
2. How did various romantic and exotic meta-narrative strategies influence the commercial expansion of Kālbeliyā dance practice? How did they subsequently produce its corresponding representative identities?
3. What is the significance of dance categorization in framing debates about embodied and therefore ephemeral cultural products such as Kālbeliyā dance? How are authenticity and tradition negotiated in this respect?

In searching for answers to these questions, I use a combination of theoretical frameworks, research techniques and personal experiences, both my own and those of my research participants (most of whom are Kālbeliyā dancers, as discussed in chapter 1). To put my research into context, I begin with some excerpts of the interviews and journals from my fieldwork.

Contemporary Kālbeliyā dancing in its historical context

When Tripti Pandey¹ asked for my name, I just answered Gulabi.² Women of our community [*samāj*] did not have family names until very recently, you know. It is only when we started to travel abroad to dance and we needed to apply for visas that women would start thinking of a family name. It was Tripti-jī who decided that I would be Gulabi Sapera, after my father's profession; he used to be a snake charmer [*saṃperā* in Hindi]. Many other young girls who started to perform chose Sapera as a family name, not because their fathers were all snake charmers but because they wanted to become famous dancers, like me.³

When the timing and circumstances are right, apparent minor events and actions of particular individuals can set new dynamics into motion, such as Gulabi Sapera's first staged performance, which took place in Pushkar in 1981 (as discussed in chapter 3). Occasions such as these can produce consequences that, as in the case of Kālbeliyā performers, were never intended. The intricate intersection of occasionalism, local socio-political discourses and encounters with international performance milieus enabled these dance practitioners to adapt and cultivate new local identities in a global context. Thus, as McDonald (2012, 8) argues, it is no longer possible in today's globalized world to study existing communities and their cultural practices at the local level without considering transnational influences. Communities are affected by cultural processes and products that are emerging and developing elsewhere in the world. This ethnographic and interdisciplinary study of Kālbeliyā dance (the methodology of which is discussed in chapter 1) clarifies the often-unarticulated power of dance to essentially transform reality (see also Dils and Cooper-Albright 2001, 96). With this dissertation, I aim to provide an initial insight into the innovative realm of Kālbeliyā 'folk' dance or Indian 'Gypsy' dance as a discursive performance genre in the local, national and international markets by critically contextualizing it within multiple historical, social, political and anthropological frameworks.

An important focus of this dissertation is to link theoretical aspects with movement praxis. Dance is fundamentally an embodied practice that cannot be seen as an unchanging conduit to the past, stable over time, or consistent in the present (Buckland 2006(a), 15). Kālbeliyā dance, like any other embodied practice, is both a product and a process; it is dependent on historical conditions, the possibilities for production and the

¹ Tripti Pandey is the former deputy director of the local governmental Rajasthani Tourist Department.

² Gulabi Sapera is known as a pioneering figure in public Kālbeliyā dancing.

³ All quotes are my own translations from Hindi. Interview with Gulabi Sapera, December 18, 2013.

corresponding reception of such processes, allocating the dance practice to certain frameworks depending on systems of value (Desmond 1997, 2). The combination of the product and the process “demands that we theorize the relationships between the public display of bodily motion and the articulation of social categories of identity, of their transmission, transformation, perception, and enactment” (Ibid., 3). The imaginative creation of human realities ontologically relates to issues of performativity and deliberately establishes sociocultural and political narratives, thus ascribing value to a specific performance (Lopez y Royo 2007, 157/174). Within this line of theory, I consider Kālbeliyā dance to be more than just a dance form: it is also a recent creation based on a translocal synthesis of other dance genres. Principally based on multiple Rajasthani dance forms, Kālbeliyā dance is also influenced by other dance styles and discursive practices from inside and outside of India (see chapters 3 and 5). In this dissertation, I thus contextualize the recent historical development of Kālbeliyā dance as an embodied phenomenon that rests on multiple sociocultural and political discourses. In this study, I often pay attention to the referential meaning, that is, to what Manuel (1995, 230) called “extra-bodily associations” related to this performing practice.

Endorsing critical cultural scholarship, I attempt to challenge notions of identity and representation by considering them to be dynamic historical, political and sociocultural ‘performances’ rather than singular and essential concepts (see also Buckland 2006(a), 14). My research takes shape at the crossroads of multiple post-structuralist and post-colonialist theoretical frameworks. Instead of working with fixed analytical categories (see chapter 4), I regularly build on critical concepts such as the idea of representational systems (Stuart Hall), the power of discourses and heteropia (Michel Foucault), social imagination and the idea of scapes (Arjun Appadurai), and the notions of hybridity and dynamism (Homi Bhabha). These concepts will be explained later in this introduction.

Re-counting identities: Marketing desert snake charmers and Gypsy ancestors

Anita Saper⁴ wiped the sweat from her forehead with her left hand. The smoke of the wood fire blew into her face, leaving traces of ash in her hair. After preparing very spicy vegetables and plenty of thick *roṭīs* (Indian bread) for her relatives and for five tourists whom she had invited to dinner at her Gypsy camp just outside the town of Pushkar, she sighed with relief, ‘My housekeeping tasks of the day are over!’ Anita looked at me and smiled.

When dinner was over, her husband, Norat, threw ashes into the empty cooking pots and plates. Anita grabbed her dance costume bag. It was time for their weekly performance at one of the tourist hotels in town. ‘Tonight, some of my best students will dance with me,’ Anita cried with enthusiasm.

While entering the hotel, I noticed the large collaged billboard that was strategically placed at the front door. ‘Tonight at 7 pm. traditional show of the desert Gypsies. Entry: 500 rupees. Pizza Buffet included,’ was printed on the poster just underneath a picture of a blonde Caucasian woman dressed in Kālbeliyā dance attire with her hands above her head in a cobra-like pose. She looked directly into the camera and smiled. Upon arrival at the hotel, some Kālbeliyā musicians, Anita’s uncle, cousin, brother, brother-in-law and husband, installed themselves in the middle of the hotel’s courtyard and started playing to attract passersby walking outside the hotel. Anita’s aunt, while singing with the musicians, peered with curious eyes in our direction, probably wondering whom Anita had brought with her this time to perform. Anita threw her bag into the corner of the courtyard. She pulled her costume over the *ghāghrā* (Rajasthani dress) she was wearing and waved to one of her students who was waiting for Anita in her newly purchased Kālbeliyā dress: ‘Come. You have to wear some *kājal*.’ Anita and her sisters greatly enjoyed applying makeup to the faces of tourist dancers. The dark kohl (*kājal*) and lipstick looked very unnatural on the light skin of the European and American women. As soon as the courtyard was filled with curious spectators, the program officially began. During the event, Anita proudly displayed her skills in front of the audience and her students. Once in a while, one of her students would dance with her, copying her dance steps as they had learned in one of the informal classes the days before.

⁴ Anita is the nickname she uses when working with tourists. Her given name, as written in her international passport, is Shanti “Saper,” after the example of Gulabi, her aunt on her mother’s side.



Figure 2 Anita (center of the picture) and Rakhi (right of Anita) proudly posing with their two students (on the left, a Mexican student; on the right, an American student) and me (sitting on the floor) just before the performance, Pushkar, February 2013.

After a few dance routines, the Kālbeliyā musicians shouted in my direction, ‘Now, show us your Jodhpuri style! *Tak, tak, tak*,’⁵ while clapping their hands. During previous performances the musicians were surprised by my acquaintance with techniques that I had learned from other Kālbeliyā dancers in Jodhpur. They enjoyed watching me execute rhythmical steps that their female family members were unable to perform. I was dragged from behind my camera in the left corner of the courtyard.

A few songs later, I was invited to return to the dance arena. ‘Now, show us a snake [*Nagīnā*] dance,’ Moriya, Anita’s younger sister, yelled with excitement. As I was not entirely sure what she meant, I asked for clarification. ‘You know, dance like a snake, do a *saṃperā* [“snake charmer”] dance. Wriggle like a snake. Use your shoulders and your hips like a belly dancer.’ Her request astonished me. She

⁵ The expression *tak, tak, tak* refers to a specific rhythmical cycle that is regarded among dancers and musicians to be particular to Kālbeliyā dance performances from Jodhpur; see also chapter 5.

wanted me to fulfill the exotic imaginations of Kālbeliyā dance not only for the audience but also for the Kālbeliyā performers themselves.⁶

Although most of the determining life events of the young Kālbeliyā performers, such as the first performance of Gulabi Saperā or the relatively new tourist-oriented lifestyle of Anita, are generally unarticulated daily life realities, multiple romantic and exotic meta-narratives have explicitly established around the representations of this new dance practice (such as Kālbeliyā dancing presented in Pushkar as a desert Gypsy dance of snake charmers, as mentioned above). These largely discursive tales have affected public imagination both inside and outside of India. Hypnotizing stories of ancient nomads traveling through the desert while working as snake charmers and artists and possessing yogic powers such as those of magicians are projected onto this community. Typecast narrative productions of identity and representation have formed the present status of Kālbeliyā performers in their modifications of national and transnational paradigms. These persistent and (primarily) imaginary depictions of a community as low-caste Yogis, snake charmers, magicians, beggars, nomads, and traditional artists reinforced opportunities for women to self-exoticize and become “transnational laborers on the global stage” (Srinivasan 2012, 8). They enabled some Kālbeliyā women to socially emancipate or at least to change their livelihoods. From the constant negotiations between desirable imaginations, global fantasies and sociocultural forces of communities, on one hand, and forces of local communities relative to discursive structures of global economic and political power, on the other hand, these representational images arose.

The advantageous transnational and local dynamics of the last thirty years planted the seeds for the formation of staged Kālbeliyā dance performances in fertile soil. Kālbeliyā dancers expressed themselves as belonging to an Orientalist imaginary. A cultural and marketable package of ‘rough,’ ‘indigenous,’ and alternative ‘Indianness’ has contributed to the current status of Kālbeliyā dance. At the same time, it evolved in relation to national and transnational cultures and has been used by women globally as a means of self-exotification and masquerading for empowerment. As a consequence of such multiple discursive interplays, a parallel world of “heteropia,” a Foucauldian concept (1984 [1967]), developed around the practice of Kālbeliyā dancing. Heterotopias are real spaces in the present that are based on a complex network of relationships; however, these factual spaces are, in essence, erected from utopias, or illusory

⁶ Pushkar, February 15, 2013. This excerpt is from my research journal report. All quotes are my own translations from Hindi.

imaginings. Kālbeliyā performers became world famous because they exquisitely fulfill widespread cosmopolitan nostalgia for lively representations of a hybrid, nearly utopic and exotic Oriental typecast dancer. In this perspective, I draw attention to the misconceptions and powerful auras of romanticism, exoticism and Orientalism that surround Kālbeliyā and Indian dance in current cosmopolitan contexts, not only in the so-called “West” but also in India and elsewhere.

I examine the idea of “representational systems” in Kālbeliyā dance. This idea, based on the influential work of Stuart Hall (1997), entails that representational systems construct and share meanings behind cultural practices. The existence of the categorizing conceptualization of the world, such as the current division of classical and folk dances in India or the dichotomous distinction between authentic/traditional vs. innovative/urban/modern (see also chapter 4), can be understood in terms of how different agents want to represent their ideas to others. Different agents impact the dynamic consequences that lead to the development of discourses: individuals or groups actively and politically “voice” certain representational images and construct identity frameworks. A system of representations consists of not only “individual concepts” but also of “different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of the establishing complex relations between them” (ibid., 17). The interflow of representational systems runs a dynamic “circuit of culture” (ibid., 1) and results in the creation of identities. The distinctive features of identity formation generate larger referential frameworks of representation. These “conceptual maps” (Ibid., 18) help us to navigate and thus to interpret the world. The dialogical meetings of multiple conceptual maps further shape discourses. As Michel Foucault noted in many of his works, agents sometimes actively but often unconsciously produce constructed representations in an interrelational language of power. Cultural discourses do not assist “the purportedly long-standing and enduring practices per se”; rather, they are considered battles for power in which practices are manipulated to “the needs of present and future” (Hughes-Freeland 2006, 56).

In essence, this dissertation addresses multiple theoretical issues of representations and identity formation, the active and global production of culture, and categorizations of the performing arts. The recent burgeoning of Kālbeliyā dance on transnational stages exemplifies a phenomenology of complex intercultural communication; it was created as a genre by what Sellers-Young (2013, 13) described in the context of Oriental dances as “a mediated social imaginary.” It is important to fully consider how power, in the specific case of Kālbeliyā dance, operates in relation to multiple identity formations, agencies, local communities and the female body. Throughout this dissertation, I question the constructedness of cataloguing dances into strict historical categories, such as Kālbeliyā dance as an Indian folk dance or an Oriental/Gypsy form of world

dance. Although global trends in representations and the impact of power relations might be considered problematic, these effects make it arguably impossible to piece together the ‘real’ story behind a dance history. In this work, I aim to recover the unwritten stories of Kālbeliyā dance. These stories serve as examples of “contemporary struggles” (Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996, 5) and the innovative attempt to claim a legitimate place within public national and transnational cultural politics. This objective is primarily achieved by connecting disparate fragments of a global culture to each other and by renarrating histories. My goal is to identify the discursive complexity behind Kālbeliyā dance stories, or at least to present an alternative version of it.

Kālbeliyā dance performances serve as an explicit case of the cultural field in which transnational capitalism and nationalist power relations are active. Although Kālbeliyā dance seems to be a successful negotiation in this arena, it nevertheless exemplifies the cultural power struggle dominated by “ubiquitous imperialist centres” (Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996, 6), such as the transnational world music industries, and exclusivist narratives of post-independence Indian nationhood (see Morcom 2013). This dissertation critically reflects on the limits of the politics of the categorization of performing arts. As Ram (2000, 261-62) suggests, we should at least consider the “magical force of representations and the persistence of a level of embodied experience,” which is meaningful in its own right.

In addition, dance histories and memories are constantly re-narrated to “a space of knowledge” (Sharma 1996, 16) in which local and global identities are persistently negotiated. The dialogic manner in which Kālbeliyā dance was exposed to the world by oscillating between Indian nationalist cultural discourses and transnational commercial apparatus enabled this embodied practice to connect to multiple narratives. Influenced by multiple sociocultural, political and commercial discursive tendencies of the last few decades, this performance practice has evolved from a patchwork of local traditions to a globally well-known and highly distinctive dance genre. Kālbeliyā dance appears to have evolved from a vague Indian form of newly created ‘entertainment’ at the beginning of the 1980s to a national folk dance genre since the early 2000s via the adaptation of a vague translocal notion of Oriental Gypsy dance. This has led to its current status as an internationally recognized intangible aspect of UNESCO heritage (2010). In my research, I pay attention to the dynamic representational frameworks to which the Kālbeliyās connect both as a community (Yogic and snake charmers’ identity, see chapter 2) and as artists (Gypsy ancestors, see chapter 6, and folk performers, see chapter 5). Furthermore, I demonstrate the imagined character of most narrative identity claims behind the Kālbeliyās’ representational entanglement. The heterotopic intermingling of discourses resulted in a hybrid new dance practice and demonstrates the ephemeral dynamisms in which dance and culture evolve. The conscious staging of

Kālbeliyā dance and the forceful matching of the dance practice with the “dynamics of power in the commodified global relations of the new world order” illuminate loopholes of postmodern categorical frameworks (Sharma 1996, 16). Although this is a reflexive study that focuses on synchronic and diachronic perspectives, I highlight cultural and political purposes and their effects on the future of the dance and its scholarship.

Negotiating authenticity: toward a performative turn and the dynamism of performing arts

After multiple phone calls with the Kālbeliyā artists and their local manager and a lot of negotiating with the festival organizers, I arrived at the concert hall of a heritage hotel on the highway between Pushkar and Ajmer. I wanted to see the performance of some Kālbeliyā dancers from Jodhpur.⁷ They were invited to perform at an international festival for Indian traditional music.⁸ However, the price of the entry ticket, 2000 rupees per performance, was stopping me from going there. I stubbornly felt an aversion toward the lucrative thinking of many festival organizations. I felt that the organizers were practicing an exclusionary policy, aiming for large profits by targeting the generosity of “Western” tourists and perhaps a few rich Indian visitors. The festival turned out to be unsuccessful, and I had already heard from the Kālbeliyā artists that they would be paid less than agreed upon because of the low number of tickets sold. As an intermediate solution between following my personal principles and collecting research data, I managed to enter the concert hall without paying for a ticket by sneaking in through the staff entrance.

The Kālbeliyās’ local manager came running in my direction: ‘Welcome madam, Ayla-ji, tonight real, traditional Kālbeliyā show,’ he stammered in Indian English.⁹ Not really understanding what he was saying, I walked into the next room where the Kālbeliyā women were applying their make-up. They looked quite anxious, I noticed. ‘We have to sing this evening,’ one of the dancers told me. I asked her why. ‘They want to have a real Kālbeliyā performance, Kālbeliyā artists only.’ I

⁷ It is worth mentioning that Kālbeliyā dancers from the city of Jodhpur were invited to this international festival instead of the Kālbeliyā artists from the neighboring town of Pushkar. More about the reasons behind this choice are presented in chapter 5.

⁸ The festival was officially advertised this way.

⁹ In consultation with the Kālbeliyā and Laṅgā artists, I have decided to keep all participants of this excerpt anonymous.

nodded my head; now I understood the earlier remark of their manager. ‘Why are you so stressed about singing?’ I asked the dancers. ‘We never sang on stage before. We are not trained as singers; we dance.’ The youngest of the dancers added, ‘And we don’t know any of the lyrics of our [Kālbeliyā repertoire] songs. We have been practicing with our grandmother for the last two days, but it is hard to remember so many songs. We have to sing for an entire hour.’ I smiled in their direction. With a sigh of slight relief they communally started to laugh.

Some men came into the dressing room: to my surprise, five Laṅgā musicians. They greeted me politely by folding their hands in *praṇām* and smiled in my direction. ‘What are you guys doing here? Isn’t it a Kālbeliyā show only tonight?’ I asked. With an exaggerated look of betrayal and giggling, they quickly closed the door. ‘Do not tell anyone that we are Laṅgā musicians! Tonight we belong to the Kālbeliyā community.’ I noticed that a slightly denigrating gaze of sarcasm came into the eyes of the Laṅgā singer. ‘Laṅgā and Māṅgaṇiyār musicians are simply better musicians than most Kālbeliyā musicians. Why shouldn’t we collaborate with them? The most important thing is to give a high-level performance, isn’t it? Just don’t tell this to the organizers, please; they will refuse to give us other performances if they knew,’ one of the Kālbeliyā dancers asked me. ‘Anyhow, they [the Kālbeliyā dancers] don’t know their own Kālbeliyā songs,’ the Laṅgā singer laughed. ‘They need me to sing along. I know the songs better than they do.’ ‘Don’t you think the organizers know that you are from the Laṅgā community? They are quite specialized in Rajasthani music,’ I asked one of the other musicians. ‘No, they don’t. Our turban has another color to look like a Kālbeliyā [man].’ I was not entirely convinced that this would do the trick. Maybe the organizers just turned a blind eye as long as the performance was entertaining and it looked authentic to the audience.¹⁰

Regardless of the transparently staged settings of the international festival of traditional Indian music in a recently built ‘heritage’ hotel, all of the concerned agents (the Kālbeliyā and Laṅgā artists, the cultural manager, the hotel owner and the predominantly European and American tourists) in the abovementioned fieldwork excerpt quite actively meet (the organizers), adapt (the artists), and expect (the audience) to see an ‘authentic’ representation of Rajasthan. What has been negotiated as authentically Rajasthani? The most popularly used meaning for something being authentic is that it goes back to its origins. Thus, an authentic tradition is restrictively defined as ‘ancient’ and ‘uncontaminated.’ Therefore, the festival organizer would not allow the Kālbeliyā dancers to perform onstage with artists from the Laṅgā or any other

¹⁰ February 17, 2013. This is an excerpt from my research journal report. All quotes are my own translations from Hindi.

artist community from Rajasthan with whom they otherwise regularly collaborate; instead, the organizer asked for an obviously utopic form of ‘uncontaminated’ Kālbeliyā art. Authenticity also overtly reflects on its representational content, most often a typecast of a cultural phenomenon, such as the idea of the rural folk artist (a traditional Rajasthani artist is not supposed to wear Nike shoes or have a smartphone) or the passionate Gypsy (a good Kālbeliyā dance is expected to be fast, entertaining, and performed with a lot of energy).

Multiple scholarly works (see, for example, Bendix 1997; Johnson 2000; Trimillos 1995) in the past few decades have theorized about the notion of authenticity. They have introduced several issues that may help in understanding the concept differently by questioning its dichotomous, constructed and popular notions. The novel perspective on this concept triggers an ongoing debate of essentialism versus constructionism. Subscribing to these contemporary theories, I aim to contrast the idea of authenticity as a fixed, bounded concept (cf. essentialism) and to highlight its more flexible and practical understanding (cf. constructionism). By implementing these ideas with regard to dance, I want to emphasize the representational qualities of dance practice that must be discussed in relation to time and place. Dance is an embodied practice and thus inevitably changes over time. Therefore, some of its representative qualities may also shift. Dance remains, as mentioned above, a dynamic process instead of a mere product. Thus, it continuously fluctuates in response to its contexts and (individual) agency. In her article on music and authenticity (2000, 282), Johnson emphasizes that cultural practices are not merely transmitted, perpetuated or preserved; rather they are human actions of constant re-interpretation. Taking these theoretical frameworks into account, we might wonder whether there ever exists something like the ‘original’ form of a dance.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the search for authenticity, in its essentialist interpretation of the concept, is no longer a burning issue among most academics. However, it remains alive in the powerful negotiation of popular, commercial and political discourses around the world. By discussing the notion of authenticity, I want to question several enduring interpretations of the concept by thinking beyond a linear past of cultural practice and its related romantic/evolutionist construction of authenticity. I aim to go beyond the more common comfort zones of representative binaries, constructed images and fixed identities. Instead, I propose to shift perceptions from the presumption that cultural purity exists to the idea that “hybridity” (Bhabha 1994) is a more credible norm for cultural practice. As Bendix (1997) questioned, it is not “what is authenticity” but “who needs authenticity and why? How has it been used?” In the words of Strine (1998, 7), there is a paradigmatic shift from performance as a “distinctive *act* of culture to performance as an integrated *agency* of culture.” The

constant negotiation and flexibility of culture, which is likewise valid for dance performances, remains worth emphasizing. Burke (2005, 47) even values the importance of concepts of performance and occasion over the potential of evolutionary forms of historical explanation:

Historians used to explain many actions in the form of statement: A did B because he or she was a C. A performance-centered approach, on the other hand, encourages us to offer explanations of the form: A did B because he/she was in a situation which required C (confrontation, say, or compromise).

In relation to this performance-centered approach, I want to resolve the boundaries between dance as a purely fixed, staged or dramaturgical model and ‘real life’ society. I consider them an intertwined, mutually influential and fluid phenomenon. In this dissertation, I thus want to shift to a *performative turn* for the study of dance.

This dissertation is meant to critically reflect on the dynamics of sociocultural and political imaginations surrounding Kālbeliyā dance from Rajasthan without intending to merely deconstruct and without engaging in dichotomous argumentations. Implementing the earlier concept of heteropia, which has been invigorated by the ensuing idea of cultural mixedness or hybridity, I follow Bhabha’s argument that culture should not be studied in a monolithic way. As Ram (2000, 265) explains, “[W]e are not fooled by invocations of a pure tradition, and can readily find evidence for the many forms of hybridity on stage.” Contrary to the essentializing of the supposedly unchanging qualities attributed to dance, we must reveal the constant fluctuation of dance practice in time and depending on the context. The consideration of more dynamic models for the study of culture makes us question “holistic forms of social explanation” (Bhabha 2004, 248) or the unitarian systematization of culture as a singular phenomenon (Hammergren 2009, 17). Starting from the perspective of theoretical frameworks of cultural hybridity and political representations, I discuss transnational processes that encourage Kālbeliyā dance performances to ascend from the margins to the center. The hybrid representations themselves, and their representational statuses of Gypsy innovation to the global level with their local folklore practices portrayed as a form of intangible heritage, have become the basis for identifying authenticity and traditional practices.

Cultural hybridity further problematizes cross-cultural comparisons of dances, such as the folk-classical division as a distinct global phenomenon (see chapter 4). This fluidity characterizing every embodied practice makes all classification attempts difficult or even impossible. According to Hammergren (2009, 30), the “problem does not lie in the ‘things’ being incompatible, but in the assumed common locus for classification, since the topos itself is always shifting.” The hybridity of cultures shows

that cultural synthesis goes much further than paradigmatic dualities of “West versus East,” “tradition versus innovation,” “classical versus folk” or “commercialism versus authenticity” (Manuel 1995, 229). Critical transculturalism reveals the perpetually dynamic and complex interplay of expressive works seen and recognized on the postmodern stage (Kelly 2013, 139). Therefore, it is interesting to focus on how dances were constructed and how they are understood. I choose to study dance within a “theory of dynamism” (Hammergren 2009, 15), acknowledging the constant change manifested in culture, societies and individuals.

A guide through the dissertation

Before discussing the core topic of Kālbeliyā dancing, I explore the methodological trajectory of this research project. In the first part of my first chapter, I position myself as an ethnographer and artist-scholar. By applying recent approaches of reflexive ethnography and auto-ethnography, I illuminate the multiple stages of research, corresponding methodological techniques and limitations of ethnographic research. I specifically focus on fieldwork experiences by first describing the pre-doctoral encounters that led to my ethnographic research in an academic context. I discuss in detail my idiosyncratic use of participant observation methods, conversational interview techniques, video recordings and reporting through reflexive fieldwork journal entries. In the second part of this chapter, specificities of dance ethnography as a sub-discipline and its corresponding methodological approaches are given special attention.

The goal of the second chapter is to present enduring representations of Kālbeliyās within sociohistorical contexts. Thus, in the framework of representational systematization leading to the creation of imagined communities, the portrayal of Kālbeliyās as a single and distinctively uniform community is scrutinized. I critically investigate currently dominating metonyms of Kālbeliyās: first, their socioreligious position as (excluded) householders of the Hindu Nāth Yogī sect; second, their mystical portrayals as snake charmers; and third, their depiction as nomads and consequential link to Gypsy communities. Finally, in relation to the latter, I specifically highlight their performative occupation of (ritualized) begging, of which music and singing form integral components. Examining these current social representations of the Kālbeliyās will help to contextualize the internal dynamics of sociocultural structures and the external impetus for young women to become dancers.

The third chapter focuses on the recent (1980s) creation of Kālbeliyā dance, disentangling it from its mystique and claimed antiquity. I discuss Kālbeliyā dance from the following two perspectives: as an invented tradition that began with its annexation by the transnational Gypsy world and consequently, as a constructed snake charmers' folk tradition and intangible heritage (UNESCO). Kālbeliyā dance was primarily shaped to retrace the origins of Gypsy artists in India. As a product of Rajasthani fusion, the dance arose within the framework of the transnational world music industry and was grounded in discourses of popular romanticism and exoticism. Recent support of middle-class, local *folklorist-managers* in promoting the Kālbeliyā community as a culture of traditional snake charmers has allowed the Kālbeliyā dance community to improve its social status within the national Indian cultural scene to such an extent that Kālbeliyā dance is currently a globally recognized facet of India's folk dance heritage.

In the fourth chapter, I demonstrate the rigidity of categorizing performing arts. I show how the dual categorization of Kālbeliyā dance as belonging to both folk dance groups and to hereditary nomadic head figures has been fed by sociopolitical and commercial discourses instead of representing unbiased divisional groupings. I highlight the theoretical frameworks of prevailing representations of Indian performers generally and Kālbeliyā dancers more specifically, the global struggle for the control over (cultural) discourses and the inevitable hybridity of cultural practice. Based on this case study of Kālbeliyā dance, I illustrate the constant flux of embodied practices, which is often selectively and discursively ignored, particularly in the framework of the so-called "Eastern" dances. In this chapter, I scrutinize persistent encounters between Indian nationalists, transnational world music managers, global and local audiences and the Kālbeliyā performers themselves in (re)claiming tradition and authenticity. First, I sketch the development of Indian cultural policies in the colonial and postcolonial era by specifically focusing on the creation of divisional categories of (neo-)classical and folk(lore) dance genres. Second, I compare Indian nationalistic definitions of tradition (both classical and folk) with transnational tendencies to interpret these discourses. I highlight the importance of consumerism for the current development of cultural policies, particularly in relation to the development of the world music industry in the 1980s. I analyze the artificial but universal categories from which performances are streamlined. Moreover, I demonstrate the dynamism and hybridity of cultural practices, particularly embodied practices, which lead to constant changes in dance practices, including those of Kālbeliyā dance.

In the fifth chapter, the dynamic molding of Kālbeliyā dance representing local Rajasthani 'folk' culture is illuminated. This chapter addresses the implementation of Kālbeliyā dancing practices as they develop locally as representational folk arts in certain regions of Rajasthan. Thus, despite the recent nature of public Kālbeliyā dance

performances as shown in the previous chapters, the staging of romanticized Kālbeliyā ‘folklore’ has progressively emerged as a normative character dance practice in representing traditional Rajasthani culture. The recent mingling of artists of different backgrounds (mainly Kālbeliyās, Laṅgās and Māṅgaṇiyārs) has led to the swift development of specific artistic techniques and the emergence of a unique cooperation system. In the fifth chapter, three case studies of Kālbeliyā dance in Pushkar, Jodhpur, and Udaipur depict fluctuating, innovative and folk-derived performance practices that were born primarily from cultural tourism in Rajasthan, with a particular focus on both artistic and (socio)cultural music-dance relations.

Over the past three decades, a series of documentary films featuring performing artists from Rajasthan have been produced. Extending the scholarly notion that the Roma historically migrated from India, these documentaries often portray present-day Rajasthani communities as descendants of Roma ancestors in India, and therefore as ‘Indian Gypsies.’ These ‘realistic’ films have greatly influenced public perceptions on Gypsy cultural representations and express identity politics of Gypsy unity, but have hardly been studied so far. To gain insight into both the portrayal of Rajasthani artists as Gypsies and the representation of the Indian background of the Roma, this sixth chapter presents the results of a contextualized content analysis of the films,¹¹ complemented by my ethnographic research. It shows that the image of the Indian Gypsy is grounded on the discursive interplay between Roma politics, commercial music industries and self-exoticizing marketing by Rajasthani artists.

The final chapter addresses the recent UNESCO recognition of Kālbeliyā dance and music practices. I discuss the representative transformation of these performance practices from more or less marginal street musical settings to the purview of internationally renowned intangible heritage. Pursuant to its rusty nomadic imaginary, the state of Rajasthan is equally celebrated as “India’s heritage state” by the Indian government in its promotion of tourism and in international disseminations of Indian culture through performances and festivals. Kālbeliyā dance, recently transformed into the chief saleable dance expression of this Indian state, was deemed eligible for UNESCO intangible cultural heritage status in 2010. In chapter 7, I discuss the effects of this global recognition of the dance tradition. Official recognition of Kālbeliyā dance as a form of heritage further evokes questions regarding UNESCO’s candidate selection process. This chapter is designed to explain the reasons for the nomination of Kālbeliyā dance (how and why has UNESCO been convinced to recognize it as a suitable

¹¹ This analysis has been conducted in collaboration with Iris Vandeveld (she holds a PhD in film studies).

candidate?) by relating this event to continuing processes of nationalism and romanticism, to economic strategies of the cultural tourism industry and to the commodification and commercialization of Indian folk arts.

Chapter 1

Reflecting on dance, embodying ethnography

Academic fields, methodologies and fieldwork



Figure 3 Performance with Kālbelyās and Māṅgaṇiyārs, January 2015 (credit: Tom Decuyper)



This chapter discusses the methodologies and theoretical frameworks applied in this dissertation to study Kālbeliyās, their dance and their representations. It primarily aims to provide rhetorical self-reflection and self-positioning within ‘the field.’ Applying the contemporary sociological concept of auto-ethnography, I recognize the ways in which the production of meaningful and evocative research is grounded in personal experience and the ways in which personal experience, in turn, influences the research process. Or, as Conquergood (1991, 193) wrote in his critical article on rethinking ethnography, “rhetorical self-reflexivity has helped politicize ethnography,” and it thus illuminates the colored perspective from which I, as an ‘expert’, have produced this research in a methodologically well-grounded manner, through temporary, interpretative and fragmentary resources of reflexive insights.

By self-definition, I have recently been labeling myself an artist-scholar. My training in various Indian dance forms and my university degree in Indian Languages and Cultures shaped two of my most prominent identity markers over the past several years: being both a dancer and a researcher. While presenting my research, primarily as an ethnographic study of an Indian dance form, I have openly situated myself within multiple interdisciplinary fields to explore diverse approaches and to enrich perspectives. My research process has thus not been demarcated by one allocated field with one specific methodology. On the contrary, this study has been at times what Bhardwa (2013, 40) aptly described as a “disclosed mess of unanticipated methodological, personal and emotional challenges.” Hopping from one theoretical perspective to another, I dove into dance and music-technical analysis or ethnology; I entered the field of heritage studies; I dug into the few existing historical references on Kālbeliyās; I investigated most Gypsy-related sources; and I attempted to engage in tourist studies. My exploration of these various fields and their respective methodologies proved effective in providing a theoretical rationale for my implicit expectations and practices.

In addition to the exploration of the aforementioned multi-disciplinary theoretical fields during my research process, the long period of practical field experience with Kālbeliyā dance (2001–present) has directed me toward the coordinating field of (“peopled”) ethnography. In the words of Fine (2003, 41), ethnography can be described as follows:

In a peopled ethnography the text is neither descriptive narrative nor conceptual theory; rather, the understanding of the setting and its theoretical implications are grounded in a set of detailed vignettes, based on field notes, interview extracts, and the texts that group members produce. The detailed account, coupled with the ability of the reader to generalize from the setting, is at the heart of this methodological perspective.

The present research is primarily founded on qualitative empirical methods. In this chapter, I will discuss how and why I chose to apply these techniques, which include the quintessential participant observation method, interview techniques, field notes, reflexive journals and video recordings of performances. Furthermore, I will call special attention to close relationships, such as friendship, as a new and rather experimental technique for ethnographic research. In the second part of this chapter, I focus on dance ethnography as a sub-field of ethnography. I will then conclude by reflecting on some ethical questions related to my research.

This chapter chronologically reflects on my personal realizations—from my days as a young adolescent, overly attracted to the exotic enticements of *going native* (more about this concept is discussed below), to my current role as researcher, where I distance myself from the familiar and “unlearn” seemingly natural ways of my own behavior and that of my Rajasthani friends and research participants (see also Taylor 2011, 16). This process did not entail any physical or emotional detachment from the actual field; instead, it was “a process of looking ‘inward’ to the self—self-objectification” (ibid.). As Taylor further argued, one’s own social actions, interactions and performances should be considered an integral part of the research experience—reflecting on these episodes magnifies “the self-other interactions” and thus gradually alleviates “insider myopia.”

Before becoming an ethnographer: Unconscious fieldwork and auto-ethnography

It has been challenging to continue, adapt to and further build on pre-scholarly, personal experiences from my childhood. Authors such as Dewalt e.a. (1998, 288) have indicated that all ethnographers inevitably bring their prejudices, tendencies, and anxieties to the field. These authors have emphasized the importance of the researcher’s reporting, whereby he or she aims to make these biases as explicit as possible to ensure that readers are able to properly judge the scholarly work. The use of more formal methodology, such as structured data collection in juxtaposition with

participant observations, supports improvement in the quality and consistency of the researcher's reporting. My implementation of formal methodology started in 2012, and it has become the foundation of my reporting; however, I also recognize the importance of my pre-academic experiences. Indeed, my PhD was more of an elaboration and fine-tuning of an unconsciously embodied methodology than a newly developed project. I currently consider the period from 2001 to 2012 to be a stage of *unconscious fieldwork*. My first steps into the field, from which this dissertation is the result, were taken in 2001, when I took my first Kālbeliyā dance class.

It was late June 2001 and more than thirty degrees Celsius—an unusually hot, early summer day in Belgium. My mother, Nakoulou (my childhood friend and dance buddy) and I were heading into the city for our first meeting with a Rajasthani 'Gypsy' troupe. Mahabub Khan, who lives in Belgium and is one of the former members of *Musafir*,¹ had invited some students to dance and play music with a Kālbeliyā dancer and five musicians of his family who were touring Europe at that time. Although I have only a few memories of the dance itself, I clearly remember what I was wearing that day: a red miniskirt and a purple T-shirt, and I had two ponytails. My feelings of discomfort and alienation as well as admiration for these artists make these particular details stand out in my memory. Although these recollections probably exaggerate the actual facts—I resembled any average school kid (I was twelve years old at the time)—the stares and incomprehensible chatter of these Rajasthani artists, who pointed at me and the other *aṅgrez* (or “foreigners” as the Rajasthani artists would call us), stopped me from wearing a miniskirt ever again. While I had decided to become a 'Gypsy dancer' some time before that day, this meeting influenced my intention to engage, learn, interact and spend much of my free time with these Rajasthani artists—I wanted to be able to understand them and to integrate into the mystical and exotic Indian island that they inhabited during their stays in Europe.

Born as the child of artist-minded parents of the late 1960s, I was stimulated at young age to develop various creative skills. My father worked as an actor in children's theater and circus-like productions. Reaching back to her familial artistic roots, my mother taught me how to develop my interests in drawing, painting, music and dance. After moving out of our city house, we lived in trailers in the garden of our farmhouse during several years of renovations. I continued to play in these trailers in the years that followed. The creative home atmosphere, the circus-like productions of my father, the long stays in trailers all profoundly influenced the personal and, recently, professional

¹ Musafir is one of the first Rajasthani 'Gypsy' troupes to tour intensively around the world.

trajectory of my life. These early external stimuli aroused my particular interest in ‘Gypsy’-like figures, as I could metaphorically bond with these personalities more than I could with the average fantasy figures of most other young Belgian girls.



Figure 4 My father and I in Nieuwpoort, 1990 (credit: Monique Joncheere)

My elder brother gave me the soundtrack of *Latcho Drom* (1993), a famous Gypsy documentary film (see chapter 6), for my twelfth birthday. Initially, I was more fascinated by the music of the film and less so by the dance and images, as I did not see the actual documentary until two years later. I brought home all the available ‘Gypsy’ soundtracks from our local library and listened to them over and over again. Since I was determined to learn ‘Gypsy’ dance—whatever that imagination might have been for me at the time—my mother took me to numerous dance workshops in town that appeared to adequately resemble what she pictured a Gypsy dance form to be: belly dance, flamenco, tribal dance, salsa, and even tap dancing. One of my mother’s friends then told her about a new *Indische zigeunerdans* (“Indian Gypsy dance”) class that would start in Ghent, my hometown.

In 2001, my friend Nakoulou and I started our first *Kālbelyā* dance class with a group of adult women. Mahabub Khan, who settled in Ghent permanently, gave dance classes with Eva Baillieul. They had met some years before, during one of the *Musafir* tours in

Europe, at a workshop with Sua Devi, a Kālbeliyā dancer from Jodhpur who was internationally famous because of her appearance in *Latcho Drom*. Standing out as children among adults, Nakoulou and I soon ended up on stage, often performing with Rajasthani musicians and dancers.



Figure 5 Performance in Gent, July 2004 (credit: Jozef Vandenheede)



Figure 6 Living room concert in Nazareth, July 2006 (credit: Gilbert Joncheere)

As a teenager, I spent a considerable amount of time with numerous Rajasthani artists who were visiting Europe for performances. They taught me how to dance, how to cook spicy food, and how to make Kālbeliyā jewelry; we watched Bollywood films together, and I listened to their Rajasthani music; I had them stay over at my place (from a few nights to months); I organized living room concerts and performed with them on stage. As we were regularly touring Europe (Belgium, France, the Netherlands, or Germany) together, I got to be particularly close with some Kālbeliyā teenage dancers, since they often were the only female members of the performing troupe and were also from a different communal background than the musicians.² Moreover, these Kālbeliyā dancers and I were more or less the same age, generally between fourteen and eighteen years old. When I chose to study Indian Languages and Cultures at Ghent University, my primary goal was to learn Hindi and thus improve my ability to communicate with my Kālbeliyā dancer friends, many of whom did not understand any

² For more about the fusing of different artist communities, see chapter 5.

English. Before learning Hindi, it took me strenuous efforts to communicate through one of the male musicians, who likewise often knew only little *Hinglish*. In March and April 2006, when my parents considered me old enough to travel on my own, I made my first journey to the hometowns of the Rajasthani artists, whom we had hosted in previous years. I expanded my dance skills and broke down the language barrier by actively practicing my Hindi. This momentous trip convinced me to return annually.

Up to this point, I never pictured myself as a scholar. Eva De Clercq, presently head of the department of Indian Languages and Cultures at Ghent University, took special interest in my intense relationships with the travelling Rajasthani artists and the stories that I told about them. This project has driven me to elaborate and transform the practical knowledge that I had already gleaned from a decade of experience with Kālbeliyā dancers into academic research.

Because of my early encounters with Kālbeliyā dancers, most of whom later became the main participants of this study, my research more or less bypassed the more common steps of ethnographic study. Long before I began this project, I had made initial contact with the ‘community under study’—I had been unconsciously pulled into the subject. In contrast to some long-standing academic premises about balancing personal involvement and in contrast to the concept of the ethnographer getting close to his or her participants without letting them be close to the ethnographer (see below), I irreversibly intimately engaged myself with this topic long before pursuing this PhD. I have been observing, participating, and communicating with many Rajasthani artists, specifically with Kālbeliyā dancers, and I identified with them—at times I ‘went native.’

Upon entering the academic world, I initially consciously tried to avoid the label of *going native*; I experimented with positivistic approaches to being a neutral, objective, and almost anonymous or impersonal scientist. Insecure about myself as some sort of wannabe Gypsy dancer, I tried to conceal my dancer’s identity, and I designed my initial research from a distant and impersonal standpoint. Later on, engaging with contemporary ethnographic works, I realized the importance of “the active role of the researcher in shaping the process” (Bhardwa 2013, 41). Building on self-reflexive work reveals the ethnographer’s multiple identities in the field instead of pretending that the researcher is an external ‘outsider’ scholar. The impossible ‘quest’ for objectivity in human sciences, which was historically shaped by the influence of positivism, routinely hides the unspoken words of the ethnographer (ibid., 40; Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 288-89).

Therefore, cultural anthropology has recently moved toward a negotiated methodology that includes not only the most well-known technique of participant

observation but also the self-reflexive idea of the observation of participation. During the last two decades, auto-ethnography was introduced as a method in the field of social studies; according to this method, the researcher combines the characteristics of analytical autobiography (personal experience and contexts) and ethnography (external cultural observations) to process and produce a cultural experience. Complex, constitutive, and significant phenomena are proffered as experienced stories rather than authoritative theories and are thus “self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, online source). With this new “process of the ethnographic dialogue,” ethnographers focus on presenting a representational work of narrative ethnography, in which they attempt to avoid writing either just an “ethnographic memoir centering on the Self” or “a standard monograph centering on the Other” (Tedlock 1991, 69).

Auto-ethnographers not only methodologically analyze their own experiences but also utilize these “epiphanies” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, on-line source) as a comparative tool for research. Ellis e.a. (ibid.) have described epiphanies as “self-claimed phenomena,” which are valued as transformative experiences. Personal experience thus becomes a tool to “illustrate the facets of cultural experience, and, in doing so, makes characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders” (ibid.). In the process of conducting research, it became necessary to “stand back and attempt to assess, perhaps with a certain self-consciousness, the logic and legitimacy of one’s practices” (Fine 2003, 42).

This research project has involved a blend of auto-ethnography, in which I have tried to adapt my experiences, including those prior to 2012, and reflexive study, in which I aimed to provide an innovative portrayal of Kālbeliyā dancing in all its complexity based on the formal methodologies of ethnography, as I will now elaborate.

Locating the *performative-I*: Entering the field³

A researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork
(Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, online source)

Methodology in the field

In contrast to its popular portrayal, I would suggest that Kālbeliyā dancers are far from rural, backward and isolated from the world; rather, they regularly travel to foreign countries. Likewise, many national, and even more international, artists and cultural producers visit Rajasthan to work with them on collaborative projects, to attend rehearsals for international touring, and to experience ‘Gypsy’ homestays.⁴ This eagerness to work with exoticized Kālbeliyā Gypsies has gradually developed over the past couple of decades. In fact, Kālbeliyā artists’ families have recently been deluged with visits by what they like to call *aṅgrez* (“foreigners”), who envision Kālbeliyās as interesting traditional nomadic artist communities that live in the desert areas of Rajasthan. Many of these visitors take their experiences to a next level by establishing some type of anthropological project (see also chapter 6).

Making my research substantially different from other exploratory visits to Kālbeliyā dancers’ families is the inclusion of specific ethnographic methodological tools. First, a long period in the field “involves sustained immersion in participants’ lives, offering a processual and longitudinal perspective” (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 745), and I spent an extensive period of time (2001–present) digging into Kālbeliyā dance and the associated community. Second, the absence of a language barrier has helped me to communicate actively and directly with the participants. Although the younger generation of Kālbeliyā dancers is now learning English, communication between non-Indian artists and cultural producers on the one hand and Kālbeliyā dancers on the other remains limited and even appeared to be tricky at times.⁵ Third, I enjoyed the advantage of being

³ This terminology, the *performative-I*, has been first used by Tami Spry (2006).

⁴ Currently, many Kālbeliyā dancers’ families commercially exploit the concept of Gypsy homestays, which strategically involves making food on a wood fire, making tourists dress up in Rajasthani attire, making visitors dance with their youngsters, playing and listening to music and visiting their ‘native’ villages outside the city center. Some families are now even building ‘Gypsy village resorts’ outside Pushkar and Udaipur, taking the construction of artificial cultural tourism to the next level.

⁵ For professional projects, interpreters are sometimes consulted. In chapters 3, 6 and 7, I demonstrate that their intermediary role is sometimes commercially colored, rather than objective.

involved in the Kālbeliyā community before the commercial explosion of Kālbeliyā dance. I learned the dance and made initial contacts before entering the field as a scholar, and this early exposure became an advantage, as I was already familiar with Kālbeliyā dance skills. The dancers did not try to make me pay for dance classes, nor did they want me to organize an official show demonstrating their performance skills; instead, they were intrigued to see me dance (and to see how my dance skills evolved over the years). They also proudly showed me their new moves, and they similarly enjoyed having *dance battles* with me (see below). Fourth, the applied methodology of this dissertation involves specific strategies such as participant observation, using interactive interview techniques, participating in informal discussions, writing down observations in field notes and reflexive journals, and recording dances and performances (see below, where these methods will be discussed separately and in chronological order).

Using the non-probability technique of snowball sampling,⁶ I started with the multiple contacts I had gathered in the pre-doctoral period between 2001 and 2012, and from these relationships, I made contacts with new participants. I intentionally divided my fieldwork into four annual visits of a few months: March–May 2012, January–March 2013, December 2013–February 2014, and November 2014–January 2015. I primarily stayed with Kālbeliyā dance families in Jodhpur, Pushkar, Jaipur and Udaipur; however, during my first fieldwork trip (March – May 2012), I travelled throughout Rajasthan in search of other Kālbeliyā dance families. Travelling to the areas of Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Udaipur, Jaipur, Pushkar and finally Jodhpur, I noticed that the number of Kālbeliyā dancers is rather limited⁷ and restricted to three main urban districts of Rajasthan—the areas of Jaipur, Pushkar and Jodhpur. Although some Kālbeliyā dancers live in other areas (such as Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Kota, and Udaipur), they all originate from the Jaipur, Pushkar or Jodhpur areas of Rajasthan (see also chapter 5). Accordingly, in the fieldwork trips (January–March 2013, December 2013–February 2014, and November 2014–January

⁶ This term is borrowed from sociology. For more details on the technique of snowball sampling, see, for example, Noy (2008).

⁷ In the first two years of my research (2012–2013), I made a rough estimation of the number of professional Kālbeliyā dancers: I counted approximately 60 Kālbeliyā dancers who perform in public. In consultation with the 2001 census of India, this figure is equivalent to approximately 0.07% of the Kālbeliyā community. I added this calculation just to portray the small percentage of the community involved in professional performing. However, because of its recent fame (especially after its UNESCO recognition in 2010), many Kālbeliyā families made the shift to the dance business. Although all new Kālbeliyā dancing families are still quite closely related to the first generation of Kālbeliyā dancers, the spread of the dance profession is vast within the community today, and it will probably continue in the future. The steep increase of public Kālbeliyā dancers, makes it difficult to keep track of the number of currently active dancers.

2015), I devoted special attention to these three representative areas for Kālbeliyā dance, including a few shorter trips to Udaipur and Jaisalmer.

Participant observation

Participant observation techniques, which have been commonly accepted as the central epistemological orientation of ethnography and ethnomethodology, entail “naturalistic investigations of culturally-contexted social processes” (Paterson, Bottorff and Hewat 2003, 30). To register the experiences of participant observation, one explicitly uses behavioral analysis and systematically records the information gleaned while observing and participating. Participant observation does not solely serve as a method for describing cultural practices; it can furthermore identify the (shielded) effects of specific practices. Using these methods, I aimed to grasp the tacit aspects and often concealed “backstage realities” (ibid.) of Kālbeliyā dance practices.

The degree of participation has frequently been debated in the field of cultural anthropology and ethnography. On the one hand, *distant observation* requires strict objectivity in which the researcher aims to avoid influencing participants’ actions and behaviors. This method might entail such a distance that the researcher is not able to become fully engrossed in the phenomena occurring in the field. On the other hand, *engaged participation* or *complete participation*, in which the researcher becomes totally involved with the subject, leads to risks of the researcher *going native* and *becoming the phenomenon*. The balance between distant observation and engaged participation is considered difficult to establish. In complete participation, the ethnographer entirely integrates himself or herself as a new member of the community with the aim of practically ‘knowing’ cultural practices and rules of behavior. However, multiple authors (see, for example, Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 262-63; Tedlock 1991, 71) have highlighted the vulnerability or even danger of complete participation and stressed the importance of keeping some distance as a researcher. According to Tedlock (1991, 71), the potential danger of the fieldworker going too native lies in

the logical construction of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity between scientist and native, between Self and Other, as an unbridgeable opposition. The implications that a subject's way of knowing is incompatible with the scientist's way of knowing and that the domain of objectivity is the sole property of the outsider. Several fieldworkers have rejected this sharp analytical distinction between Self and Other. [...] In phenomenological terminology, this communicative interaction, or “we-talk” belongs neither to the realm of objectivity nor to that of subjectivity, but rather to “human intersubjectivity”. It is

this realm that distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences as a field of investigation.

Instead of complete participation, Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland (1998, 262) suggest “active participation,” which occurs when the ethnographer actually engages in almost all of the activities of the studied community in an effort to acquire cultural patterns without becoming an active community member. Rather than blindly adopting another self, the ethnographer aims to learn through the establishment of a constant dialogue with the participants. The new interest in the “coproduction of ethnographic knowledge” is represented as “an interactive Self/Other dialogue,” which organically combines previous methods of ethnography (Tedlock 1991, 82). The “simultaneously empathetic, yet distancing methodology” produces data that somehow reflect the researched people’s perspectives; it leads to a “human understanding” through the fieldworker’s erudition and thus creates space for dialogue and “shared intersubjectivity” (Tedlock 1991, 69-70; see also Murphy 1999, 498). Enculturation unavoidably takes place, in which a tacit understanding is developed (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 261). Despite the risks of going native or becoming completely engaged, ethnographic research is at the center of both our intellectual and our emotional lives; if we are not going native, we are at least becoming “bicultural” (Tedlock 1991, 82).

Avoiding complete absorption into the field, I intentionally divided my fieldwork into four annual visits of a few months. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 90) warned about the danger of feeling too much ‘at home’ during fieldwork. The interval between visits creates some necessary distance between the researcher and his or her field—providing the indispensable intellectual and emotional distance from his or her participants. The process of personal distancing gives the researcher some time to refresh his or her perspectives and offer some lucidity to the research endeavors (Taylor 2011, 15).⁸

In relation to shared human intersubjectivity and the constant dialogue, ethnographers tend to avoid becoming merely scientists who temporarily reify other

⁸ During the periods between my fieldwork visits, I occasionally met with Kālbelyā dancers on tour in Europe. Otherwise, I continued interacting with some of my closest contacts through Skype. Most Kālbelyā dancers are now active on Facebook, where they post pictures of their performances, and these posts are interesting to chart, as I can see where they perform, with whom, for whom and on which occasions. Since 2014, I caught up with WhatsApp; although the text messages on this application are restricted to a few basic sentences which they mostly know by heart (as Kālbelyās are largely illiterate), they are able to send short voice recordings of one minute. This technology has helped me keep in touch with Kālbelyā dancers and stay informed about their lives, activities, and performance schedules.

cultures. They instead position themselves as human communicators, creating a sense of equality with the people with whom they work. Communication is essentially generating shared time: sharing the lives of people over a substantial period of time (Conquergood 1991, 183). One often surprisingly rewarding strategy for fieldwork is the method of “hanging out” (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 261), which is exactly how I experienced the bulk of my time in the field. I hung out with Kālbeliyās; I lived in or near the community and took part in their usual activities, where I was just as often sitting in their houses, peeling garlic, helping their children with their homework and conversing with community members as I was joining them in their dance performances—dancing with them, watching their shows, and waiting backstage. I was participating, conversing, consciously observing and recording.



Figure 7 “Hanging out” in Jodhpur, March 2012 (credit: Tillo Detige)

The conversational interview

Kālbeliyās regularly self-exoticize their identities by creating their own narrative portrayals. By adapting themselves to the representations and the narrative that visiting artists and cultural producers expect to hear, they enjoy commercial benefits. Breaking through these appropriated and often tainted narratives was thus a large part of my research.

One of the greatest difficulties in doing fieldwork with Kālbeliyā dancers related to formal interviews. The moment one establishes a formal environment or produces a tape recorder, the dancers switch on their story-making machines.⁹ These kinds of interviews yield repetitive, unrealistic stories, which the dancers have learned to provide through their interviews for previous commercial projects. I observed the dancers' human propensity to use formal interviews to express what they wanted the interviewer to believe or how they wanted the interviewer to represent them. Most Kālbeliyās usually consider formal talks and recordings to be tools for the commercialization of their performances; therefore they do not want to talk for any other purpose during formal interviews.¹⁰

Data collection in more informal settings that are not set up for research purposes has been imperative. The method of the *informal, interactive or conversational interview* (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, online source), which I sometimes recorded and sometimes did not, appeared to be much more effective.¹¹ If I sensed an atmosphere of unnatural or forced conversations, I would turn off the recording, and I would then make some scribbles in my note book during the discussions and produce more detailed diary reports in the evenings (see below).

⁹ See the work of Metcalf (2002) for an interesting perspective on the idea of transforming the truth versus the idea of lying in anthropological research.

¹⁰ Before I started my research project, I was already aware of the fact that the methodology of formal interviews is used equally for commercial and scholarly purposes and is therefore somewhat intricate. I also attempted to help resolve a conflict with an MA student, Hélène Deruwe, doing formal interviews with the Kālbeliyā community in Jodhpur in 2010, where I witnessed the problematic nature of formal interviews.

¹¹ The use of conversational interviews and their partial recording, of course, renders conventionally counting the number of interviews is inapplicable.



Figure 8 Conversational interviewing in Jodhpur, March 2012 (credit: Babunath)

When I applied conversational group interviews, the participants often lost their awareness of being interviewed or recorded to such an extent that even if they were informed that I was ‘writing a book’ about my observations, many participants might not have realized that what they shared as ‘gossip’ during conversational interviews would be part of this dissertation. Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland (1998, 273) explained the value of this lack of awareness:

In fact, if informants [I use the term *participant* for *informant*] were always consciously aware of our activities as ethnographers, the information we acquire would be less rich. We want them to forget, for a time at least, that we are outsiders. We want to develop sufficient rapport and to have them become so comfortable with us as community participants that they will share insights and information that only insiders would know. We regard this as the strength of our method.

The use of this more ‘natural’, rather unstructured, conversational interview technique allowed Kālbeliyās to forget their role as self-exoticizing traders and to discuss the topics that I introduced in a less conscious and thus more reliable way. For these interactive, conversational interviews, I frequently thematized the interviews by

selecting specific topics beforehand,¹² and I prepared questions that I could ask to keep the conversation focused.

I formally and informally applied the technique of focus groups,¹³ and as Durham (2004, 147) wrote, “[t]he aim of these focus group discussions was to legitimize the voices of the participants and to elicit their constructions of meaning.” In these focus groups, I interviewed the current generation of professional Kālbeliyā dancers living in the areas of Jodhpur (25 dancers), Pushkar (9 dancers), Jaipur (14 dancers), Udaipur (5 dancers), Jaisalmer (3 dancers), and Bikaner (1 dancer); the parents and grandparents of professional Kālbeliyā dancers; the children (or future generation) of Kālbeliyā dancers; Rajasthani musicians (Kālbeliyās and non-Kālbeliyās; see chapter 5); folklorist-managers and international managers and performing artists collaborating with Kālbeliyā artists (see chapter 3 and 6); and tourists who were in contact with the Kālbeliyā dancers’ families.

Despite the abiding transience as an ‘outsider’ researcher, this methodology of familiarity creates a natural or spontaneous atmosphere in which the participants talk more freely, and the increasing familiarity between the researcher and his or her participants unavoidably leads to close friendships. Developing intense relationships with participants may become rather confusing for some ethnographers; however, if the researcher approaches such friendships from a methodological angle, this tactic might help him or her obtain in-depth perceptions. I turn now to friendship as a method.

“Friendship as a method”¹⁴

Numerous recent sociological studies have scrutinized the merits and challenges of the qualitative approach involving friends-turned-participants in the field (see, for example, Bhardwa 2013; Tillmann-Healy 2003; Taylor 2011; Ward 2008). This method is based on principles of interpretivism,

which [...] stem from the German intellectual traditions of hermeneutics (interpretation) and *verstehen* (understanding), from phenomenology, and from

¹² I mainly used conceptual interviewing, where, for example, the participants provided their perceptions on the relationship between dance and snake charming, or narrative interviewing, where, for example, the parents of the Kālbeliyā dancers talked about their occupations before their children took up professional dancing.

¹³ For more details on the technique of focus groups, see, for example, the work of Morgan (1997).

¹⁴ This title has been adopted from Tillmann-Healy (2003).

the critiques of positivism. Interpretivists take reality to be both pluralistic and constructed in language and interaction. Instead of facts, we search for intersubjective meanings, [...] the “webs of significance”; instead of control, we seek understanding. For interpretivists, “objectivity becomes a synonym for estrangement and neutrality a euphemism for indifference” (Jackson, 1989, p. 4). According to Norman Denzin (1997), we research and write not to capture the totality of social life but to interpret reflectively slices and glimpses of localized interaction in order to understand more fully both others and ourselves (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 732).

As an ethnographer, I actively established close relationships with Kālbeliyā dancers. In addition to some of the pre-existing friendships that I developed before my actual research as an “intimate insider,” which transformed the dancers into *friend-participants*, I also made many *participant friendships*.¹⁵ These friendships arose during the course of the fieldwork and thus vary in degrees of familiarity, rapport, respect and emotional attachment; they are considered variable and contextual in meaning and significance. The formation of “affective ties” among friends is established through common interests, a sense of alliance and emotional affiliation (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 731). Rawlins (1992) linked the formation of these ties to early childhood, in which children typically play more with children of the same age, sex and physical characteristics. Consequently, friendships not only provide emotional bonds but also (and perhaps more importantly) establish identity resources. Through ongoing relationships, “[c]onceptions of self and other are formed, reinforced, and altered” (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 731). Friendships tend to confirm more than contest conceptions of self because we are prone to befriend those who are similar to ourselves, those more self than other. Although the identification of the ‘self’ (the researcher) and the ‘other’ (the participants) often blurs boundaries when such intense relationships exist, I consciously avoided becoming a ‘real’ member of the Kālbeliyā community. The transience and artificiality of being an external insider, a foreign white woman, has always been obvious. Yet, my position as a fellow dancer and friend as I entered the field (in 2001), has created a type of inevitable, fictive kinship relationship and has at times been valuable for this research. This relationship is connected to the paradoxical task of “getting close to them without them getting too close to me” (Calvey 2008, 911-912). One of the main goals of friendship as a method involves the *creation* of a sort of familial comfort (which is not necessarily pretending to be a participant’s actual sister) through which community participants begin to share insights and information that they would

¹⁵ The distinction between friend-participants and participant-friends has been inspired by the work of Taylor (2011, 8).

normally share only with insiders (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 273). Through authentic engagement (spending time and hanging out with participants) and the consequent blurred boundaries between the researcher and the researched (being ‘friends’), I explored, in the words of Tillmann-Healy (2003, 733), “the complex humanity of both self and other.”

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 88-89) suggested that researchers maintain a manageable, marginal position in which the researcher gains “access to the participant perspectives, but at the same time, minimize[s] the dangers of over-rapport.” Conducting research using friendship as a method essentially requires the same data gathering techniques as any other method used in ethnography, including participant observation, interviewing, recording and systematic note taking. This method of inquiry is open, multi-voiced and emotionally rich, and it also demands in-depth conversations, regular involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 734). This empathic experience inspires participants to open up because they feel heard, known and understood. Questioning “standpoint theory, power relations and colonization,” Collins (1998, 229) suggested a move toward an “epistemology of empowerment;” this new way of knowing embraces “dialogue, relationships, and an ethic of caring that invites expressiveness, emotion, and empathy” (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 733).



Figure 9 Aasha and I in Jodhpur, February 2013 (credit: Rani Sapera)

Within the personal world of others, fieldwork and friendship are often similar and intertwined. As a cultural participant and researcher, one can never accept the simplistic insider-outsider dichotomy; our position is always permeable. According to Taylor (2011, 6), the ethnographer needs to get into the subjects' worlds ('gain entry'), negotiate his or her participative roles, and accept (or often enforce) flexibility in relationships, which will enable him or her to shift within his or her role according to the context. Friendships and emotional ties are thus progressive, passing through different stages and growing from "role-limited interaction" ("I-it moments") to "integration" ("I-You moments") to stabilization ("I-Thou moments") (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 732).

The characteristics of the ethnographer affect his or her level of participant observation. The researcher's personal background as an individual of a particular gender, race, and class, among other labels, prevents him or her from being a "neutral research tool" (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 277-78). To a certain extent, the scholar's personal background might be limiting at times; my 'whiteness' for example, has always prominently contributed to my distance from Kālbeliyā others, as has my limited knowledge of local Rajasthani dialects and perhaps my education (the literate self vs. the illiterate other). My identity as a young woman and dancer, however, has often been advantageous in my work with Kālbeliyās, particularly with young female dancers. The minimization of 'social distance' and the establishment of a more 'equitable identity' through gender, age and common (dance) occupation facilitates a form of bonding, giving female researchers "access to a physical and metaphorical 'backstage', a space that may have been closed off to male researchers" (Bhardwa 2013, 46). This advantage became clear only after my fieldwork period with Jacoba Kint (December 2013–March 2014), when we were actively working with male musicians from the Kālbeliyā, Laṅgā and Māṅgaṇiyār communities (see chapter 5). Despite my close contact with these musicians, the process of conducting actual fieldwork with them was challenging. I wanted to switch to more formal ways of interacting with male musicians for research purposes, which highlighted my gender identity—I suddenly realized that I was a young woman who wanted to conduct unconventional interviews with often older, rather conservative, Rajasthani men.

The deployment of friendship for research purposes, however, is often not the most obvious and comfortable empirical exercise; the demands on both sides are high, and it often produces erratic implications. The unavoidable blurring of personal and professional boundaries is almost doomed to cause some type of predicament in personal and/or professional ways (Taylor 2011, 13). The ethnographer needs to be constantly aware of his or her personal involvement, the self-consciousness of his or her positioning and the associated emotional demands. It is a thin line to simultaneously

maintain sympathy toward others and strive for scientific objectivity and personal detachment. Constantly reflecting, examining, scrutinizing and criticizing my own methods in ways not required with other more mainstream methods of inquiry seemed indispensable. In other words, the researcher must be aware of the limitations of reflexivity—the relationship between “knower and known is never unproblematic” (Taylor 2011, 9). The interpersonal bonds of friendship occurring during research are characterized by “the ongoing communicative management of dialectical tensions, such as those between idealization and realization, affection and instrumentality, and judgment and acceptance” (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 730).

Tillmann-Healy (2003, 732) further explained an ethnographer’s commitment in the field:

As we deepen our ties, we face challenges, conflicts, and losses. We cope with relational dialectics, negotiating how private and how candid we will be, how separate and how together, how stable and how in flux.

Blackman (2007, 699) highlighted the epistemological importance of emotions in ethnography, which can reveal “hidden ethnographies” that are too messy and thus generally too controversial to release. The toughest challenge of “emotional labour” (Lumsden 2009, 510), subjective judgment, the state of being too close, and the blurring of the self/other perspectives for me has been the murder of one of my close participants, Rekha.¹⁶

¹⁶ I met Rekha, a young Kālbeliyā dancer originally from Jodhpur, for the first time in Lille (France) in 2006. During my fieldwork, I spent weeks interviewing her, hanging out and eventually bonding with her (see also chapter 5). We often ended up talking about her personal life and her difficult family situation. I left her home in Udaipur just two days before she was murdered on January 30, 2014. The day before the event, I actually talked to the man who ended up being arrested for her murder. I had inside information about the situation, which would reveal many of the motives behind the murder, and I also emotionally collapsed because of the loss of a close friend, the taunting situation, and the frightening circumstances (I was advised to leave the Kālbeliyā colony in Jodhpur because of police riots). I am grateful to my partner Tillo, who was in Rajasthan at that time. His impartial view on the situation helped me to put this event into perspective.



Figure 10 At home with Rekha in Udaipur, December 2013 (Credit: Rahul Nath)

Having close friendships with my participants for such a long span of time helped us cultivate shared experiences, increased the degree of intimacy between us and led us to share deeper, more intricate perspectives on the self, the other and the context. Knowing when to avoid crossing the line between friend and researcher is a vital skill that I had to develop as an “intimate insider” (Taylor 2011, 15). Therefore, I appreciated and also considered it necessary to have the keen, observational eyes of outsiders in the field around me, as they often helped in cultivating additional intersubjective viewpoints. Their thoughts assisted me in taking a step back and critically and analytically examining my experiences on a regular basis. They extended some new objectifications or forced me to “unlearn” or lose some values or attitudes that I would have taken for granted (Taylor 2011, 16).¹⁷

¹⁷ My sister, Margriet, travelled with me for three weeks in the field. She took pictures and shot videos, observing and talking with people in ways that were different from mine; she also shared her insights, thoughts, and observations (April 2012). Tillo, my partner and a scholar, also joined me occasionally and, among other things, talked with the men. Jacoba Kint (an ethnomusicologist) joined me during my fieldwork from December 2013 to January 2014 and helped me to structure the ethnomusicological section of this dissertation (see chapter 5).

Almost every study, even the most empirical ones, related to human ‘subjects’ involves friendship, whether it is an explicit method or not. Despite certain risks, such as overtly personal involvement and certain direct implications, these exchanges have often refined this study in many ways. Therefore, I acknowledge, as Taylor (2011, 6) wrote, “the grossly under-theorized impact that friendships may have upon the processes of perception and interpretation within and of the field under examination.” I consider friendship a distinct method. However, not every researcher-participant relationship is mutual and close; a lasting friendship between them might even be considered utopian. Nevertheless, the friendship approach toward respondents enables a mutual respect, dignifies their stories and enforces the use of their stories for humane and just purposes (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 745). I practically experienced “the ethical quandary and displacement that this can create when the researcher-researched relationships shifts” (Taylor 2011, 5). A conscious mix of familiar friend-participants and unfamiliar participant-friends is considered wholly beneficial as some sort of checking mechanism, particularly with regard to the interpretation of cultural phenomena.

Making field notes and reflexive journals

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I also took field notes and kept a reflexive journal. For the field notes, I carried around a small notebook in which I scribbled notes to capture important data, especially during unrecorded interviews. I also used the notebook to jot down phone numbers, to store business cards or to lend to children who wanted to draw in it. The multifunctional notebook was well integrated as part of my field identity, and participants quickly got used to it.

In the evening, I retroactively wrote about my experiences, often referring to my scribbles from the day. In doing so, I meant to carefully record my observations, conversations and interviews on a regular basis, in combination with some personal reflections.¹⁸ The technique of keeping a reflexive journal is definitely a personally constructed product, but it helped to structure the data I collected. Reflecting on the data further helped me to prepare for my next day of fieldwork. When there is a large chronological gap between the fieldwork and the report (the written documentation), rereading the journals aids and sharpens one’s memory. Field notes and journals act as fluid and malleable intermediates between experience and interpretation (Barz 2008,

¹⁸ Isolating myself every evening to write the journal report was not always possible, especially when I was staying at the Kālbeliyā families’ homes. I would sometimes disappear from the ‘field’ for a day to catch up on the written part of the fieldwork.

209). The fieldwork journal might be called a vehicle for the potential reflexive and analytical transformation of private responses into public knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 151).

Recording dance videos

Video recordings have further expanded my methodological strategies and data collection by capturing additional cultural and sociocultural aspects. The application of video recordings in combination with participant observation serves to blend visual approaches in qualitative research (Paterson, Bottorff and Hewat 2003, 29). This combination might provide additional information for the journal reports; video recordings offer details of the situation that are too complex to perceive during the actual performance and that require a detailed retrospective review (ibid., 32).

I recorded 245 performances between 2005 and 2012 and 395 Kālbeliyā dance performances during this research project (2012–2015). I predominantly used video recordings to register (formal and informal) Kālbeliyā dance performances. These recordings indeed provided data that I did not notice during observations or participant observations. By collecting regular video recordings, I was also able to gain insights into the progression or evolution of events (performances) over long periods of time (ibid., 31). As an ethnographer, I was interested in studying stylistic variations of dance culture rather than registering choreography. Videos are invaluable as material for large-scale analyses of movement styles, and video recordings are the best means to visualize dance (Royce 1992, 53–54).

Analyzing sources

Through what Kvale (2007, 115) called “bricolage” or a “multiplicity of ad hoc methods and conceptual approaches,” the analysis of the collected data eclectically formed meaning and voiced a new discourse. To develop such new theoretical insights concerning a relatively unstudied topic, using a crossover method for analyzing the data seemed crucial (Durham 2004, 148), and this method has therefore been regularly applied in this research project.

The recorded interviews have been transcribed and analyzed (based on structural, linguistic, narrative and discursive techniques), leading to the construction and deconstruction of an understanding of current Kālbeliyā dance practices. During the interviews, it was important to briefly share interpretations and extract “on-the-spot confirmations or disconfirmations” (Kvale 2007, 102) of my interpretation of the

provided information. After conducting the interviews, I regularly used the method of cross-checking information and collectively (re-)listening to the interviews to provide a validity check or at least counteract threats to the validity of the analysis. This method demands that interview data be cross-checked with participating members of the community, who review their own statements and recordings (“the self-correcting interview” [Kvale 2007, 103]); this cross-checking process allows them to critique their previous statements and/or those of other participants and encourages further dialogue about specific topics (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 744). When the conversations were recorded, I would make the respondents (or others) listen to their own conversations, thereby allowing them to reflect on the same topic again (the “re-interview” [Kvale 2007, 103]), or I would make them listen and react to other people, thus spurring some discussion or inviting new opinions (Kvale [ibid.] called this “membership validation”). These repeated discussions on the same subject, especially when interesting issues surfaced during unrecorded conversations, helped me cross-check the reliability, validity and generalizability of the topics about which I wanted to learn more. This approach also acknowledges “the importance of contingency” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011, online source). Memory can be fallible on an unconscious level; thus, participants may be unable to recall or report events exactly as they occurred, and different people often remember the same event differently. Methods of cross-checking allow “dialogical intersubjectivity” or a form of relative agreement or validation between all participants interpreting a phenomenon (Kvale 2007, 121). Further, the method of triangulation, or “the checking of inferences drawn from one set of data sources by collecting data from others”, has regularly provided an additional validity check or has at least counteracted threats to the validity of the analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 183). In using this methodology, I compared interview transcripts with my notes and reflexive journals, as well as a multitude of video recordings if applicable.

Dance ethnography

As already touched upon in the introduction, dance is both an active product and a dynamic process; thus, it has its own impact on the world. The veil of mystery, subjectivity and esoterica associated with performing arts and especially with dance, however, has pushed its related academic discipline into the background of anthropologic and ethnographic research. Although dance *an sich* might be considered interesting, the study of dance is frequently deemed less important (Royce 1992, 38).

Various scholars have recently started to emphasize the multilayered significance of performing arts for broader social, political and cultural dynamics. Singer (2014, 137), for example, views the dancing body as “an agent of cultural reproduction and as a site of cultural representation.” Wong (2008, 78) assigns multiple distinctive characteristics to the field of performative ethnography. First, she considers performances to be representational genres or “social change agent[s],” as they strive toward an “act of transformative becoming.” Second, within the field of performative ethnography, one supposes that a performance carries “cultural ideologies” and “political economies.” Consequently, rather than a mechanical execution, a performance needs to be considered and approached as a piece of active “culture-making.” Finally, dance as a dynamic process leads to the preordained transformation of all engaged subjectivities: the performers, the ethnographer, the audience, and others (see also chapter 4). Regarding movement and dance, Sklar (2001, 30) rightly emphasized the following:

The way people move is more than biology, more than art, and more than entertainment. All movement must be considered as an *embodiment* of cultural knowledge, a kinesthetic equivalent, that is not quite equivalent, to using the local language. Movement is an essential aspect of culture that has been undervalued and underexamined, even trivialized. It is time to deal with movement in a culturally sensitive way and to give movement a more central place in the study of culture and culture a more central place in the study of movement. Movement knowledge is conceptual and emotional as well as kinesthetic.

With this dissertation, I examine the interconnectedness between the social, cultural aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of movement within the hybrid field of dance studies. The methodology of dance ethnography underlines the “present focus on the study of dance through field research [floating] free of any existing disciplinary affiliations” (Buckland 1999, 1). It refuses to impressionistically view or perform dance; instead, it treats dance as “an object of anthropological inquiry” (Royce 1992, 19). The general objective of ethnography is to find complex patterns in cultural systems and to examine the tacit and overt embeddedness of its members in relation to society (Feld 1982, 230). Using comparative observations and concepts from the field of cultural analysis, I aim to focus on the living (and therefore fluctuating) sociocultural systems operating underneath the surface of visual entertainment.

The key to understand the underlying living and fluctuating sociocultural systems in dance ethnography is kinesthetic knowledge. As Royce wrote in her book *The Anthropology of Dance* (1992, xv), “‘knowing by doing’ is different from ‘knowing by observing’.” Knowing through the body is inherently integrative, and it ought to facilitate knowing cultures from the inside out. Therefore, when studying Kālbeliyā dance, I moved away from representational prominence and embraced the embodied

experience (see also Barz and Cooley 2008, 4; Dankworth and David 2014, 7). This embodied experience thus becomes another medium of communication and understanding—an additional social vehicle for understanding a particular culture (Singer 2014, 136).

Kinesthetic knowledge challenges the text-reliant scholar, as it is difficult to observe, collect, analyze and store (Royce 1992). According to Berger (2008, 70-71), experience relates to phenomenology, in the sense that a dance piece is not just an analytical performance but also a “lived experience of social persons” (see also Dankworth and David 2014, 8). In his paper on music—which I extend to dance—Berger (2008, 71) wrote that experiences are “embedded with affect, style, value—meaning in the broadest sense of the word.” The physical actions of agents, whether presented as actual dance or not, produce meaning. Farnell (1994, 931) emphasized the importance of embodiment in anthropology because it “draw[s] attention to the ethnocentricity that has until recently permeated our spoken-language-cent[er]ed approaches to systems of meaning.” The human body, thus, must be considered an additional agent, a moving one, “in a spatially organized world of meaning” (ibid.).

The goal of anthropology and ethnography is to gain ‘insider’ knowledge—practicing the dance that one is writing about is a valid aspect of fieldwork, as it adds effective, direct engagement to people’s embodied praxis (David 2014, 16). Learning *how* to move, rather than observing *what* is moving, elevates the sensations of moving beyond the pure visual effects, as such embodied knowledge is considered an “immediate corporeal experience” (Dills and Cooper-Albright 2001, 93; Sklar 2001, 31). An apprenticeship—in this case, in dance—is distinctive from other participatory approaches in fieldwork; it teaches you *how* to see (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 265). As mentioned above, I predominantly learned Kālbeliyā dance in an informal way. I learned, not so much by taking classes, but by what I started to call *battling*, a sort of game in which Kālbeliyā dancers challenge each other by doing the most difficult, inventive, and original “accents.”¹⁹ Within this informal process of transmitting embodied knowledge, I would be asked to dance with one of the dancers and to copy their accents. The aim of this game is to be able to copy each other’s accents throughout the dance sequence. To this day, Kālbeliyā dancers learn and perform in this way (young dancers copy the more experienced dancers on stage; see also chapter 5). Once a dancer has proven her ability to follow one of the skilled dancers, she is often requested to do solo improvisations, which is another way to share and learn from each other.

¹⁹ They use the word “accent” rather than dance steps or movement.



Figure 11 Demonstrating my dance skills in Pushkar, April 2012 (credit: Margriet Joncheere)

In participating in people's everyday lives and dancing as a “lived-through experience”, an ethnographer can develop an “empathetic kinesthetic perception” (Sklar 2001, 31). Relying on the aforementioned principle of movement as cultural knowledge, I regard dance performance, not merely as a visual spectacle, in the words of Sklar (2001, 32), “but as [a] kinesthetic, conceptual, and emotional experience that depends upon cultural learning.” Bodily participation provides the ethnographer with an additional instrument—the body becomes a “site of knowing” and consequently acts as an intensive medium of cultural understanding (Conquergood 1991, 180).

On the ethics of ethnography

The researcher's personal and active presence in the field, which often goes beyond simple data gathering and interpretation, inevitably influences and potentially affects the participants under study (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998, 287; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 16). The quintessence of participant observation within qualitative methodology raises critical questions about reliability. During the process of working on this dissertation, I often struggled with the ethical issue of my participants' inability to

understand the consequences of their participation/collaboration. Despite the numerous conversations, interviews, recordings and notes gathered during my time with Kālbeliyā dancers and their families, they may have remained unaware of my (novel) goal or intentions as a scholar, let alone the potential impact of the publication of my research on their lives and dance practices. Even though I made the aim of my presence explicitly clear to the community, most participants quickly forgot or did not understand what I was doing. After multiple efforts to explain the goals of research, and what I wanted to write about, the only message that sometimes came through was that I was writing a book about them. Even that fact generally seemed to be forgotten.

Their overall obliviousness made negotiating access particularly easy. When asking their permission to record, photograph, use their names, and the like, I instantly obtained their consent, as they mostly considered my research “good publicity”—some sort of promotional stunt or a gateway to fame. Many, often desperately, wanted me to become their international tour manager, believing that my book would be the first step in that direction. Furthermore, it often proved challenging to work with friends-turned-participants; the dancers considered me their teenage friend, their sister, even their *ustād* (“guide”). The personal relationships with roots in my pre-research life and the almost blind trust in my actions by most Kālbeliyā participants have been an advantage, but also raised several ethical questions for me.

With the goal of production of knowledge in mind, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 219) suggested that the researcher should rely on “ethical situationism,” in which we assert our legitimacy as researchers, even if it might offend someone. However, an ethnographer can try to adjust his or her emphasis to avoid potential harm to the participants. Indeed, sometimes I have maintained participants’ anonymity to avoid any personal harm. Considering the concept of “ethical relativism” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 220), Kvale (2007, 28) wrote that the potential benefits and importance of the novel knowledge outshines the possible risks of harming the subject; it is thus the researcher’s responsibility to consider the “the ethical principle of *beneficence*.” Although the criteria of such decision-making could be debated, legitimating certain actions and behaviors as part of this research project remains a challenging task.

Conclusion

For many ethnographers, their academic research becomes their lifework (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 737); for me, however, my lived experience has become an academic project in multiple ways. I have come to recognize the complex relations between the self, culture, embodied practices and performative experiences during this research (see also Dankworth 2014, 96). As a scholar, I have learned to actively conceive the world of Kālbeliyā dance without deteriorating my commitment to realism. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 17) have described successful ethnography as the questioning of realism through the consideration of hidden politics and self-reflexivity. The “reflexive turn” (Blackman 2007, 699; Lumsden 2009, 502), first introduced by feminist and postcolonial studies and now generally adopted in social studies and ethnography, has acknowledged that a scholar cannot escape his or her active role in the field; this turn consequently relies on a certain level of commonsense knowledge, methodology and reflexivity, which was previously ignored by positivists and naturalists. By recognizing our active role in research, we share a “reconstructed logic of inquiry [...], we can produce accounts of the social world and justify them without placing reliance on futile appeals to empiricism of either positivist or naturalist varieties” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 18).

I excavate the sociocultural and political underpinnings of representational modes of Kālbeliyā identities and their dance. The questioning of such supervening representations provokes epistemological, methodological and ethical self-questioning. The discipline of ethnography and my active participation as a dance performer, as Wong (2008, 82) described it in her work, “remains oddly schizophrenic, weighted down by empirical baggage and a little naïve about the workings of subjectivity.” Therefore, I consider my dissertation an intersubjective reflection—a real though imperfect “isomorphism,” as the term was introduced by Fine (2003, 42), between my empirical descriptions and the actual world out there.

Using different methods (participant observation, conversational interviews, video recording, and a reflexive journal) described above, I have tried to provide a conceptual understanding that moves from the *what* to the *how* and, finally, to the *why*. With such an approach, a researcher can reach an analytical stage, which enables him or her to build on (comparable) theoretical frameworks.

Through the acquisition of embodied knowledge, I aimed to transcend other non-kinesthetic identity categories (see also Ness 2001, 67). Humankind, I noticed, could be defined as a “*homo performans*,” as Conquergood (1991, 187) called it—I, thus, invite you

to read my dissertation as a practical example of such performative human behavior—the *homo performans* being “a culture-inventing, social-performing, self-making and self-transforming creature.”

Chapter 2

Imagining the Kālbeliyās

About imposter-saints, snake charmers, and artist-beggars



Figure 12 Three Kālbeliyā dancers in Jaipur, December 2014



The state of Rajasthan in Northwest India is known by many epithets, such as *Rājputānā* (“the Land of the *Rājput*” [cavalier]), *Rājvārā* (“the Home or Land of Kings”), and *Mārūsthālī* (“the Region of the Dead”, referring to its arid landscape). Similarly, various names are used for its social groups and communities. The multiplicity of community-based naming current in Rajasthan, according to Erdman (2001 [1994], 46), depends on reciprocal and internal relations among communities (who is addressing whom?) and on the circumstances or the specific context in which they are addressed. Therefore, nomenclature does not only refer to “the externally imposed analytic distinctions between tribe, clan, community and caste” (ibid.) but also refers to much more complicated interpersonal relationships. As Erdman writes, “everyone [in Rajasthan] knows who the others are, and social and political structures are dependent on complementarity and cooperation as well as differences through names and labels” (ibid.). Depending on the situation, a group or community, referred to as *kaum*¹ by Komal Kothari² (in Erdman 2001[1994], 47), is labeled by a different corresponding name for the community. Erdman (ibid.) argues that these names have levels of respectability and vary from denigrating to praising. Likewise, the community at the center of this dissertation is referred to by multiple names and labels, such as *Jogī/Yogī*, *Nāth*, *Samperā*, and recently even *Gypsy*; however, the name *Kālbeliyā* is the most frequently utilized.

In this chapter I give an overview of recurrent *Kālbeliyā* representations. These multiple depictions assist in specifying who they are, where they live, what their caste identification is, as well as their religious affiliation. I will show that the multiple names of the *Kālbeliyā* community not only refer to different levels of respectability, as Erdman and Kothari pointed out, but also function within socio-political and cultural discourses of representation in local, national and, more recently, transnational contexts. The indexical naming of communities, such as *the Kālbeliyā* community, leads to the creation of conceptual maps and assists as an interpretive tool. In this chapter, I

¹ According to the Rājasthānī-Hindī Saṃkṣipt Śabdakoś (2006), *kaum* is Rajasthani vernacular for *jāti* or caste. During my fieldwork, I noticed that the *Kālbeliyās* use two terms, *jāti* and *saṃāj*, as synonyms, which they interchange randomly.

² Komal Kothari (1929-2004) was one of the pioneers of folklore studies in Rajasthan.

explain the difficulty in contextualizing Kālbeliyās as a distinct community or caste in the larger framework of (Rajasthani) society.³

Difficulties in defining Kālbeliyās as an allocated group are connected to issues of “communalism” (Pandey 2008 [1990]), “caste classification” (Dirks 2001), and the solidification of a “uniform metonymy of endogamous ‘caste’ groupings” (ibid., 13) in the post-Independence era. The recent sociopolitical phenomenon of communalism, as defined by Pandey (2008 [1990], 7), is grounded in the idea that a group’s shared religion automatically results in common social, political and economic interests. Communalism presupposes that certain societal groups live the same lives, share the same beliefs, practice the same occupations, and even reside in the same types of houses. Pandey (ibid., 3) further considered communalism to be a colonial creation of “a new cohesion around foci of loyalty, such as caste, language and religious community.” If we follow Pandey’s conception of communalism and consider the division of society into communities as a political (imperialistic) and historical phenomenon, then we should critically examine a current community as an “imagined community” (ibid., 22) or a constructed grouping of certain people with common historical, religious, social and economic assets. Likewise, Dirks (2001, 4) has shown that under colonial rule, the modern concept of caste⁴ was used as an umbrella for diverse forms of social identities or a “precipitate of a [mostly political] history that selected caste as the single and systematic category to name, and thereby contain, the Indian social order” (ibid., 13). Dirks (ibid.) further argues that depending on the context, the multitudes of social identity were compounded by and dependent on more complex and constantly changing political systems in precolonial times. Caste formed just one category among

³ The number of Kālbeliyās recorded in the 1971 census is 19,449 (Danda 1983, 1). The Kālbeliyās have been an officially registered Scheduled Caste since 1950 (see The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 <http://lawmin.nic.in/ld/subord/rule3a.htm>). The 2001 Indian census registered the “Kalbelia [Kālbeliyā]/Sapera [saṃperā]” community, which numbered 75,118 members as a scheduled caste living exclusively in the state of Rajasthan. This recent count either indicates a steep rise in the Kālbeliyā population or may demonstrate the increased self-identification of people as members of a community or caste called “Kālbeliyā” in recent decades. The census of 2001 enlisted the Kālbeliyās as inhabitants of Rajasthan (see censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/SCCRC_08.pdf). In the 1950 census, however, Kālbeliyās (nr 38. Nat, Kalbelia, Sapera, Navdigar, Kubutar) were also registered in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh (see: socialjustice.nic.in/pdf/scorderchhattisgarh.pdf; socialjustice.nic.in/pdf/scordermadhyapradesh.pdf). According to Neuman, Chaudhuri and Kothari (2006, 238), the 1931 census indicates the return of the Kālbeliyā Jogis (3,740 of them) from other parts of India to Rajputana, the present Rajasthan. The 2011 census of India has not (publicly) shared community-based numbers.

⁴ See, for example, Bayly (1999), Dirks (2001), Inden (1990) on the modern concept of caste.

others, not a single category or “a single logic of categorization” (ibid.) that represented a distinctive identity.⁵

Following the theories of Dirks and Pandey, it appears that multiple Kālbeliyā identities have been invigorated by sociopolitical discourses of caste classification and communalism during recent decades. In this context, it is appropriate to rethink some of the current representational straitjacketing of the so-called Kālbeliyās. The current typecasts that epitomize a common Kālbeliyā distinctiveness bear resemblance to surreal exotic imaginaries: Kālbeliyās are portrayed as healing snake charmers, yogic ascetics, mysterious magicians, street musicians, exotic dancers and Gypsies. In this dissertation, I show how Orientalist elements that are perceived in the Kālbeliyā community were assembled into the current stereotypes and formed the substratum for prevalent, sometimes newly created, representations of Kālbeliyā dancers (see also chapters 3 and 4). This chapter provides an initial analytical contextualization of the Kālbeliyās and their dance “by both socially dispositioned agency and external constraints – relationships between a Kalbeliya [Kālbeliyā] ‘public sphere’, global capitalism, postcolonial, Orientalist discourses about tourism, Indian-ness, and snake-charming” (Higgins 2010, 151).⁶ I will analyze the connotations of these names and the underlying corollaries that lead to the formation of certain external images and the shaping of the (internal) identity of this specific community. The Kālbeliyās’ various names and their corresponding representational narratives of occupation, lifestyle and religious identification are therefore selected as the *leitmotiv* of this chapter.

First, the Kālbeliyās, who popularly represent a *Jogī-jāti*⁷—often simplistically translated as “ascetic caste”—will be located within the larger scholarly, historical framework of the Nāth Yogī traditions of India, which are also documented as a Śaiva cult (*panth*). In current popular imagination, the Nāth Yogīs are typically epitomized as ascetic *babas* or saints with dreadlocks and ashes on their faces, practicing extreme physical control through (tantric) yoga on desolate riverbanks.⁸ Less well-known is that in addition to its perhaps more famous ascetic groups, the Nāth Yogī tradition consist of

⁵ Moreover, other rubrics for identity can surpass caste. Dirks (2001, 13) gives the examples of regions, villages, residential communities, kinship groups, factional parties, chiefly contingents, and political affiliations as other rubrics for identity.

⁶ Carter Higgins (Cornell University) has conducted anthropological research on the Kālbeliyā practices of itinerancy, snake charming, and begging (2010, unpublished). He has shifted his current research topic to ritual and narrative practice oriented towards Gogājī.

⁷ In Rajasthan, the name Jogī is frequently used as a vernacular form of the more ubiquitous Yogīs or Nāths.

⁸ For a critical examination of this popular representation, see the works of Patton Burchett (2011, 2013).

groups of householder (*gr̥hastha*) Nāths. The Nāth Yogīs, including both ascetics and householders, consists of multiple assorted lineages of *gurus* with their disciples. Traditional Nāth Yogī literature and scholarly works count a number of conventionally recognized *gurus* along with other *gurus* outside of these lineages.⁹ One of these “outsiders,” Kanipāv(nāth), is considered the *guru* of the Kālbeliyās (see, for example, Angelillo 2014, 21; Higgins 2010, 21; Robertson 2004, 7; Wickett 2013, 3).

The association between Kanipāv and Kālbeliyās leads to the second representation: the image of Kālbeliyās as the snake charmers from Rajasthan. Because of Kanipāv(nāth)’s rebellious and competitive attitude toward Gorakhnāth (Bouillier 2013, 158), one of the more influential *gurus* and often considered to be the preceptor of the community as a whole, Kanipāv was expelled from the mainstream tradition. He was punished with the task of carrying poisonous animals. Ever since, according to these oral narratives, Kanipāv and his disciples—the Kālbeliyās—have been known for their snake-charming practices. This narrative offers a plausible mythological explanation of why Kālbeliyās are often associated with snake-catching and snake-charming practices. The term *saṃperā*, or snake charmer, is frequently used as a metonym for the entire Kālbeliyā community, and snake charming is likewise portrayed as its traditional occupation.

The Kālbeliyā community is also represented as a formerly (semi-)peripatetic community. As itinerants, they provided services while traveling for much of the year. In relation to this nomadic lifestyle, another normative occupation—that of ritualized begging—has been ascribed to Kālbeliyās. Circulating the streets, they act as ascetics (*Jogīs*) and beg for alms. In lieu of such begging practices, some Kālbeliyās also play musical instruments, such as the *puṅgi*, a flute generally associated with snake charming,¹⁰ and small percussion instruments; the women of the Kālbeliyā community sing short melodic stanzas. These portrayals of Kālbeliyās as nomadic performers led to a fourth representational image of them as the artist-ancestors of the European Gypsies (see chapter 6).

Despite these solid representational narratives, I will show that these depictions often have little resonance with the current daily realities of the religious practices,

⁹ This number of lineage-leaders or *gurus*, however, varies among references between nine and twelve, and sometimes more.

¹⁰ A *puṅgi* is a double-reed wind instrument that is played using the circular-breathing technique.

occupations and lifestyle of the Kālbeliyā community. I further argue that the attempts to use only one trait to define this community reveal its multiple complexities.

The Kanipāv Jogīs: Kālbeliyās as degenerated imposter-saints

In the few scholarly accounts touching upon the Kālbeliyās, they are situated within the Nāth Yogī traditions because they share certain socioreligious markers of identity, such as some Śaiva-oriented practices, the sporadic use of ocher clothes, the burial of their dead, and their *guru* Kanipāv.¹¹ The Nāth Yogīs comprise an ascetic and monastic tradition (*sampradāy*) that is often described as one of India’s most important Hindu Śaiva sectarian movements (Lorenzen and Munoz 2011, ix; Bouillier 2013, 157). Gold (1999, 72) has noted that the Nāth Yogīs have always gathered in groups of ascetics and householders (*gṛhastha*), which are equally important for the institutionalization of the early modern Nāth Yogī *sampradāy*. The term Yogī has “many shades of meaning from that of saint to that of sorcerer” (Briggs 1973, 1, also in White 1996). In this section, I explain this first representational image of the Kālbeliyās as predominantly householder members (*gṛhastha* Nāths) of this *sampradāy*; a conception described by Higgins as the community’s “yogic identity” (2010, 41).

The Nāth Yogī *sampradāy*: a brief contextualization

The Nāth Yogī *sampradāy* currently consists of interacting orders of renunciate ascetics on the one hand and householders on the other hand. This presently distinctive religious path has been defined by its transmission of teachings through a rigid teacher-disciple tradition (Bouillier 2013, 157). Both ascetics and householders attribute importance to the distinct devotion to a particular Nāth *guru* and consider themselves the descendants of that *guru*. The current group of Nāth *gurus* is generally counted as a genealogical line of multiple *gurus*, headed by the First Nāth (*Ādināth*), also referred to as the supreme Nāth or Lord Śiva (Horstmann 2014, 1). Although the first indications of

¹¹ Kālbeliyās adapt Śaiva ritual practices in their daily lives, such as the extensive celebrations on Śiv *rātrī*. They bury their dead instead of engaging in the more common Hindu practice of cremation. The practice of entombing bodies is often referred to as *samādhi*.

these lineage-leaders are found in numerous references from before the twelfth century, such as their sectarian texts (in Sanskrit and many vernacular languages), hagiographies, inscriptions, iconographies and historical reports, a distinct identity for these Nāth Yogīs long remained unsolidified. Overlaps in ascetic milieus and the mixing of various ascetic groups have complicated the reconstruction of the early history of this currently distinctive Nāth Yogī sect; the reconstruction primarily corroborates “the lack of emphasis on sectarianism” in this earlier state (Mallinson 2015, online source). Regional disparity fomented a rivalry between ascetic groups that lasted for centuries. Continuous problems of dissension led not only to attempts to construct sectarian boundaries but also to the first forms of homogenization of disparate lineages and localized traditions (Horstmann 2014, 1). The first prominent semi-historical *gurus* of the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy* likely lived sometime between the ninth (cf. Matsyendranāth) and twelfth centuries (cf. Gorakhnāth). During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Gorakhnāth became a central figure to the *sampradāy*. He is generally considered the first person to attempt the institutionalization of the Nāth *siddhas*¹² and the establishment of a Nāth *sampradāy* (White 1996, 95). By the sixteenth century, most Nāth Yogī denominations had established headquarters in North India (Mallinson 2011, 17).¹³ Sub-orders in the Nāth Yogī tradition began to be structurally formalized only during Mughal rule.¹⁴ By the eighteenth century, the celibate ascetics, referred to as Yogī,¹⁵ split off and divided into three distinct groups of ascetics, the group currently known as the Daśanāmī Saṃnyāsī (naked Śaiva ascetics), the Rāmānandī (Vaiṣṇava ascetics) orders and the Nāth Yogīs.¹⁶ The process of solidifying the *sampradāy* as a distinct religious identity—or religious identities, to indicate its internal regional diversity—was initiated by the “Pax Mughalia” and was precipitated by the rise of the British Empire.¹⁷ In 1906,

¹² *Siddha* generally refers to a perfected master who has achieved a high degree of physical and spiritual control.

¹³ The Nāth Yogī denominations are called *panths*; there are generally considered to be twelve *panths*. According to Mallinson (2011, 1), the first references to the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy* as an organized entity date back to the seventeenth century.

¹⁴ The interesting interchange with Islam and Sufism, in particular, has left its mark. See Digby 1970, Ernst 2005, Khan 2003.

¹⁵ The term Yogī also seemed ambiguous because it often referred to “yoga practicing ascetics belonging to a wide range of orders, in particular those of the Daśanāmī *saṃnyāsīs* and Rāmānandīs” (Mallinson 2011, 3).

¹⁶ The period in which the religious order was structured is currently the subject of a debate between James Mallinson (2011; 2015) and Monika Horstmann (2014, online sources). Horstmann suggests that it dates back further; although the nomenclature Nāth cannot be verified for the community, there might have been a community present before the eighteenth century. Mallinson (2011, 4) emphasizes that the focus on Śaiva orientations in the Nāth traditions has recently increased.

¹⁷ Pax Mughalia refers to a high degree of economic welfare and political stability during the high Mughal period. During this period, religious exchange between Islamic Sufism and Hindu devotional practices

the establishment of the national Yogī Mahāśabhā was the first attempt to unite the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy* as one.¹⁸ Mallinson (2011, 18), however, examines the Mahāśabhā's endeavor to emphasize ascetic practices and to distinguish itself from its lay peers. Ascetics claim “superiority in spiritual matters” and look down on the householder Nāths as the “descendants of fallen ascetics.” As explained below, this quite recent tension between ascetics and the householder Nāths, also popularly called “*family-vāle Jogīs*” (Napier 2007, online source), likely led to a gradual distancing from formerly more unified local Nāth Yogī traditions.

The *gurus* of the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy*

During the gradual formation of Nāth Yogī traditions, inscribed lists of Nāth *gurus* emerged from the late fifteenth century onward.¹⁹ However, these formal listings of Nāth *gurus* as lineage leaders are not mentioned in any of the *Haṭha* yoga sources (or other Sanskrit sources that are directly related to the Nāths) before the eighteenth century (Mallinson 2011, 4). Even after the eighteenth century, there are significant variations in the numbers and names of the members on the many lists of the Nāths after Ādināth (see, for example, Dvivedi 1996 [1981], 25–27; White 1996, 90–95). Only in the nineteenth century did numerous Sanskrit and Hindi hagiographical works attempt to standardize the listings into lineages of nine Nāth Yogī leaders.²⁰ In modern times, a range of hagiographies of the nine Nāths is available in many vernacular languages, thus showing the importance of the mainstream Nāth sects in India's popular imagination.

The two names that recur in most of the Nāth *gurus*' lists are Matsyendranāth and Gorakhnāth.²¹ Multiple primary Nāth Yogī sources, along with scholarly accounts, identify Gorakhnāth as the disciple of Matsyendranāth. Gorakhnāth was by far the most famous reformist *guru*. He is often considered the founder of the Nāth order of ascetics and the first teacher of *Haṭha* yoga. The teachings associated with Gorakhnāth attached

flourished (O'Hanlon and Washbrook 2011, 135). A complex variety of causes for this solidification process of creating a distinct religious identity continue to be debated among scholars. For more information, see O'Hanlon and Washbrook (2011).

¹⁸ In full, the Akhil Bhāratvarṣīya Avadhūt Beṣ Bārah Panth Yogī Mahāśabhā or the “Pan-Indian Assembly of the Renouncer Yogīs of the twelve branches” is currently based in Haridwar (Bouillier 2013, 163).

¹⁹ According to Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam (1992, 125), the first written source that contained a list of Nāth *gurus* is the (Telugu-language) *Navanāthacaritra* (Deeds of the Nine Nāths).

²⁰ Mallinson (2011, 4) traces most of these nineteenth century works back to Rajasthan.

²¹ According to Mallinson (2011, 5), Gorakhnāth likely lived in South India (in the Deccan region).

great importance to celibacy and to the internalizing of *Kaula* tantra practices.²² Numerous *Haṭha* yoga texts and vernacular verses in the *nirguṇ bhakti*²³ style are ascribed to Gorakhnāth (Mallinson 2011, 1/5). Since the eighteenth century, most *panths* have recognized Gorakhnāth as the leader of the entire Yogī Nāth tradition. There were multiple efforts by the followers of Gorakhnāth, the Gorakhnāthī (also Darśanī), to deify their saintly guru as “the godhead” (Śrīnāth—*anādi anant puruṣ* or “the eternal person,” and even Lord Śiva himself) (Dvivedi 1996 [1981], 27; Mallinson 2011 5/18). The nine Nāths became his *avatārs*. In addition to these nine Nāths, there are many lesser-known *gurus*, including Kanipāv(nāth), the *guru* of the Kālbeliyās.

Kanipāv: The *guru* of Kālbeliyās

Kanipāv²⁴ is generally said to have been from the Bengal area and to have lived during the tenth century.²⁵ He is most often described as the disciple of Jālandharnāth (one of the nine *siddhas*).²⁶ Scholars have referenced multiple versions of the Kanipāv story.²⁷ Kanipāv’s stories largely concern the rivalry between him and Gorakhnāth. Gorakhnāth and Kanipāv(nāth) were initially two peers/“brothers” (*guru bhāī*) in the Nāth tradition, each with his *guru* (Matsyendranāth and Jālandharnāth, respectively). Gorakhnāth is typically portrayed as the stronger of the two, with yogic powers that surpass those of

²² According to Mallinson (2011, 5), this Gorakhnāthī tradition attempts to refute “the exclusivity and complexity of earlier tantric ritual.” Although Gorakhnāth is often portrayed as a *guru* who advocated celibacy among ascetics, this form of yoga “involved the visualization of the raising of *kundalinī* in combination with other physical practices, including sexual ones. His cult included both celibate and married *yogīs*, and he was among the latter” (ibid., see also Muñoz 2011). See White (2003, xi - xvi), who described *Kaula* tantra as “the sexualization of ritual,” among other things.

²³ The concept of *nirguṇ* (“without attributes”) *bhakti* is a “distinct devotional mode” contrasts with *saguṇ* (“with attributes”) *bhakti*. This concept arose during the “classical” period of *bhakti* literature in North India (ca. fifteenth - seventeenth century CE) (Stratton-Hawley 1995, 160-161).

²⁴ There are many variations on his name, such as Kānīpa, Kānhapā, Kānhu, Kaneṛī, Kṛṣṇapāda, Karṇripā, Kāniph and Kānanīpā (Mallinson 2011, 6). In the work of White (1996, 107), Kanipāv is called a “*Kāpālīka*” (“belonging to a skull”) disciple of *Jālandherī-pā*.

²⁵ Mallinson (2011, 8) emphasizes the lack of evidence that the ascetic Nāth *sampradāy* would have flourished in Bengal at any time before the eighteenth century, and even after the eighteenth century this tradition remained a minority. The first reference to Kanipāv (“*Kāpālīka*”) is found in a Bengali song dating back to the tenth century (ibid., 6).

²⁶ In this source, called the *Goraṣavijaya*, composed sometime during the early fifteenth century, Kanipāv is mentioned as the companion of Gorakhnāth; however, in later references, he is always associated with Jālandharnāth and described as his disciple (Mallinson 2011, 6).

²⁷ For different versions of the Kanipāv story, see Digby (2000, 157-160), Grodzins-Gold (1992, 300-310), Higgins (2010, 21-24), Jodh (2011, 17-21) and Robertson (2004, 281-288).

Kanipāv. In the end, the arrogant, less skilled Kanipāv was defeated. The discord between the two *gurus* led to the exclusion of Kanipāv and his later disciples from membership in the *panths*. Since the expulsion of Kanipāv from the Nāth Yogī community, his disciples have been forced to beg for their food by catching snakes and poisonous animals. This representational narrative accounts for why the Kālbeliyās remain predominantly labeled as the descendants of Kanipāv and consequently have been designated as a community of snake charmers.

In general, the Kālbeliyās are still understood to be active members of a larger Yogī Nāth *sampradāy*. This religious movement, however, seems far removed from the daily realities of most Kālbeliyās. According to Angelillo (2012, 194), the Kālbeliyās seem to have been distinguishing themselves from many other mainstream Nāth communities, predominantly Gorakhnāthīs, for a long time.²⁸ Briggs (1973, 69) considers the Kanipāv cult a “half sub-sect” of the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy*. Robertson (2004, 13) observes that “the Kalbelias [Kālbeliyās] do not have ritual or social relations with the other Jogis [Yogīs] or *panths* (way) of the Nath sect.” Higgins (2010, 25) similarly confirms the minor role of Kanipāv in the Kālbeliyā community.

In fact, not only were a majority of my informants unaware of the stories of Kanipāvjī, he did not figure into any of their ritual practices: no one performed worship of Kanipāvjī; no one sang his praises at Kalbeliya *jāgarans* (“all night *bhajan* singing parties”); and no one hung pictures of Kanipāvjī in their home shrines. I discovered that basically the only time people referenced Kanipāvjī in my presence was when they were explaining their remembered practices of itinerancy and begging. [...] For my informants, the narrative of Kanipāvjī had no hegemonic reach because it wasn’t at all that important. What’s more, because Kalbeliyas had, for the most part, abandoned these practices, they had no use in referring to Kanipāvjī amongst themselves.

My experience with the Kālbeliyā dancers’ families corresponds to these observations. When I asked my Kālbeliyā participants about Kanipāv, the general response was, “Who is Kanipāv?” The Kālbeliyā dancers and their family members do not have prominent ritual practices for Kanipāv, nor do they have many temples or shrines dedicated to him. A small anecdote illustrates the relative unimportance of Kanipāv in the daily ritual practice of the Kālbeliyā dancers. It relates to my attempt to

²⁸ Angelillo dates the separation of Kālbeliyās from other Nāth Yogī communities back to the twelfth century, but she gives no source of argumentation in any of her published works. Taking other historical works on the Nāth Yogīs into account, this dating seems to be too early.

visit the Kanipāv temple in Pushkar.²⁹ When I asked Moriya (a Kālbeliyā dancer in Pushkar) where the temple of Kanipāv was, she replied, “Who is Kanipāv?” I clarified, “You know, the temple that Gulabo [Gulabi Sapera] built a few years back?” She turned to her elder sister and said, “Did Gulabo build a temple in Pushkar?” Her sister replied, “Yes, the one just outside town.” Moriya smiled and said, “I’ve never visited that temple.”³⁰ This single endeavor of Gulabi Sapera appears to have been uninfluential. I did not observe any other temple or ritual practice that was related to Kanipāv in other places during my fieldwork.³¹

Despite the common view that the Kālbeliyās are householder Nāths, they appear to be ostracized from the larger Nāth Yogī community in Rajasthan and generally are not acknowledged as full-fledged members of the Nāth Yogī tradition (Napier 2013, 9-10/22). This is commonly explained as caused by the expulsion of their *guru*. Moreover, Higgins (2010) and my own experience reveal that the Kālbeliyās appear to have collectively erased their *guru* Kanipāv from memory. In reality, the Kālbeliyās have begun to engage both in other, more popular local Rajasthani religious practices (e.g., the cult of Bherujī³² and Baba Rāmdevjī³³) and in more general pan-Hindu practices (e.g., the popular devotion to Durgā Mātājī). The tendency of absorption into a pan-Hindu religion has been the most influential in Nāth communities, such as the Kālbeliyās, who appear to have always been marginal in the *sampradāy*.

Kālbeliyās today: powerful ascetics or low-caste Hindus

The use of the suffix *-nāth* by Kālbeliyā men or their self-identification as “Jogīs” appears to indicate that the Kālbeliyās confirm themselves as a community that belongs

²⁹ The construction of the Kanipāv temple is an attempt by Gulabi Sapera (read more about Gulabi Sapera in chapters 3 and 5) to create a distinctive religious identity for her community by which she hopes to bring about the community’s social improvement. More about the Kanipāv temple in Angelillo (2014).

³⁰ Interview conducted on December 5, 2014. The translation is my own from Hindi.

³¹ In the documentary, *Songs of the Dunes: Search for the Original Gypsies* (2009) a newly built Kālbeliyā temple in Falna (Pali district) is shown. It remains unclear whether the temple is dedicated to a specific deity, saint or *guru* (such as Kanipāv).

³² Bherujī, which is vernacular for Bhairava (its Sanskrit form), is most often considered an incarnation of Lord Śiva. This deity has a complex background. “Bherujī [is] a fierce male protector deity who may take many forms even as the goddess does and is often identified with posthumous heroes and with Śiva” (Martin 2015, online source). For more information on Bhairava and the Yogīs, see Bouillier (1997, 48-53).

³³ Baba Rāmdevjī is a vernacular deity that is mostly venerated in Rajasthan. He is considered a (semi-)historical warrior figure who possibly lived in the fourteenth century. He is venerated by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. For further reading, see Khan (1998).

to the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy*.³⁴ The term Nāth, however, has been construed quite recently to refer to this Nāth Yogī group. Before the eighteenth century, the words *nātha* (Sanskrit) and *nāth* (regional languages) simply denoted “Lord” (used to refer to a god) or “master” (of religious knowledge), and the members of the various ascetic lineages were known as Yogīs. As stipulated before, the ascetic-householder boundary is blurred in both a theoretical and a practical way—“ostensibly distant, but often mutually supportive, and moving in parallel ways as they approach the twenty-first century” (Gold 1999, 69). In the twentieth century, because of a process of Sanskritization,³⁵ disparities in the community increased. Sanskritization upholds a division and separates ascetics from householders because of the different Sanskrit models in which they believe (*ibid.*, 81).³⁶ Thus, there is an increasingly twofold distinction in the *sampradāy* between the ascetic Yogīs, the “real” members of the tradition, and the householder Nāths, distinctive ancestral lineages of degenerate Yogīs who broke the rules of celibacy and “who were drawn back to the illusory snares of marriage, procreation, and inheritance” (Grodzins-Gold and Gold 2014, 289).³⁷ Gold (1999, 72) considers “[t]he emergence of the [householder] Nath [Nāth] caste community as a kind of fall – but not an immediate or even necessary one.” The “Yogī ideal” of the householder Nāth community remains the “prosperous, married, householder-magician”—the powerful, politically engaged figures of precolonial times.³⁸ The fall of these householder Nāth Yogīs has been attributed to “an unfortunate interaction of magical power with the worldly passions of family and politics” (*ibid.*). Gold further argues that in the earlier generations of the Nāth Yogī lineages, the householder Nāths were equally perceived as powerful Yogīs, which may indicate that they used to be a single but mixed community of householders and ascetics who shared similar marks of identity. Bouillier (2013, 164) calls the householder Nāths the “descendants of lapsed ascetics,” who often provide an alternative yogic model or preserve tantric values that were lost to modern asceticism. According to Grodzins-Gold

³⁴ The suffix –nāth is added to the names of Kālbeliyā men, such as Kālu(nāth), Bābu(nāth), Pārśva(nāth). Female Kālbeliyā dancers do not use the female version (nāthnī), as noted in Briggs’ book (1973, 1). They often add Devī as a suffix (e.g., Suvā Devī, Māyā Devī, Līlā Devī).

³⁵ Sanskritization is the homogenization of Hindu religious practices. This homogenization links more local vernacular traditions to the “high” cultural norms that are found in Sanskrit texts.

³⁶ According to Gold (1999, 70), the Nāth Yogīs of Nepal (householders and ascetics) are still perceived as a single community. The community has maintained its solid alliance with the local dynasty and is therefore equally powerful. In Rajasthan, however, the power of the Nāth Yogīs (both householders and ascetics) diminished because they did not enjoy the constant patronage of the princely courts. During British rule and Independence, the local political power of Nāth Yogīs declined even more drastically.

³⁷ See Napier (2007) for alternative reasons for the disparity in the tradition.

³⁸ See Gold (1995) for more information about the Yogīs’ influence in Rajput kingdoms.

and Gold (2014, 289), the apparent twofold division often remains indistinct and many householder Nāth communities maintain their spiritual and genealogical affinities with world-renouncers.

Currently, as might have always been the case, householder Nāths are more numerous than ascetics. They consist of a multiplicity of predominantly endogamous castes throughout India and Nepal.³⁹ The householder Nāth castes contain many social groups, from low-status Muslim bards (Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan) to relatively high-status “Sanskritized” communities (Bihar, Rajasthan and Karnataka) (Mallinson 2011, 2). In Rajasthan in particular, householder Nāth communities have intermingled with both Hindu and Muslim communities. The householder Nāths of Rajasthan began to create their own identity by structurally referring to themselves as Nāths, distancing themselves from ascetic Yogīs and countering the vernacular, pejorative label Jogī, which had come to be associated with low-status castes and mendicant orders (Grodzins-Gold 1992, 51). According to Grodzins-Gold and Gold (2014, 291), Nāth teachings were transformed over time and were sometimes veiled, weakened or fragmented by other influential, more popular traditions of Hinduism. Many householder Nāths, in my observation including the Kālbeliyā community, have adapted their daily practices to more standard Hindu householder norms (Gold 1999, 82). The absorption of Kālbeliyā religious practices in more pan-Hindu traditions seems more obvious than with other Nāth communities from the same area. Likewise, in Rajasthan, “this apparent monolithic Hinduism [...] glosses over the wide range of religious beliefs and practices” (Lodrick 2001 [1994], 20). Singh (1998, 476) proclaims that the “caste deity” (*kul devtā*) of the Kālbeliyās is Bherujī, whose main temple is located in the Jodhpur area. He also mentions Durgā Mātā as an important goddess for the Kālbeliyās. Local deities, such as Baba Rāmdevjī, who is likely the most popular deity among the Kālbeliyās (also in Higgins 2010, 31), also play a significant role in their religious practices.

In summary, Kālbeliyās are usually represented as members of the Nāth Yogī *sampradāy* in both popular and scholarly accounts. Scholars, as I observed during fieldwork, generally explain the apparent loss of the Kālbeliyās’ practical connections to the *sampradāy* as resulting from the excommunication of their community *guru*, Kanipāv. Their consequential marginal position within the *sampradāy* might have persuaded this community to adapt to other religious practices. This link to the Nāth

³⁹ According to Mallinson (2011, 2), the householder Nāths live predominantly in Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

tradition, however, has remained important for the historical legitimation of their profession, especially when they are portrayed as snake charmers.

The *saṃperās*: Kālbeliyās as the snake charmers of Rajasthan

In the context of Nāth Yogī mythology, the legend of Kanipāv and his expulsion from the tradition, which forced him to become a snake charmer, is still commonly referenced as the reason why the Kālbeliyā community, the disciples of Kanipāv, practices this inherited profession. In both scholarly works and more popular sources, the Kālbeliyās are generally known and frequently represented as snake charmers. Robertson (2004, 1) considers the snake-charming occupation “their traditional occupation,” whereas Angelillo (2012, 194) considers it “the main social characteristic of caste.”

These same academic works have indicated that many communities in Rajasthan, especially in rural areas, venerate snakes as the animal embodiment of a deity. Because snakes are viewed as religious symbols, villagers offer milk or donations to charmers or keepers of snakes (“gods”) (Angelillo 2012, 201). The devotees come to watch the snakes in public spaces, often in the street or occasionally in front of a provisional shrine, where these animals are supposed to “dance” to the sound of a gourd pipe, called a *puṅgi* or *bīn*. In addition to this ritual (or religious) practice, snake charmers have a more pragmatic societal function: they are called both to remove snakes from human residences and public places and to cure poisonous snakebites (Angelillo 2013, 82–83). Snake charmers are considered healers who possess secret recipes for medicine. They remove the poison glands of captured snakes and use them to make an antivenin;⁴⁰ however, they also use the glands to make eye creams and other pharmaceutical products.⁴¹ Despite modern, equipped hospitals, villagers who live in the rural areas of

⁴⁰ The *saṃperās* indicate that after removing snakes from villagers’ homes, they only keep the snakes for short periods of time (several months) and then release them in the jungle. A few *saṃperā* men roam the nearby jungle to look for snakes, especially cobras (Robertson 2004, Angelillo 2012, 2013).

⁴¹ The most famous eye cream of the Kālbeliyās is called *surmā*, a strong *kājal*-like product that is based on cinder and snake poison with other secret ingredients. I felt cold, burning sensations when I used it—the eyes tear for a short time. The Kālbeliyās in Pushkar consider the daily use of *surmā* the perfect medicine to protect against vision loss. *Surmā* has become an expensive product because few individuals produce it. It seems that this apparent luxury product is no longer used regularly (Fieldwork in Pushkar, January 2013).

Rajasthan primarily rely on these traditional treatments of the snake charmers (Angelillo 2012, 201; Jain et al. 2011, 258). Because of this occupation, Kālbeliyās are often called *saṃperā*, which accurately translates to “snake charmer.”

Both popular narratives and scholarly accounts portraying the Kālbeliyās as a singular group of professional snake charmers (*saṃperā*), should be nuanced. Higgins (2010, 38) correctly states that only in Rajasthan are professional *saṃperās* regularly identified as Kālbeliyās. In contrast to claims by Robertson (2004, 276), the *saṃperā* epithet is also used for many non-Kālbeliyā snake charmers’ communities and their corresponding occupations of snake charming and the traditional healing of snake bites, particularly in North India and to a certain extent, throughout the Indian subcontinent (Higgins 2010, 149-151; Dutt 2004, 12). In Rajasthan alone, various other communities (such as Bhīl, Mīṇā, Sahāriyā, Garāsiyā, Gūjar, Ḍomaṛ, Kāthoḍī) have been identified as healers of snakebites; as a result, they are also often called *saṃperā* (Jain et al. 2011, 258).

Furthermore, in contrast to the statements by Robertson (2004, 1) and Angelillo (2012, 194) referenced above, Komal Kothari indicates that only approximately five percent of Kālbeliyās are actually involved in snake charming or snake worship (in Bharucha 2003, 53-54; also in Singh 1998, 474). Although this number is likely a well-reasoned guess not based on an actual count, it challenges the claim that most Kālbeliyās are practitioners of the snake-charming profession. The low number of Kālbeliyā snake charmers has been attributed to the governmental prohibition on snake catching. The Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 seeks to protect “India’s fast depleting wildlife” (Dutt 2004, 8) and has made the profession of snake charming illegal. However, it is plausible that the decline in this practice began long before the 1970s. It seems unlikely that the number of Kālbeliyā snake charmers has diminished from a normative occupation (according to Robertson and Angelillo) to a minority livelihood in the community (or five percent, according to Kothari) in less than thirty years (or one generation). The Kālbeliyā dancers with whom I worked did not keep snakes at home and did not practice snake charming. Many Kālbeliyā dancers even claim to be afraid of snakes. Most of the members of the older generation (the parents and grandparents of the Kālbeliyā dancers) who were interviewed did not recall the practice of snake charming.⁴² This finding indicates that if the Kālbeliyā dancers’ ancestors were snake charmers, they would have left the profession at least three generations ago. Again, we seem to be working with an unbalanced narrative to represent the complexities of this community.

⁴² As noted during multiple interviews (2012-2015) with older-generation Kālbeliyā focus groups.

Instead of being a normative occupation, snake-charming should be considered as one amongst a wider range of occupations in the community. Multiple scholarly works on the Kālbeliyās (see, for example, Singh 1998, 474-475, or Higgins 2010) have categorized the *saṃperās*, or professional snake charmers, as a subgroup of the Kālbeliyā community. The community has often been subdivided into profession-based categories of snake charmers (*Samperā*, *Pungivālā* or *Jogīrā* [Singh 1998, 474]), basket makers (Kālbeliyā *chabṛīvāle*⁴³ [Robertson 2004, 13] or Kālbeliyā *ḍālīvāl*⁴⁴ [Singh 1998, 474-477]), and grinding-stone craftsmen (Kālbeliyā *cakkīvāle* [Robertson 2004, 13], Kālbeliyā *Mevārā* or *gaṭṭīvālā*⁴⁵ [Singh 1998, 478-480]). According to Singh (1998, 474), the Kālbeliyā *ḍālīvāl* (basket makers) are located not only in the Pali district but also in the Ajmer, Chittaurgarh and Udaipur districts. The Kālbeliyā *chabṛīvāle* (grinding stone craftsmen) and *saṃperā*⁴⁶ are spread among the regions of Udaipur, Chittaurgarh and Bhilwara, with the largest concentration in the Udaipur district. In Neuman (et al. 2006, 238), the manufacture of *ras*, a part of the pit loom,⁴⁷ is mentioned as the Kālbeliyās' primary occupation. The development of new technologies for making fabrics eliminated the traditional market for weavers and therefore, the Kālbeliyā profession of making *ras*.

The attempts to define the Kālbeliyās based on occupational division appear to be rather artificial or at least outmoded. I observed during fieldwork that this division has no importance in the daily life of the Kālbeliyā community. Higgins (2010, 145) similarly writes in his case study of Kālbeliyās in Jaipur that few people who are grouped in one of these categories actually practice their distinctive trades in modern times. The tripartite categorization of Kālbeliyās based on occupation has also led to the idea that the Kālbeliyās' range of occupational practices is restricted. On the contrary, Bharucha (2003, 54, also in Angelillo 2012, 195) notes the wide range of specialized skills, which are sometimes combined with ritualistic practices, and "other kinds of indigenous expertise." Kālbeliyās' occupations include stonemasonry and building work, selling herbal medicines, farming, truck driving, factory work, rickshaw driving, army service, policing, housekeeping staff in the tourist industry, and artistic performance (i.e., illusionists, acrobats, dancers and musicians), to name a few that I have observed.

⁴³ *Chabṛā* means "basket"; *chabṛī* is the diminutive form (McGregor 1993, 339).

⁴⁴ *Ḍālīvāl* is derived from *ḍāl(i)*: basket.

⁴⁵ *Gaṭṭī* means "a grinding stone."

⁴⁶ Singh (1998, 478) considers the *saṃperās* a single group in the Kālbeliyā community.

⁴⁷ A pit loom is a device used to weave cloth.

Although few Kālbeliyā men actually practice the snake-charming profession and although it was likely never their only occupation in the past, Kālbeliyās are currently stereotyped and famous as traditional snake charmers. A combination of a popular interest in snake-lore (see chapter 3) and the symbolic image of a snake charmer for the Kālbeliyā community that references a mythical past have maintained this representation of the community.⁴⁸

Nāth or Naṭ: Kālbeliyās from nomadic beggars to artist-gypsies

Despite the diverse occupational range of Kālbeliyās discussed above, a collective memory exists of a time when one normative occupation of the community was begging. The communal ascetic (self-)identification as Jogīs empowers them to “literally *perform* as ascetics while begging” (Higgins 2010, 1). During this practice, Kālbeliyā men often temporarily dress up and act as ascetics, earning a livelihood on the streets by displaying animals or relics to the villagers or through ritualized begging (ibid., 110).⁴⁹

For this “ritualistic” way of begging for money, Higgins uses the term “sham ascetics” (2010, 1), and this practice is often considered fraudulent, especially by the local inhabitants of Rajasthan. The standard expression *bhīkh māṅgnā*—to beg for alms—commonly refers to all religious mendicants, including the Nāth (Grodzins-Gold 2011, 92) and Kālbeliyā practices. In India, they are often referred to as “beggars” (*bhikhārī*) (see, for example, Jodh 2011, 15); however, most Kālbeliyās consider this a humiliation because they claim they never ask for money by “showing their hands” and always deliver some service in return; they consider themselves to have a higher status than beggars.⁵⁰ Komal Kothari expresses the differentiation of Kālbeliyās from beggars:

It is important to differentiate nomads from beggars, those vagrants who can be found begging for a livelihood in a bus and railway stations and on the streets.

⁴⁸ Notably, many Kālbeliyās—recently, mostly female dancers—who do not actually work as snake charmers use the name *saṃperā* as an emblematic communal surname.

⁴⁹ They have, for example, cows with five legs, snakes, images of gods (in particular, *sāto bahṇem* or “the Seven Sisters”, popular mother goddesses in Rajasthan). Singh (1998, 476) also considers the snake-charming profession as “begging by exhibiting snakes.”

⁵⁰ Derived from interviews (March 15, 2012, and April 4, 2012); Bhattacharya (1975, 753) observes the same. Some Kālbeliyās, however, do not hesitate to utilize the word *bhikhārī* when describing their own profession (also in Robertson 2004, 14).

Nomads⁵¹ are not beggars: they provide certain types of services for which society is obliged to provide them with food. The services are primarily of a technical nature, which are not otherwise available in the villages (in Bharucha 2003, 53-54).

Grodzins-Gold (2011, 91) has described the performances of Jogī [Yogī] Nāth minstrels twice a year during harvest time. They cry *Alakh* (“Unseen”)⁵² while approaching the houses of local people to “perform” fragments of epic tales in exchange for donations of food. This practice is called “making rounds” (*pherī lagānā*) by these Nāths in Rajasthan. Likewise, they consciously avoid the word “begging” (*bhīkh māṅgnā*) (ibid., 92). Wickett (2013, 8) observes the use of *pherī lagānā* among the Kālbeliyā female singers in Jaisalmer, where these women used the term to describe their way of generating income. The women were circulating in the villages “singing songs for their supper” (ibid.).



Figure 13 Old Kālbeliyā woman practicing *pherī lagānā*, Pushkar, February 2013

Higgins (2010, 106) identifies the Kālbeliyās not only as religious beggars but also as “entertainers.” Furthermore, he emphasizes the artificiality of the divide between rituals (religious) and entertainment (secular).⁵³

⁵¹ Later, he uses the term Jogī to refer to the Kālbeliyās.

⁵² *Alakh jāgarṇo* literally translates as “To awaken [to] the imperceptible.” Grodzins-Gold (2011, 91) translates it more freely as “Awakening Generosity.”

⁵³ This representation will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Not only is snake-charming both ritualized *and* entertaining, the disconnection of one from the other may be rooted in an assumed dichotomy between “religious” ritual and “secular” entertainment. Following Bell (1992), I will leave the characterization of snake charming outside of the realm of “ritual”, preferring instead to find in individual performances of snake-charming the strategies of ritualization (differentiation) employed.

The boundary between ritual begging and secular street entertaining is indeed difficult to identify. Some Kālbeliyā men (some are snake charmers; however, many are not) play the *puṅgi*, which is the most stereotypical flute for snake charming; some Kālbeliyā men play small percussion instruments, such as the *ḍaphlī* and *mañjīrā*. Many Kālbeliyā women are known for their catchy songs, which they sing while going from door to door in return for food, alms or clothes (Wickett 2013; Neuman, Chaudhuri and Kothari 2006, 238). Some members of the Kālbeliyā community have therefore been categorized as street “artists” (musicians). Recently, some young women have assumed the profession of dancers, and some Kālbeliyā men have professionalized their musical skills to enter national and international stages (see chapters 3 and 5). As itinerant street artists, they have enjoyed a new representational image as Gypsies.

In addition to Rajasthan’s arid landscape of sand dunes and historic palaces, the state is well known for its numerous nomadic communities. The (semi-)itinerant lifestyle of many Rajasthanis has often been considered a response to the state’s desert climate. “[T]he existence of fuzzy group clusters practicing different degrees of mobility” (Rao and Casimir 2003, 12) has led to a historical continuum of vague cognitive distinctions between nomadism and sedentariness. Despite the difficulty in listing the nomadic groups of Rajasthan, several scholars have attempted to do so.⁵⁴ Systemizing these large sections of India’s population, Rao and Casimir (2003, 5) suggest that the nomadic communities of South Asia are best organized in “types of economic categories,” such as “the pastoralists and animal husbanders,” “the foragers or hunter-gatherers” and “the peripatetics.” In this representation, Kālbeliyās belong to the peripatetics or “service nomads” (Hayden 1999, 11-12; Neuman et al. 2006, 238; Robertson 2004, 3). Peripatetics provide services and offer all types of specialized goods and facilities to urban settlements, which necessitates a nomadic lifestyle. Most service nomads do not travel continuously, however, but instead are “part-time” nomads or “circulatory” migrants (Robertson 2004, 5). They travel with their tents for a specific part of the year and

⁵⁴ Komal Kothari, for example, enumerates approximately eighty types of nomads in Rajasthan (in Bharucha 2003, 52). Robertson (2004, 2) calculates that approximately seven percent of India’s population belongs to a nomadic community.

return to their home villages, where they farm for the rest of the year (Robertson 2004, 5). Currently, many nomadic communities, including Kālbeliyās, settle permanently on the periphery of urban areas.

Because of their occupation as ritual beggars or street entertainers (and sometimes as snake charmers) and their (previously semi-)nomadic lifestyle, some scholars (see, for example, Swarankar 2007, 156) have mistaken Kālbeliyās for members of the Naṭ community instead of Nāth, confusing the spellings of these different groups' names.



Figure 14 Temporary housing (*ḍerā*) of a Kālbeliyā family just outside Jodhpur, April 2012

Morcom (2013, 63) correctly notes that “[i]n modern India and in colonial ethnographies, classification of these groups can be confusing, with inconsistent patterns of interrelations and different names in different places for what appear to be the same groups.” Naṭs⁵⁵ is a generic term for formerly semi-nomadic tribes who were labeled “Gypsy” and were criminalized by the British in 1871 (Morcom 2013, 63). The stigmatization of these communities has steered “identifications and dis-identifications in recent or long-term history” (ibid.). Many nomadic communities have been multi-resourceful, with “inherently conflicting ‘ideal types’ – flexible, often multi-occupational nomadic communities operating within a rigid network of essentially uni-

⁵⁵ Other group names are Deredar and Bedia, and all identify themselves under the more general term of Bhatus (which is not considered a caste, community, or tribe name) (Morcom 2013, 61).

occupational community-units (castes)” (Rao and Casimir 2003, 18). Nomadic communities tend to create what Berland (2003, 105) calls a “peripatetic niche.” This dynamic niche makes nomadic communities flexible and multi-resourceful because they have access to diverse markets; they constantly adapt to changing social structures and adjust to the opportunities that are provided by external circumstances (ibid., 114). Whether there might be some connection between the groups of householder Nāths and itinerant Naṭs remains unclear and must be further investigated. The current connection or confusion between the two groups through the case of the Kālbeliyās instead appears to be primarily an attempt to identify this community within a larger Indian social framework. The last part of this chapter sought to demonstrate the Kālbeliyās’ skill in adapting to the multiple external demands to fit into contemporary frameworks. During fieldwork, however, I observed that the Kālbeliyā dancers identify with Jogī (Yogī), Nāth, and recently with Gypsy; however, they do not relate to—and rather consider themselves superior to—the Naṭs.

Conclusion

This chapter provided some initial insights into the current classifications and representations of the Kālbeliyā community. The so-called unity of this community has been popularly marked by several conspicuous representations, such as members of a Nāth Yogī tradition, snake charmers, beggars, artists and Gypsies. This identity formation based on “communalism” or a single image or portrayal of a group of people has created an “imagined community” (Pandey 2008, 22). Considering the multiple names that the Kālbeliyās use (e.g., Kālbeliyā, Jogī, Nāth, Saṃperā), I questioned the apparent unity of this group by demonstrating the complexity of the names and labels and by highlighting the stereotyping and its influence on the current labeling of the community. I discussed the unclear position of the Kālbeliyās in the Nāth Yogī (Jogī) *sampradāy*, which is primarily known for its ascetic practices. However, there does exist a large group of householder Nāths (Gold 1996, 91), which is further dislodged from the ritual (religious) practices of the First Yogīs. Although most sources designate the Kālbeliyās as adherents of Kanipāvnāth (and, thence, snake charmers) who belong to the religious traditions of the Nāths, the observance of their daily practices indicates that the importance of Kanipāv and the occupational inclination to snake charming is minimal. Next, this chapter addressed the occupations of the Kālbeliyās and described them as service nomads or peripatetics. Despite the normative triple subdivision into snake charmers, basket makers and grinding-stone craftsmen, I argued that the Kālbeliyās engage in a much larger spectrum of professional jobs. The characterization

of the Kālbeliyās as “(ascetic) beggars” was also briefly mentioned in this chapter. Both the usages of terminology (*bhīkh māṅgnā* versus *pherī lagānā*) and the status of “performative begging” were examined. This examination frames the discussion of some Kālbeliyās’ activities as professional dancers and musicians, which will be the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter 3

From Gypsy entertainment to *samperā* tradition
The recent creation of Kālbeliyā dance performances



Figure 15 Kālbeliyā dance performance in Pushkar, December 2013



In recent decades, so-called ‘Indian Gypsy troupes,’ or ‘Rajasthani folk ensembles,’ have become regular participants at transnational world music festivals and national folk fairs. Kālbeliyā dance, which is performed as part of these shows, has thus become increasingly well known around the world. Whereas the ornamental black dress, colorful beaded jewelry and expressive makeup distinguish the new visual identity of the Kālbeliyā dancer, explicit hip movements, fast spins, acrobatic tricks and rhythmic footwork are considered the foundational elements of her dance. However, despite the Kālbeliyā dance’s traditional appearance, purportedly a custom of itinerant snake charmers, it is likely to be a recent invention. This contemporary dance, popularly known as an ancestral, Indian form of Gypsy dance or alternately, as a traditional folk dance of snake charmers, is performed by women of the Kālbeliyā community. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kālbeliyās are generally classified by scholars as low-caste peripatetics and are categorized as members of a larger religious group called the *Jogīs* (or *Yogīs*). They offer diverse services, including types of ritualized begging (*pherī lagānā*, “making rounds”). With respect to these begging activities, Kālbeliyās have been described as buskers playing for alms. Although the Kālbeliyā community is regularly portrayed as a musicians’ community, until recently, public dancing was considered dishonorable for women and typically was forbidden by the community.¹

This chapter traces the origin of Kālbeliyā dance practice to the early 1980s, thereby demonstrating that it is a recently constructed tradition. It highlights the rapid establishment of the dance as a distinctive genre, first on the transnational market and later within the framework of Indian national cultural policy, where its integration has led to its institutionalization as a national folk heritage and ultimately, to its UNESCO recognition in 2010. I will argue the importance of traditionalism and narrative legitimization within a shifting adaptation process to fit into multiple discourses. Based on the principles of claiming authenticity, the creative search for ritual or the symbolic nature behind the cultural practice of Kālbeliyā dance serves as proof of its uninterrupted link to the past.² I will show how Kālbeliyā dance can be understood as the confluence of a transnational pursuit of Indian Gypsy culture, national cultural

¹ The content of this chapter will be published in *Dance Research Journal* (2017).

² This legitimizing strategy was first theorized by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983, 1).

policy, the expansion of local tourism, and socioeconomic benefits for the Kālbeliyā communities, all of which are factors that led to the creation of this dance.

The structure of this chapter is twofold. First, it will illuminate how the conceptualization of Kālbeliyā dance is both the result and a product of romantic and exotic narratives brought about by a growing world music industry in which transnational cultural managers specifically focused on retracing the origins of Gypsies back to India. When staged Kālbeliyā dance developed in the mid-1980s, it became a tool employed by artists and world music managers to support the so-called “Indian connection” hypothesis, which proposes that Gypsies originated in India and then migrated around the globe.³ The trope of the ‘artist-Gypsy’ is a popular image that facilitates the assimilation of those who are considered nomads into a transnational Gypsy world. Through this image, Kālbeliyā dance has become a familiar feature of the Gypsy-focused international world music circuit. Second, this chapter will focus on the initial (pre-UNESCO) marginal position of Kālbeliyā dance within local and national sociocultural spheres and its recognition in 2010 (post-UNESCO) as a snake charmers’ folk dance, which has improved the status of Kālbeliyā dance within India’s performing-arts landscape. Indian folklorist-managers began to depict Kālbeliyā dance as a performing art that was marketable to larger audiences and transformed it into a traditional folk dance. Its alleged continuity with the past was necessary to legitimize its claim to authenticity and tradition. To establish this sense of continuity, an artificial link was introduced between dance and the practice of snake charming. With the addition of an older ritual function, i.e. snake charming, Kālbeliyā dance befitted a nationalist framework of staged folk performances.

In short, this chapter demonstrates the powerful interplay of multiple parallel discourses and its agents that facilitated the development of Kālbeliyā dance. Whereas the global romanticist perspective stimulated the unification and (re-)union of Kālbeliyā culture with the transnational Gypsy identity via dance, Kālbeliyā dance is increasingly used in post-Independence Indian cultural policy (particularly since the late 1980s) to represent the idea of *unity in diversity*.⁴ In the case of the performing arts, *unity in*

³ The hypothesis that Gypsies migrated from India to the rest of the world was first named the “Indian connection” theory by Okely (1983, 8). This theory is founded in linguistic evidence suggesting that Gypsy languages such as Romani are related to the Indo-Aryan languages (see, for example, Matras 2002, Kenrick 2004, Hancock and Karanth 2010). See chapter 6.

⁴ The phrase “*unity in diversity*” was first used in the context of performing arts by V. Raghavan in his influential works on Indian dance and theatre in the 1950s and was later also adapted by other prominent authors, such as Kapila Vatsyayan (1980, 12).

diversity describes a rich variety of patrimonial art forms (*diversity*) within a cohesive, tripartite framework (*unity*) of classical, folk and tribal practices that represent India as a nation. The recent (2010) UNESCO recognition of Kālbeliyā ‘folk’ dance as an intangible heritage⁵ has led to increased interest in the dance among the wider Indian and Rajasthani population, interest that until recently was more or less absent. This recognition further increased the Kālbeliyā community’s national and international renown because they are now seen as one of the main representatives of ‘traditional’ Rajasthani performing arts.

Seeking the roots of Gypsy culture: Kālbeliyā dance in the framework of transnational romanticism and exoticism

Lumnath, a Kālbeliyā musician currently living in Jodhpur, remembers how during his childhood days, he would roam around with his father playing *mañjīrā* (hand cymbals) for whoever wanted them to play; at the end of the day, he earned approximately two rupees. He used to be very happy with that. His mother would also wander around with some of his aunts to sing and beg. Lumnath’s younger sisters, however, never had to beg or sing—Komal Kothari had selected them at a young age to dance on international stages.⁶ Most Kālbeliyā interviewees remember a time when some members of the Kālbeliyā community worked as street musicians, making rounds (*pherī lagānā*) for small gifts, clothes, food or alms. Kālbeliyā women actively participated in this public occupation by performing as singers (see also, for example, Samar 1979, 13; Verma 1987, 87; Neuman, Chaudhuri and Kothari 2006, 238).⁷ The performance of public dance by Kālbeliyā women before the 1980s, however, is firmly denied by all Kālbeliyā participants. A convergence of circumstances, including the development of local (cultural) tourism from the late 1960s onwards, the establishment of a transnational world music industry and a growing national interest in folk arts since the 1980s,

⁵ See, www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00340

⁶ Lumnath’s sisters do not remember when this “talent scouting” of Kālbeliyā girls occurred, but they estimated that it occurred near the end of the 1990s, when they were in their early teens. I saw the first international passport of Khatu Sapera, one of Lumnath’s sisters, dating back to 1998. Interview conducted on February 24, 2013, with my own paraphrases from Hindi.

⁷ Kālbeliyā men and women would move in separate groups; the men would play the *puṛgi* and small percussion instruments in accompaniment, whereas the women would sing a cappella in groups of two to four vocalists.

created an ideal climate in which a few Kālbeliyā families were able to shift their livelihood away from street begging to become internationally renowned performers.



Figure 16 Kālbeliyā female singers performing in Delhi 1989 (credit: Sangeet Natak Akademi)

Gulabi Sapera is widely acknowledged by other Kālbeliyā artists as the pioneer and the first Kālbeliyā dancer. My fieldwork interviews with dancers reveal that before Gulabi began dancing, reportedly, nobody in the community was “able to do so” (*nāc nahīm saktī*), at least not in the way that Kālbeliyā dance is performed today. In the past, during the month of *Phāgun*⁸ and for the *Holī* festival celebrations, both Kālbeliyā men and women⁹ used to dance publicly in large groups to the accompaniment of the *caṅg* (large frame drum) for alms (also in Higgins 2010, 138-145). According to Kālbeliyā dancers, since the first staged performances in the mid-1980s, this activity has been privatized and mostly occurs at home. Kālbeliyā community members themselves hardly ever make the link between the festive dancing during the month of *Phāgun* and present Kālbeliyā dance performances. Kālbeliyā dancers consider the celebratory dancing that occurs at this festival a type of leisurely community rave (similar to festive dancing

⁸ *Phāgun* is the twelfth lunar month of the Hindu calendar (February-March).

⁹ Kālbeliyā women would veil their faces (“*ghūṅghaṭ karnā*”) during these public appearances.

during community weddings),¹⁰ utterly distinct from conscious, ‘professional’ dance practice as it developed later.



Figure 17 Celebration of *Śivrātrī* at home in Jodhpur, March 2013

Current families of Kālbeliyā dancers consider themselves the first generation of skilled dancers. Older women, moreover, affirm that they never performed as dancers and that they never learned the dance their daughters currently perform:

Our daughters learned to dance on their own, following the example of Gulabi. We never taught them. However, we encourage our daughters to dance. We live more comfortably now. Food is always available, and we have many clothes.

Author: So you never danced?

No, I can't dance. [Her children and grandchildren start laughing affirmatively] I only dance at our own wedding celebrations, to slow music. I don't know any dance steps. It is just for fun.¹¹

Confronted with such evidence from within the community, where time and again individuals testified to the recent origins of Kālbeliyā dance and the legacy of Gulabi, I was awed by this phenomenon: how could one woman ‘invent’ a (currently)

¹⁰ Higgins (2010, 139) mentions the cross-dressing of young Kālbeliyā men to dance and beg at weddings. I never came across such examples.

¹¹This is an excerpt from an interview (January 2, 2014) with Lakshmi Devi in Jodhpur. The interview was part of a larger set of interviews on dance and the community's elderly women conducted in 2012, 2013, and 2014, primarily in Pushkar, Jodhpur and Jaipur. My own translation from Hindi and Marwari.

distinguished dance style that rose to the level of cultural heritage in such a short time span?

In 1981, Gulabi, a young Kālbeliyā girl in her early teens, was discovered at the outskirts of the Pushkar¹² Camel Fair, where she was dancing at the edge of her temporary nomadic encampment. Tripti Pandey and Hanumat Singh, at that time officers of the local governmental Rajasthani Tourist Department, spotted Gulabi dancing to the tune of her father's *pungi*, a snake charmer's flute. Tripti Pandey enjoyed watching Gulabi dance and convinced Gulabi's father to let his daughter perform at the festival in the evening. Gulabi's performance was a major success. Despite the regular bans and exclusions imposed by her community (*samāj*) following the orders of the Pushkari council of elders (*pañcāyat*), who considered public dance vulgar and inappropriate for women, Gulabi and her father, attracted by the financial opportunity, accepted Pandey's offer to perform. In this context, in 1982 Gulabi performed for Rajiv Sethi, also known as Rajiv Gandhi, who was a friend of Tripti Pandey.¹³ He invited Gulabi to join the "Festival of India" tours, a governmental cultural production that focused on creating international awareness of India's culture, with a large diplomatic resonance. Rajiv Gandhi firmly supported the state's "packaging of culture and gave the official stamp of approval to the ethnicity boom" (Chand 1991, 272), consciously aiming to portray India as a rich and diverse cultural nation (cf. *unity in diversity*). When he saw Gulabi, Rajiv Gandhi was scouting diversified, talented artists from all over the country. Her unfamiliar dance fit well within his effort to spotlight unknown performing arts, so she was invited to join the festival tour in 1986.¹⁴ During these international performances, Gulabi received two nicknames, *saṃperā* or "snake charmer"¹⁵ because of her father's profession and "Gypsy girl" because of her nomadic roots. The second label, "the Gypsy dancer from India," inaugurated her international career.¹⁶

¹² Pushkar is a town close to the city of Ajmer. In the last few decades, it has become a common tourist attraction.

¹³ Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India between 1985 and 1991.

¹⁴ Her first international performance with "The Festival of India" was in Washington D.C.

¹⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, Gulabi did not have a family name because most Kālbeliyā women often only had a surname. It was Tripti Pandey who decided that she would be named "Gulabi Sapera" (as explicated in my interview with Gulabi, December 18, 2013). Therefore, interestingly, female dancers (and rarely, non-dancer Kālbeliyā women) in the community use the surname Sapera almost exclusively. Kālbeliyā men rarely use the name, despite the assumption that they would have been the traditional practitioners of the occupation.

¹⁶ This short synopsis is based on an interview with Gulabi on December 18, 2013. This story can also be read in Robin and Guillien (2000) and in Jodh (2011, 28-32).



Figure 18 Gulabi Sapera's (on the right) first international performance in Washington D.C., 1986 (credit: Smithsonian Institute)

Gulabi Sapera emphatically considers herself the pioneer and creator of *Kālbeliyā* dance.¹⁷ She claims to be the first *Kālbeliyā* woman to dance on stage, and she attests that she gradually developed this dance form during her first performances in the late 1980s. It is clear from the earliest recordings of Gulabi's dance (see, for example, her performance for the Lok Utsav in New Delhi in 1985, archived at the Sangeet Natak Akademi) that she had not yet developed many of the techniques that are currently defined as the basic skills and movements of a *Kālbeliyā* dance. She predominantly sang to the accompaniment of her uncle (on *puṅgi*) and brothers (on *ḍaphlī*, a frame drum, and *bapaṅg*, a friction drum with cord), closing the performance with a dance section that consisted of simple spins on her axis (cf. the *cakkarī* dance of the Kañjar community) and steps that would currently be associated with *ghūmar* dance.¹⁸ Although Gulabi now attributes the innovation of her dance steps to fantasy visions and dreams she had about snakes,¹⁹ it appears from the recordings of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (cf. Lok Utsav 1998) that she was mainly trained to transform her own talent into a stage performance during her early (i.e., the late 1980s and the 1990s) international tours abroad with the governmental "Festival of India" and with commercial Rajasthani Gypsy fusion groups, such as *Musafir*.

¹⁷ As stated by Gulabi Sapera in interviews conducted on December 18, 2013 and December 2, 2014.

¹⁸ *Ghūmar* dance was originally described as a group dance of the Rājput ladies and is currently danced by members of all strata of Rajasthani society (see Singh 2010).

¹⁹ Author's paraphrase from Hindi, derived from interview on December 18, 2013.

Later, when the demand for Kālbeliyā dance performances increased, Gulabi trained (“*sikhānā*”) other Kālbeliyā women to dance like her.²⁰ Contemporary Kālbeliyā dance performances have evolved into an up-tempo ensemble of pre-existing local Rajasthani dance traditions. The adaptive (borrowing steps and techniques from other dance styles) and fast-changing nature²¹ of the dance indicates the relative unimportance of legacy. The dance is based on improvisation, and the dance moves change constantly in response to trends among the dancers and personal taste. At present, there is still quite limited numbers of dancers’ families, which account for an insignificantly small percentage of the total number of Kālbeliyās.²² The dancer subgroups of the Kālbeliyās are presently based in Pushkar (Gulabi’s native village), Jaipur (the current hometown of Gulabi) and Jodhpur (where folklore research centers such as the Rupayan Sansthan and the local department of the Sangeet Natak Akademi are located).²³

After Gulabi Sapera’s first performances in the U.S.A. (1986), numerous artists, musicians, dancers and world music managers²⁴ with an inventive “globalized post-industrial” (Locke 2009, 8) cultural background began involving Kālbeliyās in creative projects. Dox (2006, 55) states that in the context of belly dance classes in the U.S.A, Western logocentrism and exotic ideas regarding the East have resulted in an idealistic belief in a universal cultural world, an ideology that was equally accounted for in the commercial world music industry of the 1980s (see chapter 4). Dox further explains that performing and participating in this “cultural alterity” dissolved distinctions based on ethnicity, class, and national culture and created a feeling of universalism based on artistic communication. Combined with the world music industry’s romantic interest in the concept of the Gypsy artist, these encounters fed the popular perception that Kālbeliyās, among other Rajasthani communities, were the ancestors of the European Gypsies.²⁵ In reality, the Rajasthani troupes comprise a marketable mix of artists from

²⁰ The training (“*sikhānā*”) of other dancers meant that younger girls of the community would join Gulabi during performances, informally copying her steps on stage. This is still how Kālbeliyā dance knowledge is transferred today. My own paraphrase from Hindi, derived from interview on December 18, 2013.

²¹ These characteristics describe the dance’s technical attributes. The changing tempo and rhythmical structure of the music, along with the incorporation of acrobatic movements and new dance steps, are only a few examples of the fluctuating nature of Kālbeliyā dance.

²² See chapter 1, footnote 6.

²³ For more details on Kālbeliyā dance subdivisions and technicalities, see chapter 5.

²⁴ For example, Alain Weber, Tony Gatlif, Thierry Titi Robin, Chico Bouchiki, Arnaud Azzouz, Marie-Noëlle Jaffré, and many others.

²⁵ A few examples include *Musafir: the Gypsies of Rajasthan*; the multiple projects of Thierry Robin with Rajasthani artists, such as Gulabi; the *Gypsy Caravan* tour, including the Rajasthani troupe *Maharaja*; the *Dhoad Gypsies from Rajasthan*; the *Return to Rajasthan* project of the *Gypsy All-Stars*; *Banjara: the Gypsies from Rajasthan*; and the UK-based Arun Ghosh (*A South Asian Suite, the Gypsies of Rajasthan*).

various communities, including Kālbeliyās, Laṅgās, Māṅgaṇiyārs, Kava (Mīrāsīs), Solāṅkīs, Bhopās, Bhats and Ḍholis. A female Kālbeliyā dancer and a *faqir* generally accompany internationally touring Rajasthani musicians' troupes.²⁶ This concept of Gypsy ancestry has been sustained by the creation of an artificial fellowship among 'Gypsy' artists, from Balkan brass bands to flamenco dancers. Cooperation with international artists and managers has intensified the association of Rajasthani 'folk' arts, including Kālbeliyā dance, with *the global Gypsy community* and, more specifically, with the Indian origin of the Gypsies.

The persona of the Gypsy artist has a twofold, ostensibly paradoxical, but magnetic attraction. Locke (2009, 136) has characterized the European Gypsy artist as an "internal outsider," capitalizing on its peripheral status, and enjoying "the double advantage of being just distant enough to be somewhat intriguing" (ibid., 150). First, from the romantic perspective, the concept of familiar universalism proposes that cultural differences are irrelevant. The romantic utopia of a common, comprehensive vision of the world leading to mutual understanding between the 'East' and the 'West' remains prevalent in the contemporary cosmopolitan marketplace (see also Latronche 2008, 490). So-called Gypsy performances, especially collaboration projects between Romas and their Indian ancestors, perfectly nourish this postmodern need for transnational (re-)union. The notion of Gypsy music, moreover, is particularly easy to understand and assimilate because of its regular interactions with various European musical traditions over the centuries. The long presence of Gypsy music in Europe has taken on mythical proportions in the European imagination (Locke 2009, 154). Second, European romanticism was and still is interactively amplified by discourses of Orientalism and exoticism. The creation of this new and universal Gypsy world is therefore based on, in the words of Trimillos (1995, 30), "parameter[s] for authenticity." These parameters correspond to perceptions of the other as exotic, mysterious, and even bizarre. This lure of the unfamiliar or the 'other' and the powerful imagery of "Elsewhere" (Locke 2009, 3) first gave Roma performances throughout Europe an "aura of Easternness" (ibid., 156). In this reception, transnational cultural managers focusing on Gypsy music were driven to this group's Indian roots. These perceptual frameworks of romanticism and exoticism transformed into "often-distorted reflections of reality" (ibid., 3) and even led to the creation of a popular meta-historical (Franklin 2006, 2) Gypsy past (see chapter 6).

²⁶ In this context, *faqir* is used to refer to a male dancer, often from the Kālbeliyā community but also from other communities. *Faqirs* are showmen who display their tricks while dancing. They walk on broken glass, balance heavy objects, such as cartwheels, on their heads and eat fire.

The creation of metropolitan and (post)colonial cultures, such as the popular notion of a Gypsy culture, “record[s] intellectual encounters which were marked by a mutual exchange of knowledge and a mutual adaptation of self-perception” (Franklin 2006, 18). The emergence of Rajasthani Gypsy dance appears to be more than a mere product of transnational romantic interest in universal artishood or exotic fantasies of the bizarre Gypsy-other. Internal agency within the Kālbeliyā community itself equally motivates women to become professional dancers. The community’s transition to this occupation is connected with the prospect of financial gain and the emancipation of this ‘outcaste’ community. Many Kālbeliyā dance families have been able to raise their standard of living because of the growing popularity of their performances:

We are from the Kālbeliyā caste (*jāti*). We wandered in the jungle before, catching snakes and making them dance in front of the villagers. We earned a little bit of money for food and clothes. Afterwards, we moved to the city, and all of the girls [of the family] started to dance, just like Gulabi—she is world famous. After a while, people started to like our dance, and now we have good food and clothes every day.²⁷

In India, multiple local artist communities have now ostensibly acknowledged and commercially transmuted their former nomadic lifestyle in an assimilation process referred to by Kovalcsik (1987, 47) as a “*Gypsifying* process.” In particular, artist communities associate themselves with other Gypsy communities because it is economically and sociologically beneficial for them to be affiliated with the ‘Gypsy world’.

Although a body of information provided earlier in this chapter indicates that the dance was recently created, it was their hereditary musical practice (Neuman, Chaudhuri and Kothari 2006, 239) that ensured Kālbeliyās a place in the international world of Gypsy artists. This ‘artistic background’ facilitated the Kālbeliyā’s shift into their new profession, which would have been more difficult for a ‘non-artistic’ community. Following the example of Gulabi, currently internationally renowned both for her dance practice and (equally) for the trendsetting nature of her community’s emancipation, multiple Kālbeliyā families willingly exoticized themselves as Gypsy performers beginning in the 1990s. Allied with the transnational world music industry, they succeeded in creating a romanticized and exotic fantasy image of themselves as the artistic ancestors of the Gypsies. However, the perceptions of Kālbeliyā dancing within the national and local contexts differ significantly from the transnational view, as

²⁷ This interview was conducted on March 15, 2012 with Sugni Sapera (Kālbeliyā dancer from Jodhpur). It was part of a larger interview identifying the professions of Kālbeliyā people. My own translation from Hindi.

discussed in the second part of this chapter. At its outset, the obvious recent nature of this dance form flustered the nationalist categorizing of performing arts. Kālbeliyā dance did not fit easily within any of the three existing performance categories (classical, folk, tribal). Claims about the authenticity of Kālbeliyā music and their link with snake charming were transferred to the new dance and used to validate the ‘traditional’ nature of the genre. With this transformation, Kālbeliyā dance has recently been legitimized as a nationally recognized ‘folk dance’ with roots in ancient snake charmers’ practices. The next part of this chapter analyzes the transformation of Kālbeliyā dance as a contemporary dance practice created by Gulabi into a ‘traditional’ folk dance genre. It highlights the importance of what I have named local, or Rajasthani, folklorist-*managers* in representing Kālbeliyā dance as a full-fledged folk art within the framework of and capable of supporting nationalistic cultural policy.

Kālbeliyā ‘snake’ dance: from customized hybridization to recognition as a folk heritage

Folklorists in Rajasthan²⁸ sometimes deplore the collaboration among local artists from different communities, including the Kālbeliyā community, and their cooperation with international and Indian commercial circuits, particularly in Mumbai.²⁹ They consider this type of collaboration a ‘hybridization’ that will lead to the impoverishment of individual ‘folk’ styles. Bharucha (2003, 242-243) notes that the intellectual opinion prevalent in India stresses “the necessity of reviving/re-inventing folk culture, as well as of keeping it free from urban contamination.” Some folklorists fear the disappearance of the ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ folk styles and predict that ‘Rajasthani Gypsy dance’ will soon lose its appeal to transnational romantic audiences, with detrimental effects for the Kālbeliyā community and its culture.³⁰ Such bold statements reveal the tension

²⁸ For example, Komal Kothari (in Bharucha, 2003), Mahendra Bhanavat (2004), or Mohanlal Jodh (2011), or folklorists active in organisations such as Jaipur Virasat Foundation (www.jaipurvirasatfoundation.org/objectives).

²⁹ Many Rajasthani folk artists participate in talent shows and films, including *India’s Got Talent*, *Dance India Dance*, *Super Moms*, *Big Boss 5*, and *Roti Rasta Aur India* (see, www.southandeastasia.ugent.be/aylajoncheere/kalbeliyaonscreen).

³⁰ Personal communication with a folklorist/researcher and promoter of Rajasthani folk troupes abroad. The interview was conducted during a troupe’s tour in Europe (Ghent, Belgium, September 18, 2010). The interviewee requested to remain anonymous.

between the ethics of folklore research, which seeks to safeguard the apparent ‘authenticity’ and ‘tradition’ of local art forms, and the pragmatic concerns of short-term economic gain.

Inversely, many of these idealistic folklorists are also involved in promoting Rajasthani folk arts nationally and internationally, organizing the same profitable fusion performances that they purport to abhor.³¹ In this context, such influential local figures may best be denominated as *folklorist-managers*. I understand folklorist-managers as those who are generally recognized as experts on Rajasthan’s folk heritage while simultaneously fulfilling the role of organizers and managers of music and dance shows both in India and abroad. The Rajasthani folklorists, employed by or independent of the government, primarily aimed to reorient local hereditary performance practices into contemporary stage shows. As a result, they began marketing their ethnomusicological research and transformed themselves into folklorist-managers. As folklorist-managers, they are relatively unconcerned about historical accuracy or scholarly representations of the artists with whom they are working; rather, they have learned that collaborating with (commercial) national and international artistic industries and responding to their demands increases interest in their research and obtains financial profits both for them and for the artists whom they represent. Consequently, folklorist-managers have helped create new cultural identities and have customized those identities to contemporary, transnational tastes for world music; now, they frequently act as interpreters and cultural brokers for the Gypsy artist communities from Rajasthan. With a chameleon-like attitude,³² equally adaptive to the demands of Indian audiences, they also recently started to transform the same newly collaborative performances under another name, “Rajasthani folk,” for Indian audiences.

There is a notable difference between Rajasthani performances for local/national Indian-oriented audiences and those organized for cosmopolitan audiences; transnational organizations, equally collaborating with local folklorist-managers, refer to Kālbeliyā dance as Gypsy dance, whereas in Indian contexts, it is referred to as *Rajasthani folk* dance. This difference is partly a response to the idea of the Gypsy. In

³¹ Examples include performances organized by Rupayan Sansthan, the RIFF festival, Rhythms of Rajasthan, Music of Rajasthan, and many others.

³² The metaphor of a chameleon for the adaptive attitude of ‘Gypsy’ artists in the context of the world music industry, was first used by Girgis (2007, 61).

India, the Indian connection hypothesis and its transnational Gypsy image are essentially unfamiliar and therefore unmarketable.

Notwithstanding their sudden achievement of international fame as Gypsy artists, Kālbeliyā dancers were not initially granted a genuine place on the Indian cultural scene. Because Kālbeliyā dancing could not be accepted as a ‘traditional’ dance form with historical authentication or traditional values, it was added to the dustbin category of ‘entertainment.’ At the outset, in the period from the late 1980s to the 1990s, Kālbeliyā dancers found themselves at the bottom of what Morcom (2013, 12) named the Indian “cultural hierarchy,” often decried by other Rajasthani communities, including some members of the Kālbeliyā community itself, as artificial. They are considered merely entertainers or even regarded as prostitutes.³³ As observed by Reed (2009, 9) during her study of Kandyan dance in Sri Lanka, the public display of the dancer’s body and the “assertiveness they dispose on stage” conflict with South Asian ideals of womanhood. The perceived emancipative capacity and financial gain from being included in the nationalist tripartite structure of Indian performing arts (classical, folk and tribal) has influenced the choice to apply the folk label to Kālbeliyā dance. Local folklorist-managers developed a platform and a market for the dance that resulted in its acceptance into the category of folk dance. In particular, UNESCO’s formal recognition in 2010 increased the status of Kālbeliyā artists and noticeably increased the requests for Kālbeliyā dancers on national stages (see, chapter 7).³⁴

After India obtained Independence (1947), Indian dances were formally divided into categories: an elite minority of *classical* dance forms that were revived or recreated based on regional characteristics and an extensive collection of *folk* dances representing the countless regional cultural dance forms of India’s new nation state (Erdman 1996, 299). Five years later, in 1952, the Sangeet Natak Akademi was founded to promote music, dance and drama, reflecting a new nationalistic cultural discourse. However, the Sangeet Natak Akademi focuses primarily on classical art forms and currently teaches only nine official dance genres. Shortly after its establishment, the institution was

³³ Currently, the opinions of Kālbeliyā dancers’ families and Kālbeliyā families without dancers are contradictory. Whereas Kālbeliyās working as performers are proud of their young dancing daughters, Kālbeliyās without dancers in the family often remain strongly opposed to the dance practices of women. Similar perceptions have been observed in the work of Wickett (2013), studying Kālbeliyā singers.

³⁴ Kālbeliyā dancers are not only invited to participate in national and local festivals but also are now equally invited to dance during auspicious private occasions, such as weddings. Until recently, their presence at these celebrations was considered unacceptable.

criticized for neglecting the rich diversity of the country's performing arts. According to the report of the committee on Zonal Cultural Centers,

It was at that meeting that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi³⁵ enquired about the arrangements made by the Ministry of Culture to take the resurgent cultures of India out to the masses where they live instead of confining the Indian Cultural Renaissance to auditoria and galleries largely limited to elite city audiences and viewers (Report of the committee on Zonal Cultural Centers 2011, 1).

In response, the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the State Ministries of Culture established seven *Zonal Cultural Centers*³⁶ in 1985. These institutions were appointed to research, preserve, and teach local folk arts, and the country “redoubled its ongoing multiple efforts at the chimerical goal of ‘national integration’” (Purohit 1988, 1172). By establishing the Zonal Cultural Centers, Rajiv Gandhi wanted to expose the “cocooned middle class, which always believed that culture began and ended in the cities, to the splendor of folk culture” (Chand 1991, 272). His campaigns were considered helpful in “bridging the cultural gap that divides metropolitan India from its vast hinterland” (ibid.). It is no coincidence that the establishment of these regional folk institutions and the appearance of Kālbeliyā dance, beginning with the discovery of Gulabi Sapera, occurred simultaneously. Gulabi Sapera's dance fit neatly into this nationalistic search for ‘undiscovered/unknown’, ‘traditional’ and local Indian dance forms. The lively, up-tempo dance and its catchy musical accompaniment³⁷ drew the attention of Indian cultural organizers. However, local public opinion³⁸ was less positive. The locals felt that their ‘real’ (centuries-old, ‘authentic’) traditions were being neglected in favor of an artificial form of entertainment. Rajasthani folklorists initially supported this perception of Kālbeliyā dance as inferior ‘entertainment’ and did not include it in their projects. However, Komal Kothari,³⁹ one of the most respected Rajasthani folklorists and ethnomusicologists, did include Kālbeliyā dance in his programs, explicitly introducing

³⁵ Note that Rajiv Gandhi also took Gulabi Sapera on her first tour to the U.S.A. in 1986.

³⁶ The North Zone Cultural Center (NZCC), the Eastern Zone Cultural Center (EZCC), the South Zone Cultural Center (SZCC), the West Zone Cultural Center (WZCC), the South Central Zone Cultural Center (SCZCC), the North Central Zone Cultural Center (NCZCC), and the Northeast Zone Cultural Center (NEZCC).

³⁷ The repertoire of songs that are composed and sung by Kālbeliyā women is extensive and remains popular outside of the Kālbeliyā community (Bharucha 2003, 233; Neuman, Chaudhuri and Kothari 2006, 239). Many of these songs have been remixed into Rajasthani pop songs, and the songs are familiar even on a national (Indian) scale. Kālbeliyā songs are now frequently sung by non-Kālbeliyās. Their popularity has led to the integration of these songs into the repertoire of other musical communities. This exchange originated in mixed Rajasthani (Gypsy) groups, in which non-Kālbeliyā musicians learned to sing Kālbeliyā songs for dance performances (see also chapter 5).

³⁸ Local opinion was determined during my stays in India from 2006 (pre-UNESCO)-2014 (post-UNESCO).

³⁹ Komal Kothari founded the Rupayan Sansthan, a research center for Rajasthani folk arts in Jodhpur.

it as “newly-created.”⁴⁰ The commercial potential of Kālbeliyā dance eventually persuaded local managers to advertise it as one of the main attractions of the Rajasthani tourist industry, targeting an international (non-Indian) audience. To justify the inclusion of Kālbeliyā dance in Rajasthani folk performances, and to connect Kālbeliyā dance to other older or traditional practices within the community, folklorist-managers searched for authentication of the dance’s ritual or symbolic functions. They created an “authentic illusion” (Skounti 2009, 74) that transformed Kālbeliyā dance from a cosmopolitan and transnational Gypsy dance into an ancient folk dance of snake charmers.

In chapter 2, exploring the various representations of Kālbeliyās, I discussed the community’s overly generalized representation as one of snake charmers (*saṃperā*). Reflecting this historical practice of some Kālbeliyā men, the dance currently performed by Kālbeliyās is regularly compared to the movement of snakes (*saṃperā* dance) and is therefore called “the dance of the snake charmers.” This artificial association leads to creative, unrealistic and unscientific descriptions of the dance form. Mahendra Bhanavat, attaché of the West Zone Cultural Center in Udaipur, for example, writes in his book about Rajasthani folk dances,

Kalbeliya women are very talented dancers. They copy the movements of snakes with the same flexibility—as if they do not have a spine—and they make high-speed turn movements. Actually, it seems like their body does not have a spine at all (2004, 40).⁴¹

The Kālbeliyā UNESCO report describes how, when the profession of snake charming was banned by the Wildlife Act of 1972, Kālbeliyā women were obliged to replace the snakes as dancers.⁴² Despite the current popular portrayal of Kālbeliyā snake charmers losing their most traditional occupation, and thus their social identity as a distinguished caste, I have argued that snake charming as a metonymic signifier of the Kālbeliyās is essentially exaggerated. Nevertheless, Kālbeliyā dancers are currently presented as substitute ritual performers in an old, banned tradition, in which snakes were charmed by the tunes of the *puṅgi*. The process of religious “ritualization” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 4), especially the construction of the Kālbeliyās as “the priests of the snake” (Bharucha 2003, 53) and the dancer as the spiritual representation of the snake (as “a form of Lord Śiva” [Angellilo 2012, 201]), is now frequently used to legitimize the acceptance of Kālbeliyā dance as a fully-fledged heritage and an ancient tradition. The

⁴⁰ Observed in video recordings from the Rupayan Sansthan (February 2013).

⁴¹ My own translation from Hindi.

⁴² See also UNESCO nomination form (p2): <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00340>.

prohibition of snake catching in the 1970s is used to explain the shift from using dancing snakes, a sort of “folk dance in its first existence” (Hoerburger 1968, 31; Shay 1999, 32), to using female dancers to personify and replace the ancient function of these ‘sacred’ animals or a “folk dance in its second existence” (ibid.). Although the link between the dance and snake charming practices is evidently contrived and purposefully created by Rajasthani folklorist-managers, these same individuals promoted the dance’s UNESCO nomination (for more details about the UNESCO recognition of Kālbeliyā dance, see chapter 7).



Figure 19 Sayari Sapera and Serunath posing as a snake dancer and *pungi* player (credit: Sayari Sapera)

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate that the recent assertion of the pre-modern, traditional origins of Kālbeliyā dance is a largely constructed narrative. Far from being a centuries-old expression of the Kālbeliyā community, this dance is a modern creation dating from the 1980s. I argue that Kālbeliyā dance is a product of both local conditions and economic realities in Rajasthan; moreover, it is a result of transnational, romantic interests in ‘authentic Gypsy culture’ from India. This chapter has shown that Kālbeliyā dance developed as a coalescence of postcolonial, cultural and nationalist developments

in India. Particularly in Rajasthan, the dance emerged from a desire to develop international tourism, the search for Gypsy artists (dancers) as additional, popularizing proof of the Indian connection hypothesis, and the Kālbeliyā community's need for social and economic improvement. This later resulted in the shift of Kālbeliyā dance from a form of 'Gypsy' entertainment to its national promotion as a traditional folk art. Ultimately, UNESCO recognized Kālbeliyā dance as an intangible cultural heritage in 2010.

Chapter 4

Discursive classifications of dance
An appraisal of categorization based on the Kālbeliyā case



Figure 20 Rekha applying her make-up just before a performance, Udaipur, February 2013



In India, postcolonial cultural policies structured performing arts nationally into strictly representational classical and folk categories.¹ Failing to match one of these labels, many Indian dance forms were destined as (commercial) ‘entertainment.’ As a result, performance practices are sometimes purposefully reformed to fit into one or more accepted national or transnational representational categories and, thus, gradually become included among acknowledged forms of staged art. More ambiguous matching or the failure to adapt to conventional representations often leads to transnational and/or national stage marginalization or even exclusion (see, for example, Morcom 2013). The strict labeling of dance in India has been often determined by political lobbying (see also chapter 7). In this chapter, I aim to illuminate the intricate, discursive clusters that have had an impact on the current state of affairs regarding Indian dance. The case of the recent creation of Kālbeliyā dance, and how the dance form passed from one category to another, demonstrates the negotiation of dance practices from the state level to the national (Indian) level and to the transnational level. This case shows the dynamic influence of various (social, economic, cultural) spheres and the hybrid exchange of discourses, such as the perceived need for authenticity and antiquity related to romanticism, exoticism, and Orientalism, leading to national and international heritage policies. Because of this interplay of discourses, Kālbeliyā dance experienced a shift in labels from the rather vague national label of low-caste ‘entertainment’ during the period of its first public emergence in the 1980s and 1990s to a national and local folk dance label since the early 2000s via the dance’s adaptation to a vague translocal idea of ‘Oriental’ Gypsy dances on transnational stages. This has led to the dance’s current international recognition as both ‘folk’ and ‘Gypsy’ intangible heritage.

In the 1980s, Gulabi Sapera pioneered the staging of Kālbeliyā dance in India for multinational audiences and soon shifted her main platform outside of India (beginning in 1986). The swift commercialization of Gulabi’s dance subsists on two cultural tendencies, which have developed in parallel since the 1980s. The first, and earliest, tendency was carried by a renewed romantic Gypsy rave supported by the transnational

¹ As discussed in chapter 3, the third category, tribal dance, is gradually being adopted in the category of folk dance. A tribal dance is a folk dance from a community officially enlisted as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian government.

world music industry (see also chapter 6). The up-tempo, exotic and mesmerizing performances of Gulabi Sapera and the Kālbeliyā women who have followed in her footsteps since the early 1990s touched the ‘Western’ world’s imagination about the lost Gypsy ancestors of the European (Roma) Gypsies. The performances of Gulabi Sapera, in which she embodied a typecast image of a mysterious Oriental Gypsy dancer, led to the development of “Gypsies of Rajasthan”-type performing troupes. These internationally marketed groups were composed of musicians from different backgrounds (Māṅgaṇiyārs, Laṅgās, Ḍholīs, Kavā, etc.) accompanied by a Kālbeliyā “Gypsy” dancer. Despite the controversy of whether women from the Kālbeliyā community would be allowed to dance in public, a few families, mostly relatives of Gulabi Sapera,² soon chose the socioeconomically beneficial profession of performing.

The immense international success of exotic Rajasthani Gypsy fusion projects gradually influenced the view of Kālbeliyā dance as a nationally recognized folk art. The second cultural tendency, likewise originating from the 1980s, consisted of Indian national policy makers’ newly developed interest in promoting multiple ‘unknown’ folk arts. Kālbeliyā dance’s place in the Indian folk dance category was initially questioned because there was no distinct proof of the ancestry of this dance within the community. The intellectual lobbying of predominantly local Rajasthani folklorist-managers, however, transformed Kālbeliyā dance to fit the label. *Folklorist-managers* gradually established their position with the cultural field during the post-1960s expansion of tourism in Rajasthan (see p. 88). Since then, the ‘desert’ state of Rajasthan has been portrayed as a wealthy cultural state with a rich tangible heritage including its numerous forts and palaces and a similarly diversified intangible heritage characterized by numerous *folk* traditions. Rajasthan’s folklorist-managers became the mediators or cultural brokers for the Kālbeliyā community and for other Rajasthani performing communities, commercializing the members of the community both on the transnational market as ancestral ‘Gypsy’ artists and on the national market as traditional ‘folk’ artists.

In this chapter, I want to show that current classifications of (Indian) dance practices are grounded on national and international discourses. I utilize the case study of Kālbeliyā dance to exemplify the predicated nature of dance categorization. I demonstrate how Kālbeliyā dance suits multiple discursive dance labels, or, how Kālbeliyā dance actually does not belong to any of these categories, but was discursively twisted to fit into dominant political and cultural frameworks. Ever since Kālbeliyā

² With the exception of the few dance families in Jodhpur; see chapter 5.

dance was brought on the international stage (1986), the dance has been perceptively adapted to its transnational circuit, nourishing the cult of otherness, particularly of the exotic and bizarre other, and combining romantic images of free, emancipated and premodern Gypsies with spiritual, mysterious snake charmers. The ‘ethnic’ or ‘authentic’ Rajasthani look of Kālbeliyā dance functions as, what Trimillos (1995, 31) calls, “functional” traditionalism rather than “historical” authenticity. Therefore, it is not based on a historical transmission of repertoire or techniques; instead, it is consciously cultivated to look authentic so that it is either functional or marketable. Kālbeliyā dance is a dance form based on stylistic characteristics of local ways of dancing, consciously kneaded into hybrid Rajasthani shows and commercialized globally becoming popular outside its local context even before being transformed into a national product.

This chapter will elaborate on theoretical frameworks within the practical historical and political context of Kālbeliyā dance. As O’Shea (1998, 54) correctly notes, the current debate about dance style categorizations, particularly the folk versus classical classification, illuminates multiple larger debates about Indian history, including the complex phenomenon of colonial and postcolonial cultural renaissance, its connection to nationalism, and the consequential and hierarchical unity among diversity dialectics in contemporary Indian cultural policies. I will discuss the reform movements in Indian culture influenced by colonial and nationalistic discourses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which led to post-independence cultural policies. I will do so by first examining the categorization of performing arts into, on the one hand, *neo-classical* dances and, on the other hand, *folk(loristic)* dance forms. Next, I will widen the scope of the debate to the new Indian nation’s predilection for authenticity and tradition. I will argue that this phenomenon is not only a tool of national legitimation but also a postcolonial, transnational fashion that depends on the persisting discourse of (neo-)Orientalism. Finally, I will illuminate the powerful influence of the world music industry on globally prevalent cultural discourses.

The transformation of the performing arts in colonial and postcolonial India

The discourse of classicism: the Indian cultural renaissance

Since the end of the nineteenth century, which was characterized by strong political activism and social reform, the Indian educated elite culturally countered dominant European standards of “high culture” and actively sought for ways to establish a similarly structured cultural organization based on the principles of *classicism* and nationalistic historiography (see Allen 1998, Walker 2014, 13). This resulted in a large-scale cultural reformation movement, *the Indian renaissance*, which was closely entwined with the development of (Hindu) nationalism and the Independence struggle.

Thus, the new, educated Indian upper class strongly believed in the existence of “a long-past golden age of pure ‘Hindoo’ culture, compatible to the cultures of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome” (Walker 2014, 11). India’s ancient cultural glory, according to Indian nationalists’ ideology, needed to be restored by returning to its distant past, or at least the period before foreign (British and Muslim) supremacy. Based on European Orientalist-Indologist works of previous centuries, many Indian intellectuals returned to the oldest sources, Sanskrit manuscripts and inscriptions and archeological treasures, to find proof of India’s ancient splendor (ibid.).³ The Indian nationalist reformers actively used such references to antiquity as legitimation for the revival of their traditions without borrowing from the colonizing ‘West’ (O’Shea 1998, 56). This romantic, although mediated, vision of antiquity gave impetus to a “degenerate school of thought” (Chatterjee 1998, 88). This school incorporated the idea of Indian culture, which was once splendid and deeply sophisticated, being in need of restoring through the study of ancient Hindu texts (de Bruin 2011, 12). The ostensible rediscovery of these forgotten textual sources led to the justification for ‘indigenous’ cultural practices seemingly described therein. Moreover, they served as proof that these practices were equally valid to those of the foreign rulers (Walker 2014, 11). With such methods, Indian nationalists effectively endeavored to refute accusations of the irrationality and barbarism of Indian culture. In opposition to British claims of cultural superiority, Indian nationalists rejected the notion of India’s inability to self-govern (Allen 1998, 26; de Bruin 2011, 12; Walker 2014, 14) and aimed to regain India’s ancient cultural legacy and its former glory, as well as the Indian nation itself.

³ O’Shea has named this approach “textual Orientalism” (2007, 29).

During the Indian renaissance and classicist movement, multiple hereditary artist communities were dislodged from their livelihoods and replaced by members of the new upper-classes. The marginalization of hereditary female dancers, of which the *devadāsīs* are the most famous,⁴ is a complex sociopolitical phenomenon with multiple causes.⁵ Lopez y Royo (2003, 156) mentions the decline of temples and courts as the dancers' primary patrons and describes the influence of the colonial educational system and the Victorian sense of morality and values. This intricate process began in the nineteenth century with the "Self-Respect Movement," an imperial project aimed at the cultural "cleansing" (Kersenboom 2013, 716) of flamboyant art practices, which seemed to conflict with Victorian prudishness. During colonial times, dance in particular was targeted as inappropriate and in need of transformation based on morally superior British values as part of a larger imperial project called the "civilizing mission" (de Bruin 2011, 12; Neville 2000, 19). At that time, female performing artists were portrayed as victims who were unwillingly forced into these ways of earning a living and accordingly, needed to be rescued from their own culture and society through a "missionary campaign" by British and Indian social reformers (Neville 2000, 21). The more radical anti-*nautch*⁶ campaign, in which both British colonialists and the Indian elite were actively involved, consisted of a political-ideological movement to systematically banish professional dancers. With the movement's momentum in the 1930s, hereditary female performers across India were "condemned as fallen women" (ibid.). Their rights to the public practice of professional dancing were legally stripped away or even abolished. These drastic reforms detached dance and music from their immediate roots, omitting what was considered disreputable in the minds of the modern and post-modern political leaders of the new nation. The pre-colonial deviant lifestyle and public practices of these dancing girls were situated outside of the domestic sphere of married, upper-class women (Chakravorty 1998, 110-11).⁷

⁴ The term *devadāsī* has popularly become equivalent to hereditary female performers; however, there were multiple groups of such women spread across India. For more information on these groups of hereditary performers, see, for example, Chakravorty 2004 and 2006, Kersenboom 1987, Neville 2000, Peterson and Soneji 2008, Soneji 2010/2012.

⁵ The broader story of this classicizing discourse is complex but well explored. See, for example, Chakravorty 1998/2000-2001/2006, Erdman 1996, Meduri 1988/2004/2008, Lopez y Royo 2004, O'Shea 2007.

⁶ *Nautch* refers to the British way of pronouncing of the word *nāc* ("dance").

⁷ O'Shea (1998, 51) explains that the "paradigms of femininity" of Indian dancers and upper-class Victorian Englishwomen substantially clashed. Under Christian influence, the British and the Western-educated Indian elite became overtly sensitive to erotic references (Shay and Sellers-Young 2003, 28).

Following the imperial Victorian ethos, dance was transported to more ethically acknowledged, dominant domestic spheres (*grhastha*) of upper-class women (ibid.).⁸ Consequently, upper-class women, who were deemed better representatives of India's new national culture, gradually replaced these professional performers in the context of a cultural revival movement. Walker (2010, 178) emphasizes the upper class's interruption of centuries-old relationships between the aristocracy and their performers to reclaim India's culture, product and people as "national commodities." Therefore, upper-class cultural reformers should not be regarded only as national idealists. They operate as "mediators, agents, and entrepreneurs" (Ronström 1996, 10). By actively producing culture, these reformers, working as intellectuals, university researchers, teachers, festival organizers, and journalists, among others, construct new identities.⁹ These dance revivalists, as they were later labeled, politically reconceptualized classical dance as a strength rather than a weakness (O'Shea 1998, 54).

These *neo-classical* dance forms created and claimed by upper-class reformers were widely exported¹⁰ abroad as "representatives of Indianness and Indian culture, presented as timeless and universal by cultural officialdom, and by the dancers themselves" (Lopez y Royo 2003, 155). As Kersenboom (2013, 716) describes, "[t]his novel dancer came to represent 'Hinduism in a nutshell' and India's spiritual identity on a new global stage." The formation of the category of so-called *classical* dance should be understood as an embodied product that promotes India's Hindu spirituality. The intermingling of discourses based on a hybrid "Victorian-Brahmanic habitus" produced what Ram (2000, 264) called a new but "derivative nationalist discourse." Many Indian dance forms were thus drastically reconfigured to fit this Orientalist artistic discourse.

By the second half of the twentieth century, the selected *neo-classical* dance styles were postulated to have commonalities that by the 1940s were officially cited (Walker 2014, 111). The Indian upper class provided a formalized, sophisticated dance tradition systematized, codified and recreated on the basis of textual works (*śāstras*), and

⁸ This discourse fits into the larger Indian nationalist discourse, as described by Partha Chatterjee (1993). In their attempts to subvert colonial hegemony, Indian nationalists portrayed the East as superior to the West in terms of spiritual power, which was primarily located in the "inner domain" of Indian culture. The new, modern, middle-class women were portrayed as guardians of the nation's spiritual values. The new elite performer had to find a way to keep her natural modesty (and spirituality) without sacrificing her femininity in public spaces (de Bruin 2011, 14).

⁹ Some middle-class members from Rajasthan, working as folklorist-managers, whom I described in chapter 3, might be considered a later (post-1980s) example of a cultural reform movement for local folk arts.

¹⁰ Beginning in the early 1920s and 1930s, Indian dance increasingly appeared in a new format on festival and concert stages (Walker 2014, 111).

equivalent to the status of European classical ballet (Lopez y Royo 2003, 156). Many *neo-classical* dance forms are claimed to have origins in Vedic times, using archeological materials and mythology as evidence. It is stated that these *neo-classical* dance forms can be traced back to Sanskrit texts, like the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (ca. second or third century CE), which is most often cited,¹¹ the *Abhinayadarpaṇa*, and other sources from the early centuries CE and medieval times. The movement, vocabulary and specific aesthetics of these *neo-classical* forms have been concretized in conventions and canonical rules justified by textual sources and oral transmission from famous dance *gurus* (ibid., 157). The new nation promoted a *gurukula* (hereditary lineage) system that often authorized male instead of female teachers as the new representatives of tradition (Chakravorty 1998, 117).

By the 1950s, these neo-classical dances were sustained not only by ancient textual sources and, increasingly, by secondary literature but also by government-supported institutes and dance schools (Walker 2014, 111).¹² After Independence, the state formally interfered as “the patron of Indian cultural heritage” (Chakravorty 1998, 117). Medhuri (2008, 228) identified this period of institutionalization as the “second national-international revival of Indian performing arts.”

In summary, contemporary classical dance performances in India are largely historical constructions of upper-class revivalists reflecting emergent new perceptions of gender, religion and the nation (Ram 2000, 265). As argued by many scholars, these dances do not truly descend from a linear tradition dating back thousands of years; instead, they were consciously embedded within a postcolonial, nationalist discourse in the twentieth century. Through a selection process based on new nationalistic values, certain dance forms were transformed into representatives of the canonized high culture of the Indian nation.

¹¹ The *Nāṭyaśāstra* was rediscovered and printed in 1926 (Chakravorty 2006, 91).

¹² Along with the multiple style-specific institutes, such as the precursory Kalakshetra (established in 1936) for Bharata Natyam and the Kathak Kala Kendra (established in 1964), for example, the overarching Sangeet Natak Akademi, established in 1954, is the best-known and most influential governmental institute. The Akademi, purposely spelled wrong, consequently presented themselves as the “true bearers of authentic Indian culture” (Chakravorty 1998, 117).

The development of folk as the non-classical counterpart of nationalistic discourses

The transformation of neo-classical performing arts into what Morcom (2013, 111) calls “a bourgeois system of upper class-upper caste performers and audiences and public/state institutions” has received considerable scholarly attention, as discussed in the previous section. With the edifice of *classicism* came the strict separation of classical and non-classical art forms, encompassing numerous and varied practices (Allen 1998, 25), which represent a less-studied field in academia. As de Bruin (2011, 12) writes, the reinvention of India’s classical dances “became the yardstick with which cultural expressions (and social values and norms) were measured.” This resulted in a hierarchical and evolutionary “rupture between performances considered respectable and ‘high’ and others labeled ‘low’” (ibid.).¹³ According to Indian institutional definitions, *lok nṛtya* (“folk dance”) are equally considered to have been transmitted orally for many generations (also referred to as non-śāstric traditions). They are generally described as art forms whose repertoires lack of textual canonization. The original practice of a folk dance is often linked to a specific community (in our case “the” dance of “the” Kālbeliyā community). According to Indian cultural institutions, folk dances are non-commercial and relate to functions of the common man’s daily life.¹⁴ Its most ‘authentic’ forms are supposedly found in India’s premodern rural and pastoral areas. Narayan (2004(b), preface) describes this phenomenon in her book on India’s folk dances:

¹³ Within the “overdetermined identity-trap” of current categorization strategies (Chatterjea 2009, 20), which forces dance forms to conform to strict rules and expectations, there is a vigorous debate concerning whether the English terminology of “classical” and “folk” strictly originates from the colonial, European referential meaning or whether these categories also have pre-modern Indian sources (Lopez y Royo 2003, 156). The Indian categories *mārga* and *deśī* are often claimed to be ‘indigenous’ terms preceding the influence of European frameworks. Although it seems as though the terms *mārga* and *deśī* do indeed fall within the same categories as classical and folk, many scholars caution against the all too easy translation of the pre-modern terms of *mārga* and *deśī* to the modern European terms of classical and folk (see, for example, Chatterjea 2009, 20-21, Iyer 1997, 5-7). The strict classical/non-classical divide and its definitions are likely built on the fusion of European and Indian concepts (Allen 1998, 25). Although this major debate is interesting, I do not attempt to discuss it in further detail. Because my research generally focuses on India’s postcolonial period, I chose to concentrate on contemporary definitions of currently used categories. Whether they are strictly based on European frameworks, based on precolonial Indian categories, or intersect with both of these frameworks is relatively unimportant to my current research, which attempts to transcend both categories as recent constructions, as exemplified by the case study of Kālbeliyā dance.

¹⁴ Neo-classical dances, on the other hand, are considered more ritualistic, esoteric and sophisticated.

Being rooted to [sic.] nature and life, [folk] dance and music envelops the life of man exhibiting spontaneity, refreshing naturalness and naivety, buoyancy of spirit that is combined with eloquent and effortless ease.

Narayan further distinguishes herself as a classical dancer who reached a higher evolutionary stage of artistic development than that of a spontaneous and uneducated folk dancer within a national model of dance development. Likewise, many other Indian neo-classical dancers and dance scholars appear to have been the discursive creators of the distinctive folk categorization. Although most recognize the interrelationship between classical and folk dances (see, for example, Handoo 2000, 20; Singh 2000, 1-2; Massey 2004, 32-33), they consider folk dances as charming and sometimes quite entertaining, but clearly distinct from “cultivated [cf. *neo-classical*] art forms” (Narayan 2004(a), 1).

The aura of naturalness surrounding folk dance is often glorified within this Indian national discourse (see, for example, Khokar 1987, Pani 2000 or Singh 2000, and, as I will discuss below, it is also accepted in a broader global discourse). Convictions that folk dances are in danger of extinction by the modern mass media and commercial entertainment and that local folk dancers have been unwillingly forced to enter the public stage are very much alive. To survive the pressures of the modern world, folk traditions are portrayed as desperately needing reformation into stage performances, fitting the expectations of its new, larger, more varied and cosmopolitan audiences (Sarkar-Munshi 2010, 31). According to Hoerburger (1968, 32; also in Shay 2002, 18), the “cultivation of folk dance” means that a folk dance needs to be transformed from its “first existence,” the natural form practiced as an integral part of the community, to its “second existence,” a fixed staged form detached from its habitat and its people. Folk traditions in their second existence have lost their ‘original’ functions and contexts; thus, they have the task of only “being attractive enough” to “entertain” the audience (Sarkar-Munshi 2010, 31). The shift from the ‘real’ and natural tradition into a staged, ‘cultivated’ performance results in an irreversible ‘loss’ or the artificial creation of “fakelore” or “folklorism” (Shay 1999, 31). In this dissertation, I discuss the case of Kālbeliyā dance as a recently developed dance practice supported by ongoing global processes of cultural change and exchange (see also chapter 5). Whereas some performing practices might have developed from rural origins and were subsequently transformed into new staged forms of dancing, there are also far more complex processes underlying the performance dynamics. In the case of Kālbeliyā ‘folk’ dance, I argue that the dance form as we know it today was born of the dynamics of the international Gypsy programs of the 1980s. And, moreover, I show that staged Kālbeliyā dance does not have any direct premodern past or first existence, but that its ‘traditional’ form (cf. the dance of the snakes) in its first existence was created only in retrospect to fit nationalist ideals of ancestry.

The Euro-American formation of national cultural identities in the early twentieth century was usually based on *folk revival*. In European and American countries, cultural revival was predominantly based on the intellectual thinking of folklorist studies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see also chapter 6, in which I discuss early folklorist studies in the context of Gypsy identity building). In India, however, Orientalism has equally influenced national identity building, leading to a more complex phenomenon of identity formation (Walker 2010, 177) that features, first, the construction of *neo-classicist* categories only then followed by the formal systematization of *neo-folk* or *folklorist* categories. In the early years of India's independence, most attention was devoted to classicizing certain dance forms as an international visiting card for the new Indian nation. The identity formation of the 'other' art forms, including folk, only gradually took shape, resulting in an intense classicizing process. Indian elites and some scholarly works portray folk traditions to be of relatively inferior quality, on the verge of extinction and merely a rustic pastime of India's low-educated population (Brückner 2011, 13-20; Peterson 1998 41/63; Biswas and Ghosh 2011, 195). Indian elites have either excluded folk performances because they do not fit the label of 'proper Indian cultural identity' or attempted to 'rescue' them from certain death by reforming them to fit the nationalist norm (de Bruin 2011, 13). A few decades after Independence, especially from the 1980s onwards, increasing attention was paid to India's indigenous and mostly unknown folk arts. Under the banner of the famous slogan of *unity in diversity*, Rajiv Gandhi exerted considerable effort to promote Indian folk internationally (Chatterjea 2009, 120, and as discussed in chapter 3). Following international trends of public, staged folklore performances as a means of displaying ethnic diversity (Ronström 1991, 70), since the 1980s Indian folk arts have increasingly served the state by representing the bucolic multiplicity of India's cultural heritage. De Bruin (2011, 13) describes the new (post-1980s) governmental niche for folk dances as follows:

In an attempt to claim equal representation of its citizens' cultural expressions, the State has created a special niche for 'folk arts', which nowadays find a place in cultural festivals and are entitled to awards and financial assistance.

The ideal of folk arts, situated in the indigenous village, has become the counterpart of the cultivated, urban neo-classical forms. This dichotomous, classical/folk, "national cultural project" (Subramaniam 2000, 4) reduced India's multitude of dance practices (Chatterjea 2009, 121) into the distinct boundaries of categories. The dominant discourse of categorization selectively excluded certain groups from the transformation to the model of Hindu traditionalism. The 'foreign' influence that led to cultural hybridizations in India, such as the importance of the Indo-Persian legacy or European artistic influences, is selectively ignored (Walker 2014, 36). The postcolonial

categorization of dances, including the new, generally accepted categories of classical and folk, might have authorized an exclusivist discourse in which particular social identities were politically nominated to represent cultures, while others were not (see, for example, Erdman 1996, 299; Morcom 2013; Ram 2010, 55; Reed 1998, 509), to such an extent that, as Meduri (1988, 4) writes, “Indian dance today, [...] functions in a secular reality – in the gap between philosophic vision and everyday reality.”

Verbal categories for organizing genres help us comprehend phenomena, and it is difficult to work without such “word-boxes” (Allen 1998, 23). However, we tend to use these categories without keeping in mind their representational meaning. Introducing a new conception of culture, Appadurai (2001 [1996]) suggests approaching culture in terms of “scapes” instead of “categories.” He states that “scapes” are globally flowing “spheres of life” that connect and relate to one another and to different places. Appadurai (2001 [1996], 33-36) distinguishes ethnoscapas (human mobility, particularly in the form of migration and tourism), mediascapas (global representations created by the media), technoscapas (mobility of manufacturing), financescapas (global capital flows) and ideoscapas (the global exchange of ideas). The negotiation of these different scapes comprises “the imagined world”¹⁵ of the present, as we understand this world from a cultural perspective. Dance scholar, Paula Saukko (2003), has added an additional scape to Appadurai’s list, the “bodyscape,” in the hope of challenging current traditional systems of classification and comparing the complex nature of local discourses to global socio-cultural structures of power. Following this author, I argue that it might be more interesting to study the bodyscape as an additional factor to theorize sociocultural dynamics rather than constantly restructuring categories to fit dominating cultural, political and social discourses.

Parallel to Walker’s observations (2014, 117), I also want to emphasize the recent “homogenization of the cultural hybridities,” which originated in colonial legacy, Orientalism, and “the nationalists’ negotiation of the dichotomies of tradition and modernity.” The postcolonial conception of hybridity, which is clearly present in dance in the form of constant cultural interaction, helps us to move away from the concepts of strict opposition (classical versus folk or modern versus traditional):

Embracing hybridity as a central consequence of cultural exchange can mean moving beyond diversity or multiculturalism and their attendant qualities of exoticism and otherness. It also means moving beyond conceptions of cultural

¹⁵ Appadurai adopted the term “imagined world” from Benedict Andersons’ notion of the “imagined community” (1983).

purity or authenticity and their attendant assertions of superiority. I am not sure if embracing an “ethics of hybridity” will lead to the type of global human understanding that scholars like Bhabha (1994) and Gandhi (1998) tentatively suggest it could, but the idea itself certainly offers a way out of the “totalizing binaries” that focus only on opposition and difference (Walker 2010, 180).

As presented above, the cultural discourses in colonial and postcolonial India underline the relative recentness of the strict hierarchical categorizations of dance forms under the influence of the national and political climates of the last few decades. The strict categories of *classical* and *folk* were officially institutionalized by the late 1940s and 1980s, respectively. The strong ties between politics and culture led to cultural reformations, performing (re)creations and social inclusion/exclusion. In distancing itself from ‘Western’ dominance, the common denominator of Indian national culture was its spiritually rich and uniquely diversified cultural past. In the following section, the notions of tradition and authenticity are discussed functioning as instruments for national (Indian) and global legitimation and power struggles in the construction of cultural discourses.

The romantic construction of authenticity and traditions

As discussed above, the post-independence Indian cultural renaissance movement has been actively involved in politicized stereotyping by representing ancient and authentic traditions redolent of primeval sacrality. The rebellious “enlightened” intervention of Indian nationalists and their revival movement, contrasted with “alien rationality” and “modernity” and enabled the “rebirth” of Indian performing arts, like Bharata Natyam, in the postcolonial era (Meduri 2004, 12). The novel national perspective on Indian performing arts heavily valued *authenticity* and *tradition*. Although many performing styles claimed authenticity in their own unique ways, they have all been (re)molded in similar ways (artificially or not) by tracing back to the origins of the dance form and creating historical images of their dance practice (O’Shea 1998, 52). Current Indian dance discourse claims primarily ancientness and authenticity as the two common notions of national heritage or glue that binds all Indian performing arts—both classical and folk practices—together (Chakravorty 1998, 111; Hammergren 2009, 19). Within the legacy of the Enlightenment and its evolutionary thinking, the explicit focus on *paramparā*, which is often translated as “tradition,” reflects the idea of an unbroken, progressive and continuous notion of India’s national dance history (Chakravorty 1998, 114). Hughes-Freeland (2006, 55-56) claims that ancestry and authenticity are political in nature: “the rhetoric of wholeness and authenticity associated with traditional practices

are not so much matters of fact but rather political strategies associated with legitimization.” The prevalent perceptions of traditions as essentially indigenous, authentic and based on long-established customs should include the ideological activity that operates within conscious revival or reinvention. By considering concepts of *authenticity* and *tradition* as political constructions, we might improve our understanding of the complexities and modes of understanding the past (ibid., 57).

Moving away from the confines of the Indian context, I also focus on transnational efforts to promote ‘authentic traditions,’ and more specifically, the commercial development of the world music industry from the 1980s onwards (see below). It seems no coincidence that during this same period, the focus on folk performances in India increased. Both the world music industries and global heritage policies, like India’s cultural policies, are based on a more or less fabricated, dichotomous distinction between the urban ‘modern’ and rural, ancient ‘ethnic.’ Thus, tradition has often been linked to the ethnic, supposedly illiterate, typically rural group of ‘folk.’ The notion of ‘traditional’ folk has been uncovered as “an ideological construct whereby rural communities and their older practices were perceived by the intelligentsia as survivals from an ancient, pure culture” (Buckland 2006(a), 7). Dominant, educated, socially and geographically mobile members of society claim such traditions, legitimizing themselves through false nostalgia and the desire to rescue a vanishing cultural past (Buckland 2006(b), 202). Whereas nostalgia, in a common sense meaning, is described as an individual’s yearning for the past or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with the past, it is also to be understood as producing authenticity and tradition and to contributing to identity preservation (Scheelar 2013, 135). The conflation of culture and identity as synonymous leads to reifying ethnocentric boundaries of communities and contemporizing cultural differences (Hammergren 2009, 21). Culture is not a single, unchangeable identity; instead, it is a contemporaneous and constantly shifting set of politicized “belongings” (O’Shea 2006, 145). Considering ideological constructs, selective nostalgia and ethnocentric identity formations related to the politics of the past, it is important to distinguish between “the past as an unproblematic acquisition and the past as representation” (Ram 2000, 267). Representations of the past often only symbolize cultural practice. In a sometimes-invented form of tradition (Ranger and Hobsbawm 1983), they construct mythical, even fictional, dimensions of contemporary practices, often under the guise of a factual “modern” approach (Hughes-Freeland 2006, 71).

As I also argue in chapters 3 and 7 (p. 85-90; p. 177-184), the ideological and evolutionist-oriented conception of folk dance as the survival of rural and ancient practices is often questionable (Buckland 2006(a), 14). The “blanket analysis” of culture is a global trend and a “hegemonic thought of its own kind,” constructing commercial

media and folk traditions as two completely separate entities and ignoring the intense relationship and exchange between the two (Naithani 2006, 56). With the “redundant regurgitation of old evolutionist theory” (Buckland 2006(a), 16), I contest the circulating of nationalist works on a political search for uninterrupted cultural history. Instead, I underscore the bumpy road of the “negotiation of expressive needs and artistic imaginations of the individuals who re-embodiment these forms” (Dils and Cooper-Albright 2001, 93). The study for methods of cultural negotiation serves to trace embodied strategies and their politics of representation instead of trying to prove the “truth” about this dance form and its past (O’Shea 2006(b), 145).

The recent creation of Kālbeliyā dance demonstrates the nexus between commercialism and folkloric portrayal, regardless of whether they are imagined as ancestral Gypsies or traditional snake charmers (see chapter 3). In the former case, the desire to represent the Indian artist-ancestors of the Gypsies caused the commercial world-music industry to promote nomadic Kālbeliyās as the curbed victims of the urban modern world. In the latter depiction, false nostalgia for the clichéd Indian practice of snake charming helped to promote the Kālbeliyās, on both national and international stages, especially since the dance’s 2010 UNESCO recognition. Indeed, I argue that Kālbeliyā dance was first commercialized for a non-Indian market promoting Gypsy cultures as a representative of world music (see below and chapter 6). The transformation of Kālbeliyā dance to conform to national cultural policies appeared to be beneficial to nationalists only after the dance form obtained transnational popularity. As it arose within the Indian cultural revival movement, the nationalist/traditionalist portraits of the Kālbeliyās were influenced by multiple cultural, political and socioeconomic strategies of the postcolonial, global era. Kālbeliyā dance practice was strategically linked to a snake charmers’ *paramparā*, portrayed as being in danger of extinction because of the legal prohibition of catching snakes imposed in the mid-1970s. Kālbeliyā women are portrayed as the saviors of this unbroken tradition, strategically replacing the snakes as the dance companions of the male snake-charming musicians of their community. However, as demonstrated in chapter 3, this connection between snakes and female dance practice was constructed to legitimate and consequently to commercialize Kālbeliyā dance performances on the national market. This dance practice was conceptually constructed and molded to fit the categories of ‘tradition,’ and became accepted as *cultural heritage* (see also chapter 7).

Despite the creation of a romanticized and therefore constructed world for the Kālbeliyās and their artistic practices, these artists consistently perform and experience these myths to such an extent that fictional stories and real human experiences increasingly drift together (see also Chakravorty 2008, 97–98). The dancer often becomes the created phenomenon. Dance performances and labor cannot be detached from the

actual dancing body, which is its means of production. With this in mind, the dancing body itself also expresses Orientalist prejudices of the romanticized figure of ancient Gypsy dancers (visually) and the exotic and even eroticized bodies of snake-charming entertainers (technically), pressing their marks on the dance form, which can help embody 'tradition.' Thus, the dancers' negotiation of the desired contemporary aesthetics supports cultural politics (Chatterjea 2009, 139). In the next part of this chapter, I will focus on (neo)Orientalism as a powerful influence on Indian dance practices.

Imagining a dancing Orient

The theatre stage, which is the current public sphere for most dance performances, exhibits mythical, often politicized representations (Ram 2000, 270; Shay 1999, 31). Through the powerful audio-visual relationship that performers establish with spectators during staged performances, the audience is drawn into an illusionary, Oriental world and easily "suspend[s] its disbelief" (Lopez y Royo 2007, 174). Srinivasan (2009, 53) notes the "heavy layers of eye-catching and exotic paraphernalia" that distract the audience from critical involvement. The audience often believes that if the dancer is 'Oriental,' then the dance must be authentic (Erdman 1996, 292). The performer becomes a "fetish object separated from the performance practice as a whole" (Srinivasan 2009, 53).

It is noteworthy to consider how dancers have negotiated "their movement between informal and formal economy" (Srinivasan 2012, 19), as they adapted their performances to satisfy "the needs and desires of privileged transnationals who hope to achieve "'authentic' status" (Browning 2002, 12). I argue however, parallel to Zarrilli's observations (2012 [1990], 144) of South Indian *kathākālīḥ* theatre, that the figures embodied as the *staged other* are co-created in a dynamic process between, in this case, the Kālbeliyā performers, their national and international managers, and their spectators. The relational exchange of discourses among these agents creates a dynamic negotiation of performing practices. The interplay of intense Orientalist strategies through cultural politics and increasingly through the media (see also chapter 6) actively engenders stereotyped representations of certain dance forms, such as Kālbeliyā dance, with the commercial goal of making them genuinely popular among national and transnational audiences. Although it seems as though the audience is manipulated by the commercialism of the cultural market, we might, however, consider spectatorship as an equally distinct and influential agent in discourses of power

(Srinivasan 2009, 55). For many Indian dances, including Kālbeliyā dance, a prejudiced audience imagines and expects a precolonial, authentic portrayal of India. Kālbeliyā dance is an example of Coorlawala's (1992, 147-148) metaphor of the bilateral mirror, the mirror of the "East" and the mirror of the "West"—when an image is selected, it reflects itself to the observer, which leads to a constant exchange between image and reflection, between the dichotomous and utopic worlds of the 'East' and the 'West.' Coorlawala (1992, 147-148) further writes,

Audiences abroad consistently expect to see an ancient (read "beyond criticism"), timeless (read "unchanging"), mysterious (read "incomprehensible"), spiritual, beautiful, ecstatic, complex art form. Even now, the dances that India exports to the West are selected (by both Western and Indian impresarios) as they correspond to Western concepts of what Indian dance should be.

Considering the discursive exchanges between various agents, Indian nationalist preferences for ancient purity and the transnational romanticist ideologies concerning tradition and heritage, I also wish to incorporate persisting neo-Orientalism into the debate on 'Eastern' dance practices.

Orientalism is well known as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and [...] 'the Occident'" (Said 1978, 2). The discourse of Orientalism originally arose in the context of European academic, artistic and military circles to structure the imagined East (Buchowski 2006, 463; Rasmussen 2005, 173). Koritz traces Orientalism back further to the period of colonialism and imperialism. She considers imperialism as a tool of the creation and strengthening of ideological unification and cohesion because it "persuaded potentially rebellious internal groups" to leave their own comforts behind and to identify with the state (Koritz 1997, 134). The "Orient" was essentialized into a "timeless, a-historical quasi-reality" (Walker 2014, 13). This discursive inurement allows political dominance to define 'the other,' typically in the form of cultural creations or representations of an Orient. The persistence of such stereotypical representations of the Oriental other demonstrate the power of cultural hegemony.

Many scholars have critically reevaluated the notion of Orientalism, as first defined by Said (1978). Orientalism as a complex discursive phenomenon exceeds the dichotomy of a dominant West portraying the exotic East, demonstrating a complexity of power relations that determines how the Orient (or, in this case, Indian culture) should or should not be represented globally. Thus, it is important to consider Indian nationalist discourse as a "derivative type" of discourse uncritically based on the principles of an essentialist division between "East" and "West" (Bakic-Hayden 1995, 919-20). Orientalism in colonial and postcolonial India has been a philosophical field of study

linking present to past and has simultaneously been utilized as a theoretical foundation for governance policy (Walker 2014, 11).

The dominant aesthetics of (neo-)Orientalist discourses, in constant dialogue with politics and commercial markets, has surpassed multiple other discourses, including the nationalist discourse (Bakic-Hayden 1995, 919; Srinivasan 2012, 51-52). Orientalism has joined the interrelational frameworks of the exotification and romanticization of the other. In addition to the notion of creating a bizarre and distant other (or exoticism, as discussed in chapter 3), neo-Orientalism comprizes the process of unification (or romanticism also discussed in chapter 3.: Imaginary similarities, analogies and connections are found in discourses to create a *brotherly Otherness* (Buchowski 2006, 44). Through this *brotherly Otherness*, “imagined communities,” used here in an Andersonian sense, are grouped together by an imaginary connection or a “common language” (in this case, the dance and its appurtenances) (Cutler-Broyles 2013, 109). By the mid-twentieth century, a set of textual and visual images of the exotic female from the ‘East’ became a widespread and popular Oriental imaginary, permeating the public imagination through novels, films, visual art, opera, ballet and modern dance not only in the ‘West’ but also throughout an increasingly globalized world, including India (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005, 11).

The nexus of (neo-)Orientalism, romanticism, and exoticism and the close alliance with sociopolitical ideologies such as nationalism and imperialism fed into the creation of stereotypic representations (see also chapter 3). Stereotypes appear to be complex and tricky. Although they were consciously and discursively produced to become a fixed reality (Bhabha 1994) of the ‘other,’ they are transparent, knowable and imagined but at the same time opaque and practically visible (Koritz 1997, 138). Stereotypification has a substantial impact on the audio-visual choices and strategies designed for specific visions of national and transnational representations (Shay 2002, 39-40). Various tropes and images of the exotic Oriental other have powerfully impacted the public perception of Kālbeliyā dance, mostly through transnational mass media, like films, television, the Internet, newspapers, and commercial performances (see chapter 6).

The rise of the world music industry

The term *world music* was first introduced by a group of musicology scholars in the early 1960s (Farrell 1997, 203). These researchers intended to promote musical diversity through a newly created sub-discipline of ethnomusicological research. At that time, the

notion of world music with its “clear populist ring” (Feld 2000, 146) was considered as an alternative to ethnomusicology. Like ethnomusicology, its primary aim was to pluralize perspectives and oppose the dominance of ‘Western’ conservatories (ibid.). However, with this new scholarly inclination came a newfangled form of terminological dualism distinguishing ‘non-Western’ and ‘ethnic’ world music from the dominant ‘Western’ performing arts studied by academics. In a short time, world music became a product for public consumerism, whereas ethnomusicology was further developed as a critical, academic field of research.

The 1980s marked a new, widespread awareness of “non-Western” dance and music performances in the transnational and cosmopolitan industries (Farrell 1997, 201). *World Music*, often spelled with capital letters, became well known in 1987¹⁶ and quickly developed into a separate cosmopolitan discourse influenced by industrialism, capitalism and consumerism rather than solely by a categorical style or a new multicultural attitude toward music (Connell and Gibson 2004, 342). By the 1990s, the global industry detached itself completely from the field of academics and focused entirely on the public sphere in which the industry promoted “danceable ethnicity and exotic alterity on the world pleasure and commodity map” (Feld 2000, 151). Closely connected to the spread of global capitalism, trendy likings of ethnic elements and the commercialization of the other expanded into an unending cultural marketplace (Feld 2000, 146; Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996, 1).

The active transformation of performances since the 1980s from a ‘raw’ ethnic practice to a neocolonial, industrialized and Westernized form of ‘ethnic’ cultures in the field of world music have marked its commercial subjectivity. The popular, hegemonic, cultural industry of world music now actively transforms performances into marketable products - Performances should have an aura of authenticity; but, above all, they must also be fun, and they require an exotic and colorful flavor of translocal diversity. World music shapes a “kind of consumer-friendly multiculturalism” following the “market logic of expansion and consolidation” (Feld 2000, 168). World music performances strategically provide an all-inclusive holiday experience at home, stimulating the spectator’s exotic imagination through music and dance. Festival consumerism and the

¹⁶ In 1987, there was a formal meeting of record companies, journalists and festival managers in London. At the meeting, the attendees first started to use the generic and commercial term “world music” (Connell and Gibson 2004, 349). By 1988, the alternative term “worldbeat”, as used in the USA, gained popularity as the fastest-growing sector in the international pop market (Erlmann 1996, 467). Many other comparable terms became apparent elsewhere in Western Europe, such as *weltbeat* (Germany) and *musique mondiale* (France), and emerged in Australia somewhat later (Stokes 2004, 52).

sales of audio CDs, performance DVDs, and documentary films, (see chapter 6) became types of geographically detached tourist experiences. The distant locality of unique styles is available in home-delivered packages (Connell and Gibson 2004, 347); this gives “impressions of foreign places” and makes the audience long for a holiday to such destinations (Farrell 1997, 202).

On the one hand, the world music industry underlines the importance of local diversity in global commodity flows, thus stimulating the increase of diversity. On the other hand, it directs unknown performers from foreign places to a globally and unified cultural market, which imposes the diminution of diversity (Connell and Gibson 2004, 354). The omnipresent, transnational flows of performing arts through new media and popular cultures created by the world music industry accelerate sociocultural exchange and intensify social identities (Feld 2000, 145). Similar to the tensions caused by the inclusion and exclusion of performances according to fixed categories, as discussed above, musicians and dancers all over the world compete for inclusion in the commercial framework of world music. The factors that play a role in inclusion in the world music category are manifold. First, performance practices should be visually and aurally adapted to popular, cosmopolitan tastes of performativity. Although performance is perceived as purely traditional and authentic, it is simultaneously staged to accommodate the common flavors of world music.¹⁷ Second, the performance must fulfill spectators’ narrative expectations, even if they are purely imagined. Third, as discussed above, there is a romantic preference for the ethnic, pre-modern-looking representation of performance within the transnational world music industry. Pre-modern cultures are then expected to be unknown or even marginalized from the globalized society of cosmopolitan audiences. Grounded in the display of power by the world music industry’s “triumphantly multiproduct(ive)” market, there has been an increasing focus on marginality (Sharma 1996, 17). The high adaptability of ‘marginal’ (as opposed to dominant) cultures allows them to become ‘more’ visible, although they are within the control of dominant discourses (ibid., 18). Because of this “fetishization of [the] marginality” (Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996, 3; Connell and Gibson 2004, 354) of the world music market, many performers draw attention to their (purported) rural, deprived, and socially excluded background. Buoyed by a rescuing and setting-the-record-straight narrative, the figure of formerly excluded performers is selectively glorified, refashioned and even fetishized by a complex global, connective and

¹⁷ Examples of such adaptations are an increase in tempo or the addition of percussive instruments to increase the danceability of the performance, the reduction of compositions to a few minutes, and the traditional-looking attire that the performers wear on stage.

commercial rhetoric of entangled desires for more free access to culture (Erlmann 1996, 479; Feld 2000, 151).

The successful industrialization of world music dominates the current global representations of ‘non-Western’ or ‘ethnic’/‘folklore’ music and dance (Feld 2000, 146). It also exposes “the Eurocentric limits of the celebration of hybrid Otherness” (Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma 1996, 3), as it raises questions of deterritorialization (cultural identities and places are claimed and simultaneously deterritorialized), and the strict commodification and selective creation or uneven exclusion of cultural identities. Given the reality of the dynamic flows of global fusion and hybridity in the performing arts, it seems impossible to trace authenticity and identify tradition. This reality highlights the newly layered complexity of simultaneous processes of the exoticism and accessibility of distant performance practices, the notion of “strategic inauthenticity,” New Age spirituality, avant-garde romanticization and the fetishization of marginality. These processes sustain the marketing of newly invented cultural purity with the goal of simplistically celebrating geographic diversity and remoteness (Connell and Gibson 2004, 342; Feld 2000, 167).

Although world music is popularly portrayed as a “roots phenomenon” or as an expression of genuine ethnic and national identities, it would be proper to consider it as a post-modern product of consumerism (Erlmann 1996, 467). The worldwide transportability of performing arts through modern technologies and increased “sonic virtuality” has gradually become more accepted to such an extent that the boundaries between music and dance have become increasingly vague and blurred over the last few decades (Feld 2000, 145). Despite the conscious global fusion of dance and music, world music discursively characterizes cultural identities of societies captured in a historical moment and dependent on geographic location. This new performing industry defines aesthetics according to a new global imagination (Erlmann 1996, 468).

The centrality of Gypsy-like cultural practices within the world music industry was an outcome of global imagination and the fetishization of marginality—the Gypsies were model examples of romanticized marginal, hereditary and thus ‘traditional,’ often supposedly naturally talented artistic communities unafflicted by national constraints¹⁸ and, therefore, free to adapt to ‘new’ transnational expectations (see also Silverman 2012). The concept of Gypsy culture positively emphasizes the existence of fluid identities, “sometimes edging toward romantic equations of hybridity with overt

¹⁸ The notion of being nationless, interpreted as being transnational, was acclaimed within the offset of the world music industry in the 1980s, especially after the traumas of World War II and the Cold War.

resistance” (Feld 2000, 152). According to Connell and Gibson (2004, 342), successful adaptation in the world music industry requires artistic compromise, which in my case entails the conscious mixing of Rajasthani artist communities into newly composed Gypsy troupes, creates essentialized identities (cf. the concept of the Rajasthan artist as the ancestor of the Gypsies), and complements the resources of transnational companies. The long-lasting romantic image of the Gypsy artist in the minds of Europeans helped many artists from Rajasthan to obtain international recognition as professional performers. These artists have also enjoyed India’s vital position in the international interest in exotic ‘non-Western’ cultures.¹⁹ They jumped on the popular world music train of the 1980s, and began to function in it as a backdrop to transnational exotic consumerism.

Conclusion: Twirling around categories – What is Kālbeliyā dance?

The subtle relationships between power/knowledge and culture/control that have been restructured in India during colonial regimes have visibly marked the postcolonial reordering and dynamics of current cultural discourse. The covert dynamics of power relations show that culture consists of constantly evolving discursive practices. The validation of Indian performances and their inclusion in dominant Indian culture were characteristic for a wider global discourse on Orientalism and folklorism, which was adapted by the growing Indian upper classes at the end of the nineteenth century and persists to this day. India’s public cultural practices were restructured in a “new professional order” (Morcom 2013, 2). The postcolonial cultural habitus in India has led to a tremendous modification. These changes are evident not only in the nature of a dance practice once associated with traditional embodied aesthetics but also in

¹⁹ The 1980s’ fashion of Indian music within the world music industry came directly after the first wave of the popular “hippie” fad in the 1960s, exemplified by Ravi Shankar’s collaboration with the Beatles (Farrell 1997, 201). The objectives of the category of “Indian music” within the world music industry, however, are quite different from those within India’s local commercial market. Popular music in India (similar to the music of its film industries, for example) is not necessarily successful in the world music industry. Indian music has been largely syncretized within the world music industry: the “classical” music of Ravi Shankar or Zakir Hussain, the *qawwālī* mystical music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Indian Gypsy music (including the Kālbeliyās) are categorized within the same group of “music from the Indian subcontinent.”

negotiations with new nationalist ideals and a new impetus to represent bodies inspired by commodity images (Chakravorty 2010, 175).

As discussed in this chapter, Indian dance practices have been negotiated in a complex Orientalist interchange of expectations and discovery over the last two centuries (Erdman, 1996, 292). The romantic fascination, the attraction to exoticism, and the bodily desires that accompanied an imagination of the 'East' have conditioned strategies for music and dance. To quote Rasmussen (2005, 192), "[t]he Western European puritanical characterizations of Oriental culture were reproduced with enthusiasm and naiveté for public consumption." Neo-Orientalism permeates these local interactions and mediated images in a transnational process of exotification to extend both on the self and the other. Therefore, it is important to investigate the complex social and cultural processes associated with the continuing commodification of neo-Orientalism (Shay and Sellers-Young 2005, 25). By analyzing these discursive processes, more attention is given to the transnational dynamics of the performing arts and contemporary realities of Indian dance. By emphasizing negotiated encounters in cultural practices such as those discussed above, the complex 'cross-cultural' aesthetic, historical, and ideological dialogue leading to the inevitable and constantly evolving hybridity in performing arts and embodied practices are illuminated (Shay and Sellers-Young 2003, 13-14).

While the notion of the historicity of dance practices is often challenged in academia, a powerful struggle for 'authenticity,' 'tradition' and 'heritage' in a plot among nations, their associations, such as professional institutions and organizations, the cultural commercial apparatus, or even UNESCO (see chapter 7) and the performers themselves remains very much alive in the public perceptions and expectations of Indian cultural performances. Rather than being authentic transmissions of ancient Indian or Hindu culture, many of India's performing practices appear to have been crafted from materials that were drawn from diverse sources, coalesced at various times, and were given nationalistic colors.

In this chapter, I attempted to highlight the pitfalls of categorizing dance performances into artificially dichotomous divisions of the classical/folk (nationalist), Western/non-Western or ethnic (transnational). In each of these, they are presumed to represent the 'true' and permanent nature of a practice. Both national and transnational policies attempt to identify, recognize and support culture building and identity formation. Although such policies approached Kālbeliyā dance from various angles, they often discursively used it in overlapping ways with the aim of creating a novel and imaginary artistic practice and linking it to pre-existing cultures. By accepting these perpetual categorizing divisions, the underlying discursive strategies of

representing cultural practices are often overlooked, and the dynamic character of embodied practice is ignored. Dance practice is reduced within these discourses to a static reflection of its social environment, and its practitioner's agency is often constrained to merely replicating his/her (invented) heritage (O'Shea 2007, 12).

Neutralizing restricting categories, however, seems to be a difficult task; thus, such categories remain alive in the popular imagination. Categorization often serves as the center of the sociopolitical gravity of interpreting cultural practices (Berger 2008, 62). Similarly, I have demonstrated that Kālbeliyā dance practices have been transformed to fit two representational discourses to publicly endure and to be globally commercialized. The first discourse is the transnational discourse surrounding Gypsy performances as one of the recent (since the late 1980s) figureheads of the world music industry. The second discourse is the dichotomy of classical versus folk performances as national representatives of the postcolonial Indian nation. Kālbeliyā dance performances have been reformed as indigenous folk dances that represent a local 'Hindu' practice based on the snake charming profession of male community members. The present Kālbeliyā dance practice, however, cannot be traced back to old traditions of the rural Kālbeliyā community based on ancient daily activities; instead, it was created against the backdrop of cultural industries (as discussed above and in chapter 3). Kālbeliyās' performances currently represent authentic-looking Indian folk dance traditions. Kālbeliyā dance thus appears to be a "character dance" (Shay 2006, 30) form representing a popular mish-mash of ethnic Rajasthan. Kālbeliyā dance practice reflects "expressive eclecticism" (Allen 1998, 227-28), or multiple cultural orientations, organically combining postmodern aesthetics with traditional (pre-modern or modern) characteristics.

In reality, Kālbeliyā dance practice per se does not cater to the nationalist standards of folk dance, but the constructed Orientalist narrative behind it does. The double historical narrative (Gypsy and folk) behind the Kālbeliyā dance form is derived from an intentional engagement with the past instead of from an uninterrupted oral tradition that has adapted itself to modern times. I suggest that the problem does not lie within the fictitious authenticity of Kālbeliyā dance per se, because it appears to be an unattainable exercise for embodied practices to truly identify their authentic forms. Instead, the problem lies in the paradox that the supposedly authentic representation of Kālbeliyā dance is a mediated conception of the dance itself and projects the dance through the hybrid lens of commercialism, nationalism and Oriental knowledge (see also Keft-Kennedy 2013, 81). It is important to question the very existence of the authenticity of embodied practices that claim historical and cultural accuracy instead of highlighting the fact that performers create culture in the present (Scheelar 2013, 132). Therefore, I want to contest the nature of historical legacy of embodied practice.

Although there are dance forms that have historical traces, their journey across time has never been smooth and has always been negotiated both by the artistic imaginations of the individuals who re-embody these forms and by socio-political factors of the time the dance is practiced (Dils and Cooper-Albright 2001, 93).

Chapter 5

Fusing folk in Rajasthan

Dance and music dialogues in Kālbeliyā dance performances



Figure 21 Kālbeliyās performing Ghumar dance in Jodhpur, February 2013



Recent times have seen novel Kālbeliyā Gypsy performances become a standard representative of traditional folk art of Rajasthan. These staged shows, however, are mostly fusion projects, which involve an amalgam of musicians and dancers from different families, communities and backgrounds who were not collaborating before the 1980s and 1990s. Despite the existing academic theoretical frameworks and debates that such performances are dynamic (see, chapter 4, or, for example, the works of Allen 1998, Bakka 1999, Johnson 2000), the more conservative and rather common popular perception of 'folk' is that these arts as static - and even rusty - heritage. In this chapter, I will not engage with these theoretical discussions (see chapter 4 and chapter 7), but rather I will practically exemplify the constant flux and variations in Kālbeliyā music and dance performances, counteracting the preception of them being authentically uniform and traditionally fixed.¹

First, I will briefly contextualize this chapter by outlining the recent development of Rajasthan as a cultural entity and the herewith-related reorientation of many local hereditary performers. Second, I discuss Kālbeliyā dance performances as a cultural expression and living phenomenon from the perspective of ethnography and cultural analysis, thereby bridging the gap between music and dance studies. I examine interrelations between dance and music while identifying different forms of collaborations and looking into various performance formats (or structures in improvisation), geographical disparities, personal, interpersonal and contextual variations. Third, I elucidate and illustrate these variations in Kālbeliyā dance performances and ground my research in three case studies: Kālbeliyā dance performances in Pushkar, Jodhpur and Udaipur. In these cases I describe the cultural, socio-economical and historical context; I discuss structures apparent in the performances and their evolving artistic techniques, especially those related to the connection between dance and music. The development and practical reality of multi-community collaborations are examined, as well as the impact of different audiences.

Throughout this chapter, I will practically illustrate the innovative nature of this recently invented tradition, its transience and its constant re-creation. This apparent

¹I would like to thank Jacoba Kint for sharing her ethnomusicological insights. The content of this chapter will be published separately as an article (currently submitted for review at Asian Music).

evanescence notwithstanding, a set of joint techniques between dancers and musicians is being rapidly developed, and seems to be constantly fine-tuned into an ever more distinguishable performance genre. The exchange of repertoire, witty improvisation techniques and an explicit system of sign language seem to form the core of these fluctuations. This chapter provides a contemporary view and in-depth analysis of Kālbeliyā dance performances within which the current performing techniques and set-up of the performances will be outlined and read in relation to the broader social and cultural contexts.

The intertwined roots of Rajasthani fusion

The formation of Rajasthan as a cultural entity and the reorientation of its hereditary artists

While a widespread popular portrait prevails of Rajasthan as a historically unified cultural state, the state was established only after India's Independence. A postcolonial awareness, grounded on a hierarchical order of country (*deś*), state (*pradeś*), and family (*kul*), was "marked by celebrations, public ceremonies, political speeches and participation, as well as consolidation in social and economic spheres" (Erdman 2001, 59). In addition, 'culture' in its broadest sense (language and literature, architecture, performing arts, fine arts, handicrafts, etc.) was utilized as creative legitimation and simulated proof of a cohesive Rajasthan. With an increase of tourists visiting India from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, this state developed a distinct tourism policy promoting tangible *royal heritage* (cf. its numerous forts, palaces, and luxurious *havelīs*) and intangible *desert* (cf. itinerant) *folk culture* (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007). Agents of both the private, commercial tourist industry and governmental institutions were actively in search of 'traditional' and local art forms suitable to be commercialized within this framework.

Concurrently, many artist communities were economically obliged to progressively reorient their practices. The hereditary artist patronage system, which many musicians were previously working under, continued to diminish and disappear. This Rajasthani

patronage or *jajmānī*² system as described by Komal Kothari (2001) stands for an exchange of “non-physical services,” like those of genealogists, bards, acrobats, and musicians. The “servers” (*jācak* or *māṅgat*) do not merely provide ‘entertaining’ skills, but more notably, offer “religious and social services” (Kothari 2001, 206). Because these services, transmitted by inheritance, were related to ritual practice, such as rites of passage, marriages and funerals, the recitation of genealogies, hymns or songs in support of religious ritual, they were important for the maintenance of its local social system. In 1985 and 1986, the Indian government established Cultural Zone Centers, to draw more attention to folk arts. Folklorists (employed by, or independent of the government) attempted to give traditional musicians new audiences, by marketing their ethno-musicological research and organizing Rajasthani folk performances in India and abroad. The audiences of these musicians shifted from patrons by lineage, requesting services for ritual or religious purposes, to tourists and festival enthusiasts, shopping on the national and transnational market.

The birth of Kālbeliyā Gypsy dance performances

Beside hereditary musician communities (such as, for music, Laṅgās and Māṅgaṇiyār [see below], Bhopās, Dholīs, Kavā, among other artist communities) the Kālbeliyā community too played a part in the commercialization of Rajasthani folk. The Kālbeliyā men predominantly play the *puṅgi* (wind instrument), *ḍaphlī* (frame drum), and *mañjīrā* (hand cymbals), while the women compose songs of a few stanzas, sung in small groups of two or three. Other Kālbeliyā-specific instruments are the *ḍaf* (frame drum) and *caṅg* (large bass frame drum). Although the Kālbeliyās have been regularly portrayed as a musicians community (as previously discussed in chapter 3), they never performed within a patronage (*jajmānī*) system. Contrary to common conceptions, public Kālbeliyā dancing does not have a long history, but was first performed on stage by Gulabi Sopera in the 1980s, and from there gradually spread among a small part of the community. By the 1990s, when Gulabi Sopera and a few other Kālbeliyā dancers were regularly traveling around the world, the concept of *Kālbeliyā dance performance* began to burgeon in Rajasthan.

These first international Kālbeliyā performances were highly appreciated by audiences mainly in Western Europe and North America. The association with

² For more information about the complexities of the *jajmānī* system as a socio-political phenomenon, see, for example, Mayer 1993, Tanabe 2006 or Clark-Decès 2011. Additional research about the *jajmānī* systems of Rajasthani artists would be an interesting topic for further research.

nomadism, the marginal status of the Kālbeliyās in Rajasthan society, and their snake charming background made many romanticists believe that Gulabi, as a pioneering representative of the Kālbeliyā community, along with other nomadic artist communities from Rajasthan descended from the ancestors of the European Gypsies. The exotic image of Gypsy artists and apparent similarities between the music and dance of European Romas and of the Indian nomads from Rajasthan generated an important new trend (since the 1980s) in the growing world music industry. Performances, popularizing documentaries, newspaper articles, talks and multiple other initiatives launched in the 1990s convinced audiences worldwide of a univocal transnational Gypsy-artist identity (see chapter 6). These Gypsyfying leanings motivated Rajasthani dancers and musicians from different community backgrounds to join in newly created stage performances. In cosmopolitan milieus, they are now generally portrayed as ‘Gypsies from Rajasthan.’ As I theoretically explained in chapter 4, these international audiences are in search of “an experience of nebulous enigmatic transcendence as it is public exotica, a neo-romanticization of the familiar Other created to charm global audiences yearning for an experience of a cultural difference in an increasingly homogeneous culturescape” (Tan 2013, 48). The groups presented as the Gypsies from Rajasthan live up to these expectations, as both exotic and romanticized figures of a familiar fantasy figure – the Gypsy artist.

The double search for the illusory past – transnational Gypsy ancestry vs. local traditional folk

Despite the popularity of Rajasthani Gypsy performances on transnational markets, most Indian audiences did not develop a taste for these cooperative projects. Against the framework of local and national cultural policies, these same projects were reframed for national commercial purposes as ‘traditional folk ensembles’ of Rajasthan. Since the 2000s, the tension between ‘traditional’ folk performances and Gypsy ancestors’ fusion projects amplified. As regularly observed during fieldwork, ‘purists’ on a national level presently have asserted that they want to re-separate the collaborating artist-communities and force them to ‘return’ to more ‘authentic’ enactments of community-based repertoires. I recall Johnson’s (2000) conception of authenticity as a dichotomous, relative and problematic construct that confirms the existence of its opposite, the fake, maintaining the “fallacy that cultural purity rather than hybridity is the norm” (Bendix 1997, 9). The recognition in 2010 of Kālbeliyā performances (dance and music) as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage strengthened the purist inclination. Rajasthani artists presently establish companies mostly under their personal names, such as “Rajasthan Josh: Chugge Khan Māṅgaṇiyār and band,” “Rajki Saperā: Kālbeliyā folk dance,” or “Kohinoor Laṅgā Group.” By emphasizing their community names

(Māṅgaṇiyār, Kālbeliyā, Laṅgā), they insinuate that their art is hereditary, traditional and therefore authentic. For all practical purposes, however, their shows are exactly the same as the ‘Gypsy fusion’ performances on the transnational level. In the case of these recently created Kālbeliyā dance performances, this has paradoxically led to a situation where the Kālbeliyā community is forced to readapt their performances to match the “authentic illusion” (Skounti 2009, 74, see also Joncheere 2015). As I already described in a fieldwork example in the introduction (p. 11-12), I occasionally observed non-Kālbeliyā musicians dressing up to look like Kālbeliyās to falsely represent themselves to audiences and organizers requiring ‘traditional’ Kālbeliyā performances. They hereby epitomize how the concept of ‘tradition’ is “cumulative, multiply authored, open, accommodating, above all *messy* and therefore human” (Taruskin 1992, 323). ‘Authenticity’ merely becomes a concept used to gain a livelihood, national as well as international recognition and a sense of identity. In the case of Kālbeliyā dance performances, the claim for authenticity is two-fold: first, the Gypsy ancestry, a form of authenticity demanded by the transnational world music industry, and second, the traditional, inherited folk standing, claimed by national Indian cultural policy. Both of these authenticity claims have been simultaneously addressed by Kālbeliyās in an ingenious way, constantly disregarding the fuzzy boundaries between folklore innovation and rusty traditionalism. Describing so-called folk revivals, Bakka (1999, 79) rightly mentions the problematic nature of these attempts at preservation of living folk and brings the current Euro-centric point of view in these matters to the attention:

Thus the revival is judged only as wanting to represent a past which obviously cannot be adequately represented in the present. If there is a desire to re-present folk dance as a contemporaneous phenomenon rather than as a museum piece, then it is immediately confronted by the demand to adhere to western aesthetic conditions of continual development and individual, creative originality.

Kālbeliyā dance performances are more and more theatricalized into what Tan (2013, 51) calls, “plasticized authenticity.” The emphasis on the exotic stories about ancient Gypsiness and mystical snake charming behind Kālbeliyā dance performances often seems to take priority over the technicality of the performances, as this ‘authenticity’ secures its marketability.

Explorer in the improvisational dark: formats and variations in Kālbeliyā dance performances

The ornamental black dress, colorful bead jewelry and jingling anklets (*ghuṅghru*) of a Kālbeliyā dancer strike the spectator's eye. The peculiar body positions and rhythmical footwork might be considered as the rudiments of Kālbeliyā dance, while visually striking features such as sequences of fast spins and acrobatic tricks are generally performed somewhere in the middle of the dance piece. These young dancers with their dazzling *mien* are presently the poster girls of the whole Kālbeliyā community. Moreover, Kālbeliyā dancers are put in the limelight of contemporary Rajasthani fusion projects. These performances are created by fusing inherited repertoires of different communities. This Orientalized potpourri exhibits a factitious coherence that results in a marketable product.

In the next section, I explore patterns in Kālbeliyā dance performances that lead to a structural framework for predominantly improvised dance pieces. The main characteristics of the music are the up-tempo cyclical pulse with heavy accents and upbeats, whereby the placement of the beat is dependent on the effect required for the dancers (like, for example, stamping, twirling, or acrobatics) and coupled with a repertoire of Kālbeliyā themes inherently sung and composed by Kālbeliyā women. The rhythm section steers the music and dominates the sound palette with several instruments, depending on the background of the musicians, whereas the melodic section often consists of one or two melodic instruments and one or more singer(s). The musical structures also vary according to the background of the musicians and across regions (see below). The repertoire mostly consists of Kālbeliyā songs, which are also performed and adapted by non-Kālbeliyā musicians, and sporadically themes from songs specific to the musicians' castes (Māṅgaṇiyārs and Laṅgās), mostly inserted as variations to Kālbeliyā tunes. The performances are medleys of more or lesser-known themes of Kālbeliyā songs, enriched with melodic and rhythmical improvisations, depending on the virtuosity, professionalism and knowledge of the musicians. Tempo and volume which both tend to increase throughout a performance, are the two main parameters dancers respond to.

Redefining the term of Rahaim (2012), Kālbeliyā dance performances are constituted of “musicking bodies,” consciously engaging in the formation of the musical course. Dance gestures and percussion collaborate to embody rhythmical variances. Hameed Khan, artistic director of the Rajasthani Gypsy troupe *Musafir*, metaphorically describes the music/dance relation and the key role of rhythm:

The monkey tamer controls the monkey with a string. When he pulls, the monkey turns round. When you dance, the rhythm is like that string. It connects you with the music. Rhythm is the foundation of dance. A real dancer always keeps the rhythm in mind. Otherwise her dance will [be]come a formality. The audience senses that... (in the film *Musafir* 2004).

Although Hameed Khan stresses the leading function of musicians during performances, the dancer is rather influential in the determination of the musical sequences. The question of who is the leader and who is the follower in Kālbeliyā dance performances often leads to heated discussions between dancers and musicians. Commonly, the Kālbeliyā dancer is in charge of rhythmical modifications, as the percussionist adapts to follow the sound of her anklets as she changes her movements. However, the inspiration of the dancer strongly depends on the skills of the percussionist: rhythmical ornamentations and accents on certain beats (whether the first, the third (second-last) or the last beat) aid the dancer to creatively improvise and facilitate more complex rhythmic variations. The use of multiple melodic lines and the constant shift in vocal or melodic variations of Kālbeliyā tunes yields unforeseen “melodic ideas” (Rahaim, 2012, 3) influencing the dance sequence. The random mixture of Kālbeliyā-specific songs during dance performances prevents the dancer from relating her movements to the lyrics. Although Indian dances are often popularly standardized as consisting of both abstract dance (*nṛtta*) and pantomime (*nāṭya* or *nṛtya*), Kālbeliyās perform only abstract dance, and do usually not engage in lyrics-related facial expressions or story telling (*abhinaya*).

Parallel to the subdivisions made by Clayton (2009, 67) in his work on the guitar in India, Kālbeliyā dance performances could be ranged in terms of interactions and encounters of several kinds: between individuals, between families, and between communities more broadly speaking; between artists of different backgrounds cooperating and competing within the same industry and on the global market; and, last but not least, between the sensibilities of dancers, the demands of audiences, and the agendas of those in positions of power. Kaeppler (1999, 21) distinguishes dance practice in categories of “personal variation,” “interpersonal variation,” and “contextual variation.” I consider personal variation in Kālbeliyā dance performances as the individual creativity and innovation in making dance movements or musical interpretations, which is a significant competitive tool for artistic cultivation (both for dancers and musicians). The talented dancers with strength of character are competing to continue as a permanent member in Rajasthan’s far-famed groups. A similar urge for competition invigorates young musicians to become the leader of a Rajasthani folk company. The desire for distinction and individuality within the same subgroup (e.g. Kālbeliyā dancers in Pushkar, or Laṅgās from Jodhpur) leads to interpersonal variation.

I suggest a division of Kālbeliyā dance practice into three main, geographical *substyles* or contextual variations. These substyles are visually distinct (see also videos in case studies below) because of the closeness of these groups, the strong competitive feelings both inside a substyle as well as between substyles and the association with a distinctive intra-community identity. The current three substyles are: *Jaipuri Kālbeliyā dance* (from the area of Jaipur), *Pushkari Kālbeliyā dance* (from Pushkar) and *Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance* (from Jodhpur). I demarcate these three substyles focusing on the dance-technical differences and the different relationship with music(ians). The geographic boundaries, however, are permeable, so cross-boundary exchange occurs with similarities across the different styles and heterogeneity within single styles.³ Jaipuri Kālbeliyā dance and Pushkari Kālbeliyā dance are more closely related to each other than to Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance, the first two comprising more or less similar dance technicalities, costume design, and number of artists on stage, whereas the last differs. However, the dance-music interrelations remain more or less similar. Therefore, I selected only Pushkari Kālbeliyā dance performances for the first case study. The second case study deals with Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance. The Kālbeliyās from Jodhpur seem quite isolated from the Kālbeliyās in Pushkar and Jaipur – they rarely interact. Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dancers currently distinguish themselves with their delicately embroidered costumes (direct visual marker of their substyle), whereas the other Kālbeliyā dancers' substyles still use more modest triangular ribbons to decorate their dresses.⁴ Moreover, the dance execution and the interaction with music distinguish them from Jaipuri and Pushkari Kālbeliyās. Some Kālbeliyā dancers live in other areas, such as Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Kota, and Udaipur. Nevertheless, all originate from one of the three geographical regions mentioned above; therefore I consider them as belonging to the style of geographical

³ During my last fieldwork trip, I noticed the increasing tension between local managers and group leaders, who want Kālbeliyā dancers from different substyles to perform together (especially the collaboration between Jaipuri Kālbeliyā dancers and Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dancers is imposed) and the Kālbeliyā dancers. Managers want Jaipuri Kālbeliyā dancers to improve their techniques by learning from the Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās, leading to more high-skilled dancers (more competition, might lower the salaries that dancers demand – nowadays Jaipuri Kālbeliyā dancers (except for Gulabi) charge significantly less for a performance than Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās). The Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās argue strongly against these cross-substyle collaborations as they want to keep their hierarchical status within current Kālbeliyā dance performances.

⁴ Since a couple of years, some of the Pushkari Kālbeliyā dancers have travelled to Jodhpur to purchase these new Jodhpuri-style dresses. The Kālbeliyās are continually re-inventing their costumes. For example, the latest fashion for Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās is to wear small-sized veils (*dupaṭṭa*), which are only a meter wide in comparison with the more common one and a half or two meter long veil Indian women also use in daily life. Another way of recognizing the substyle by costume is the use of colors. Jaipuri Kālbeliyās tend to use yellow, white and red ribbons to decorate their black dresses, whereas Pushkari Kālbeliyās prefer dark blue, white, yellow and bright pink. Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās commonly combine red or light pink with turquoise and white as the main colors for their dress.

origin. As an illustration for the development of peripheral forms of Kālbeliyā dance performance, I selected one of the relocated forms of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance, the Kālbeliyā dance performances as seen in Udaipur.

Fusing methods - studying performance: The organic combination of dance and music

Using tools such as comparative observation and ideas from the field of cultural analysis, my focus is on investigating the living, and therefore fluctuating, sociocultural systems operational underneath the surface of visual entertainment. I conceive Kālbeliyā dance performances not merely as dance or music or a combination of both, but rather as the cultural outcome of “the creative use of human bodies in time and space” and dimensions of human action and interaction (Kaeppler 1999, 13), seeing music and dance as social forms in culture, not to be narrowed down to style phenomena (Born 1995, 215-216). Kālbeliyā performances thus become “dynamic multi-directional webs of relationships between different manifestations of musical expression within cultures” (see, Allen 1998, 45).⁵ The emphasis, then, lies on their living character, preventing them from being pinned down to any singular category. The focus on different case studies as, what Ronström (1999, 137) called, “situated performances” and events prevents the conceptual divorce of music and dance into independent forms. Bridging the scholarly dance-music gap, the focus in this chapter lies on the dance-music interrelation, more precisely the dancer-musician relations and contexts.

I consciously choose to work with “analytical verbal descriptions” (Felföldi 1999, 56) of dance movement and music. The quest for universal dance notation systems (such as the Laban notation, the Benesh movement notation, the Eshkol-Wachman movement notation or DanceWriting) as a type of permanent record has been popular in the West, but they are primarily designed to document, analyze and reconstruct choreographies. I do not illustrate the following case studies with dance nor music notation systems, since these systems separate dance and music, their interpretations is often restricted to a group of experts (especially for dance notation systems), and reduce the analysis of the performance to the *how* omitting the interesting question of *why*. Furthermore, notation systems are used to pin down structured sequences of dance and music, while hardly

⁵ I take the liberty to broaden Allen’s focus on music to other cultural expressions such as dance.

representing quickly evolving formats, improvisation and the emic dimension (see also in Kaeppler 1999, 14; Van Zile 1999, 85).

Kālbeliyā fusion: case studies and geographical diversification

Henry's work (2000, 92-93 and 101) on folk genres and their melodies in India, states that folk tunes, even within the same genre, vary greatly, whereby one factor influencing melodic diversity is the performance at various events by diverse musicians. It is therefore important to pay attention specifically to the degree of professionalism and specialization of the performers, and the event of the performance (its context). Henry further describes the process of degradation of organization or "genre entropy," in which the specialist/professional musicians strives towards entertainment, melodic novelty and diversity. I similarly noticed the latter process in Kālbeliyā performances, concerning music as well as dance, although the Kālbeliyā dance genre has never been clearly delineated as such.

Analyzing the three different cases, I contextualize the development of substyle-specific diversification depending on geographic location, collaboration with non-Kālbeliyā musicians, and influence of the audience, not to mention the importance of the performances as an economic factor for the livelihood of individuals and communities. I draw attention to the format in which the performances are delivered, the repertory of songs used in the different performances, the style of singing, playing and dancing. Furthermore, I focus on the technical means of interconnection and collaboration between dance and music during these performances and the ways these collaboration techniques are hitched to interhuman relationships. The case studies are not meant to indicate any quality-label, such as a hierarchy from spontaneous Pushkari to designed Udaipuri dance performances. Rather, I aim at representing a "snapshot of synchronicity" (Ayyagari 2009, 13), which reflects a temporary, therefore constantly evolving, image of the diversity and creative modification of Kālbeliyā dance performances.

Pushkar ‘purity’: The source of Kālbeliyā dance performances⁶



Figure 22 Kālbeliyā musicians just before their performance, Sai Baba Hotel, Pushkar, December 2014

Situated in the vicinity of Ajmer, the small pilgrimage destination of Pushkar today seems a unique blend of pilgrimage, backpacker tourism and nomadism (Angelillo 2012, 200-201). This otherwise quiet town has gained international fame, as it harbors one of the few existing *Brahmā* temples in India, a sacred lake, and the huge annual camel fair, which attracts nomadic herdsmen from all over Rajasthan. Most houses have consequently been converted into hotels or guesthouses, souvenir shops or restaurants receiving Indian pilgrims and international tourists. This peculiar hodgepodge led to the creation of a profitable place for Kālbeliyā families to work. On the one hand, ritual begging (*pherī lagānā*) fits the pilgrimage atmosphere. On the other, backpacker tourists are more than intrigued by nomadic communities living around the town in the hilly rural landscape, including Kālbeliyās. Therefore, a number of Kālbeliyā families have settled permanently on the fairground on the border of town.⁷ They continue living in

⁶ Videos related to this case study can be viewed on www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTZfl3v5YdQ, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHlmv6pUM9A, www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIk3SnibRNC, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CkQGQ5ZYaE.

⁷ The permanent camp of the Kālbeliyās is illegal, but they are tolerated and thus keep on living there, because of their value to the tourist industry. Some young families have recently started to build small brick houses on the fairground. Slush funds for local authorities have compelled the, perhaps temporary, tolerance of these buildings. Many families have built houses outside of Pushkar, where they stay during the months of monsoon (off-season for tourists).

rudimentary tents made out of branches and clay (*ḍerā*, see, Figure 14) to invoke an aura of nomadicity. Currently, Kālbeliyās in Pushkar gain an income during tourist season as beggars (ritualized or not), dancers and musicians, henna tattooists, or sales (wo)men of handmade bead jewelry. They befriend tourists for commercial purposes, invite them to their ‘Gypsy camp’ and introduce them to the ‘traditional way of Gypsy life.’ Tourists receive food and tea, are given the opportunity to take pictures and sometimes to watch dance performances. Kālbeliyā dance classes have increased in popularity among young female tourists, and Kālbeliyā women collaborate with hotel owners to teach dance in hotels.⁸



Figure 23 Kālbeliyā dance performance at home, Pushkar, April 2012

This booming of Kālbeliyā dance practice in Pushkar can be traced to the childhood of Gulabi Sapera. As already mentioned, Gulabi Sapera was presented on stage for the first time during Pushkar’s 1981 annual camel fair. Nowadays, Pushkar is considered her hometown. The Kālbeliyās currently living and working as stage performers in Pushkar are all relatives of Gulabi Sapera.⁹ Shortly after Gulabi’s first performance, she moved to Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. Some family members joined Gulabi, and are now

⁸ The Coleena Shakti School of Dance plays a pivotal role in institutionalizing Kālbeliyā dance classes in Pushkar. See, www.colleenashakti.com/shakti-school-of-dance/

⁹ These family members are uncles and aunts from both maternal and paternal side, and their children. The younger generation consider themselves cousins of Gulabi (interview with Shanti - January 2013). Gulabi Sapera disassociates herself from her Pushkari family, stating that they are not real family members, but just of the same *samāj* or “community” (interview with Gulabi, December 2014).

performing in Jaipur; others stayed behind and make hay of Gulabi's success.¹⁰ Despite the family ties, and the exchange between and similarities of Jaipuri and Pushkari Kālbeliyā dance, Gulabi's relocation gradually led to the bifurcation of the Kālbeliyā dancers from Pushkar and Jaipur.¹¹

Compared to the total number of Kālbeliyās living in and around Pushkar, the number involved in dance performances is small. In fact, the young Kālbeliyā dancers all belong to one extended family. Two cousins, Rakhi and Anita (tourist-oriented pseudonym, her real name being Shanti), are kingpins of the dance activities in Pushkar. Although they previously collaborated, they began competing in 2013 by performing in separate hotels, and accepting their own dance students. Rakhi and Anita each have a few sisters who dance with them, leading to a total of nine Kālbeliyā dancers performing in Pushkar in 2014.¹² The accompanying musicians are also members of the same extended family. The older male members of the family play the *pungi*, while the younger generation of men prefer to play percussion instruments such as *thālī*, *ḍaph(lī)*, *ḍholak* and *mañjīrā*. Mothers and aunts of the dancers perform as vocalists.

The Kālbeliyās work for these events as an inclusive 'family-bond' entity, where all members of the same family attend a local show: husband and wife, sisters, brothers or cousins, children and even nursing infants. Those who want to perform can join, even when they do not yet possess the skills to play or dance. Performance skills are developed live on stage through informal imitation. Boys start to play *thālī* and *mañjīrā*, and if they seem to have interest or talent they are allowed to switch to *ḍaphlī*, *ḍaf* or *ḍholak*. Young girls develop dancing skills on stage with one of the older girls.¹³

Kālbeliyā performances in Pushkar often follow a similar set-up, with a basic sound system provided by the event organizer, often a restaurant or bar. Performances usually last a whole evening, from around six or seven o'clock until midnight. Their salaries are

¹⁰ Gulabi relocated to Jaipur with her close family to escape social pressure of the Kālbeliyā *pañcāyat* (council of elders), who reprimanded her because of her public dance performances. Moreover, the city of Jaipur facilitated [international] travel. In 2014, Gulabi started the construction of her own Kālbeliyā "resort" (dance school and hotel) in Pushkar, claiming that she wants to shift back to Pushkar as soon as possible (interview with Gulabi, December 2014).

¹¹ The collaboration between the Ḍholī and Bhatt communities and Kālbeliyā performers in Jaipur is an interesting new case.

¹² If more dancers are required, some young family members from neighboring villages are brought to Pushkar for a few days. Most of these young girls have never performed before. Costumes are hastily stitched for the occasion.

¹³ See, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CkQGQ5ZYaE.

low, 100 or 200 rupees per artist, while attendant children and additional family members do not earn anything. Young girls are generally allowed to solicit extra cash by walking around the audience with a collection plate. While the musicians play continuously, the dancers enter and leave the improvised stage, sometimes (but not always) with clearly indicated, but not necessarily original, moves. The *puṅgi* plays the lead melody, backed by a rhythm section, which emphasizes the strong beat and provides the pulse of the music but does not embellish with ornamentation. The Pushkari Kālbeliyās mostly use Kālbeliyā specific instruments, whereby the *ḍholak* is sporadically added or replaced by a collaborating *naqqarā* player (members of the Solaṅkī¹⁴ family). They transform plates (*thālī*), spoons and other utensils into percussion instruments. The *ḍaphlī* and *ḍaf* parallel and reinforce the strong beats indicated by the *ḍholak* or *naqqarā*, mostly on the first, fourth and second last beat in cycles of eight. The *thālī* and *mañjīrā* sound on each and every beat, ensuring the pulse and increasing the sound density, interacting with the dancing feet and arms.

Metrical variations remain basic, at the most shifting the placement of the strong beat and the muting.¹⁵ There is hardly any opportunity to accommodate ornamentation or elaborated improvisation. Metric structures are not clearly demarcated, especially since there is a general lack of rhythmical cohesion of the group and varying focus of the different musicians.¹⁶ Speed and volume are the two main variables, usually increasing in volume and pace until the culmination point while the dancers spin. Codes are limited, there is often no use of *tihāī* (a rhythmical formula to indicate change of structure), the music simply dies out when the dancer stops and the *puṅgi* player plays a high note. The melodies played by the *puṅgi* are melodic variations of musical themes stemming from a limited repertoire of Kālbeliyā songs. The *puṅgi* player returns to the same basic theme and as the performance gains in intensity, the speed in the change of motifs mounts while adding some personal variations. Some themes can be recognized in the performances of different *puṅgi* players, while others reveal a more personal

¹⁴ I have found no scholarly references to this community in Rajasthan, except for the short graduate research project about the *naqqarā* drummers in Pushkar of Kathleen Toomey (2014). There are references to the Solaṅkī Rājput of Gujarat, but the direct connections between the historical dynasty and these *naqqarā* playing musicians are doubtful.

¹⁵ An example of such a variation is the placement of the strong beat on the first, second and third pulse, while muting the fourth, a characteristic hallmark of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance known as “beat in three.” By imitating the movements of the Jodhpuri girls, the Pushkari Kālbeliyā dancers hope to improve their level of professionalism and artistic standing (see, fieldwork example, p. 7).

¹⁶ It is interesting to observe the increased concentration of Kālbeliyā dancers and musicians when they collaborate with the Solaṅkī drummers.

style. The girls take turns dancing and singing, without amplification, sitting next to the musicians when resting, often with children, on stage.

The Kālbeliyā dancers from Pushkar do not commonly wear anklets (*ghuṅghru*). In many Indian dance forms, often including Kālbeliyā dance, anklets primarily function as a mediating tool between improvisational dance and music. The absence of anklets during most of these performances can lead to miscommunication between dancers and musicians. The dancers must constantly command the musicians' attention while performing, mainly through the rather large movements of the arms, heavy stamping of the feet, and strongly gyrating hip movements. Musicians are often visually distracted (not observing the movement of the dancer) and not very sensitive to rhythm changes necessitated by the movements of the dancer. Dancers and musicians use cues to communicate, for instance the musical responses to turns and twirls are acceleration and crescendo, and stamping feet and waving skirts follow or modify the beat. Many Pushkari dancers and musicians have difficulties keeping a basic, constant regular beat. Although the meter stays constant, the pulse is unclear and seldom consistent. The limitations of the performers' techniques (both dancers and musicians) regularly contribute to an unintended eclectic sound and atmosphere.



Figure 24 Moriā Saperā waiting for her turn to perform, Alpine Restaurant, Pushkar, December 2013.

The Kālbeliyās from Pushkar currently combine older forms of their occupational scale (like begging, or selling of jewelry) with dance performance, a newer means of earning money. Responding to the rise in tourism, a few Kālbeliyā families have recently chosen to portray themselves as local Gypsy artists, performing and teaching on a regular basis. They work for and with international tourists in this small town, not only demonstrating their Kālbeliyā dance, but also collaborating in fusion jam sessions with traveling artists. Whereas international tourists are looking for ‘traditional’ Gypsy music, many Indian urban tourists, as a recently expanding group distinct from pilgrims, are looking for free ‘entertainment’ in Pushkar (especially with Pushkar’s reputation for cheap drugs, like space cake and *bhāṅg lassī*).

Folklorist Jodhpur: a buzzing town for ‘Gypsy’ fusion (Kālbeliyās and Laṅgās)¹⁷

Jodhpur, the center of Rajasthan’s Marwar region, has a history of incessant art patronage. *Mahārāja* Gaj Singh II - the present head of the Marwar royal family - and his family are still involved in organizing and sponsoring events and festivals related to Rajasthani folk and other performing arts.¹⁸ Besides the historical roots of folk patronage, Jodhpur’s centrality to the art industry is further cultivated by local folklorist research (two of the most authoritative folklore institutes of Rajasthan are based in this city),¹⁹ the development of tourism, and commercialization of local art forms under the bigger umbrella of the world music industry. Those whom I called folklorist-managers before (see p. 88), play the most vital role in the propagation of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance performances.

In this climate, many artists settled in Jodhpur, among them a group of Kālbeliyā families, who predominantly live in Pratap Nagar. Kalunath (*puṅgi* player) and his wife, Mohini Kalbeliya (vocalist) were approached by one of the pioneer folklorists of Rajasthan, Komal Kothari, who recorded their music as part of his research. In the early 1990s, after the popularity of Gulabi Sapera’s work had increased internationally,

¹⁷ For the Jodhpur case, I have selected the rehearsals and recordings of an ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) promotional on January 26 and January 28, 2014. See, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oARxWe6BLw (the rehearsal) and www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs5OIVPUOeQ (the performance).

¹⁸ Some examples are the RIFF (Rajasthan International Folk Festival), World Sacred Spirit Festival (Princess Shivranjani Rajye as co-director), Jodhpur Flamenco and Gypsy Festival.

¹⁹ Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi, and Rupayan Sansthan (the institute founded by Komal Kothari). In Jaipur, Jawalhar Kala Kendra is also known for its interest in local Rajasthani performances, and Virasat Foundation is actively involved in the preservation and commercialization of Rajasthani folk arts.

Kalunath was requested by Komal Kothari to make his wife, and some of their relatives, dance like Gulabi Sopera.²⁰ Through this request, they became the first generation of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās turned professional dancers. The dance performances of Mohini and her female relatives involved them singing Kālbeliyā songs accompanied by Kalunath (*puṅgi*) and two other members of the family playing *ḍaphlī* and *mañjīrā* first, with a few minutes of dancing to end. They did not know many of the dance steps or techniques. They were mainly waving their hands and regularly spinning on their axis, in imitation of Gulabi Sopera, as instructed.²¹ Mohini and the other women who were dancing at that time felt considerable discomfort during dance performances.²² The demand for ‘Gypsy dancers from Rajasthan’, however, proliferated and European and American managers and artists regularly contacted Komal Kothari to act as a local expert for the production of Rajasthani Gypsy performing troupes (see chapter 6, p 161-162). The daughters of Kalunath and his relatives were sent to Gulabi Sopera to ‘learn’ her dance techniques.²³ Pivotal in the launch of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance performance on international stages was the release of the documentary film, *Latcho Drom* (1993), in which the talented Sua Devi, the niece of Kalunath, literally spun Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance onto the silver screen. Her appearance made the Kālbeliyās from Jodhpur amongst the most demanded dancers on professional stages, second only to Gulabi Sopera. The children of four related families were raised to become professional dancers (their mothers left the stage permanently as soon as their daughters were ready). These families are still the only ones to perform Kālbeliyā dance in Jodhpur.²⁴

Komal Kothari could be considered as the indirect inventor of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance performances, as he first requested Mohini Kalbeliya to dance and brought Sua Devi in for the auditions of *Latcho Drom* (see also Girgis 2007). Yet, Komal Kothari’s

²⁰ Interview with Kalunath and Mohini: March 15, 2012.

²¹ Unfortunately, I did not come across any old records of their first dance performances, except for a thirty second excerpt in the documentary, “There’ll always be Stars in the Sky” (1992). See, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qsm9hOpi8lc. Another 1990s recording of Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-pgYo84MNQ>. In this YouTube video, we can see a performance at Arna Jharna (museum of Rupayan Sansthan, just outside Jodhpur), in which Sua Devi sings dances with the mother and aunts on the rhythm of the *ḍaf* and *mañjīrā*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-WezPek_DU

²² Interview with Kalunath and Mohini: March 15, 2012 and Lakshmi Devi on March 18, 2012.

²³ Interview with Gulabi Sopera, December 18, 2013.

²⁴ The number of Kālbeliyā dancers in Jodhpur has become difficult to count, as the four families, including the one of Kalunath, have children and grandchildren (the third generation of performers), out of whom many of the young girls have become dancers. Some of the daughters-in-law of the second generation of Kālbeliyā dancers’ families have also learned how to dance, and are also performing currently. I estimate that there are roughly thirty dancers active in Jodhpur.

specialization was primarily the music of Māṅgaṇiyārs and Laṅgās. He did extensive research in archiving their singing and playing techniques, their instruments, and their repertoire. His work is preserved in the Rupayan Sansthan (Jodhpur), although most of it has not been published. As a pioneer for managing artist-communities, not only did he study these communities, but he was also actively involved in cultivating new audiences for them. In search of modern-day adapted performances, he devised contemporary Rajasthani fusion groups, bringing different artist communities together. Under his management, Kālbeliyā dancers first performed together with musicians from Laṅgā and Māṅgaṇiyār communities in the early 1990s.²⁵

In this case study, I specifically focus on the collaboration between Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās and Laṅgā musicians. The Jodhpuri Kālbeliyās equally collaborate with Māṅgaṇiyār musicians, but this will be discussed in the following case. Most men of the Muslim Laṅgā community are known as low-caste musicians, who traditionally worked within a patronage system (*jajmānī*). They used to perform songs for their Muslim patrons, the Sindhī Sipāhī, who are generally known as low-caste cattle keepers and herdsmen. The Laṅgās were presumed to attend and play at their patron's rituals such as childbirth, marriage, and funeral ceremonies. According to Komal Kothari (2000, 60), the relatively recent conversion of this community from Hinduism to Islam brought about a culture combining a mix of practices from both religions.²⁶ Laṅgās distinguish by their specific singing technique, a style of singing relying on vocal embellishment, which is strongly related to the style of *sāraṅgī*²⁷ playing (Kothari 2000, 59). Laṅgās' vocal style is somewhat lamenting with a high intensity of vibrations, glissandos, and half-tone ornamentations. The Laṅgās are often categorized as semi-classical musicians, because of the adaptation of certain musical structures that are typically ascribed to 'classical' genres, like the use of *ālāp* (introduction), *rāga*-like structures, and *tihāī* (rhythmical formula to indicate change of structure).²⁸ Laṅgā songs have attained their present form through a process of semi-conscious transmission. Transmission among Laṅgās is entirely based on the teaching of the repertoire of songs and tunes, not on the

²⁵ As I will discuss in the next chapter, Hameed Khan initiated another form of cross-community collaborations under the name of *Gitans du Rajasthan*. Hameed, from the Kava community, collaborated with Gulabi Saperā and Thierry Robin, and therefore founded the concept of Rajasthani Gypsies. Komal Kothari likewise brought together musicians of the Laṅgā and Māṅgaṇiyār communities (since the late 1970s) and also Kālbeliyās (since the 1990s). Although Kothari has been the advisor for many Gypsy projects, he never used the term Gypsy for his own projects.

²⁶ There is no specific indication to the exact time period of conversion to Islam in any of Kothari's works.

²⁷ The *sāraṅgī* is a bowed, short-necked string instrument.

²⁸ As discussed in chapter 4, the delineation of categories, such as folk and classical, remains problematic in the context of Indian performances (dance and music) (See, for example, Ayyagari 2012; Allen 1998; Henry 2000).

notes or musical scale. Recognizing notes is thereby limited to the *sāraṅgī* (ibid., 63), although nowadays youngsters often learn to sing with the help of a harmonium. Multiple Laṅgā families have settled in the city of Jodhpur, mainly living in Kalākār Colony. Most still own land and have family in their ‘native’ villages in the Marwar district.²⁹



Figure 25 Laṅgā musicians during Kālbeliyā dance performance, Jodhpur, January 2014

Kālbeliyā dance performances in Jodhpur are often only one element of larger shows. These fusion shows aim to represent an array of ‘Rajasthani folk music and dances’ set up for tourists and events promoting Rajasthani culture on the national level and representing a unified image of the ‘Gypsy ancestors’ on the transnational level. The venues of such performances typically provide professional stages, and audiences are often mixed, Indian and non-Indian.³⁰ Performance locations range from local, in or around Jodhpur, to other parts of India (predominantly in large cities like Delhi, Bangalore, or Ahmedabad) as part of cultural programs, to international festivals abroad. Local performances in Jodhpur often pay less, therefore young girls who are still developing their performance skills are sent to these performances. If there are no well-paid performances, the more accomplished dancers join the young girls locally, where

²⁹ They are not necessarily born there, but they have some ancestral roots in these villages.

³⁰ Kālbeliyā dance performances from Jodhpur, among other substyles, are very recently finding their way into local ‘respectability’, as they are increasingly in demand for national cultural activities. They are also popular on the market as private entertainers (such as for weddings, or birthday parties).

they dance together, and the young girls get the opportunity to learn. Depending on the venue, the salaries of the artists differ greatly (from an average of 500 rupees per artist for local performances to 10.000 rupees per artist or even more for international performances).

The structure of the whole show (the order of songs and dance acts) is ‘fixed’ before the performance, and since recently also rehearsed. Most Rajasthani fusion shows currently follow more or less the same structure: they open with a solo performance of the *morcaṅg* (mouth harp played by a Laṅgā musician or sometimes Kālbeliyā musician) or *bapaṅg* (friction drum with cord) predominantly played by a Kālbeliyā musician, seldom by a Laṅgā, accompanied by *ḍholak*; next some Laṅgā specific songs or *qavvālī* hits³¹ are played; then *ghūmar*³² and/or *cari* dance,³³ followed by some more Laṅgā/*qavvālī* repertoire, a solo with *algozā* (double flute) or *sāraṅgī* (*algozā* is currently more popular) and *kartāl* solo, *bhavāī* dance,³⁴ some more songs, and culminate with the Kālbeliyā dance performance.

The Laṅgā musicians are often numerous on stages. They play the *ḍholak*, *kartāl*, *morcaṅg*, *algozā*, and harmonium. They may also play the *sāraṅgī*, but there is a tendency to omit this instrument, as the subdued mood is not suitable for large stages. The *puṅgi* is often added as a Kālbeliyā-specific instrument to give the dance performances a snake charmers’ touch. However, the instrument is not always played by a Kālbeliyā musician, but regularly by a Laṅgā musician who masters the circular breathing technique from the *algozā*. It is particularly interesting to note that during Kālbeliyā dance performances, Laṅgā musicians always play from the repertoire of the Kālbeliyā community. This musical part consists of a medley of themes from several Kālbeliyā songs.³⁵ These Kālbeliyā songs used to be performed by two to three Kālbeliyā women

³¹ Of which Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s version of *Mast Qalandar* is most common played.

³² This dance form, originally attributed to Rājput ladies, became the representative folk dance form of Rajasthan, and is currently danced by all layers of Rajasthani society.

³³ This dance originates in the Gūjar community of the Alwar district, and has been recently adopted by the Kālbeliyā community.

³⁴ Bhavāī dance is a dance in which the performer balances multiple water-jars (*maṭkī*) on his/her head. The origin of Bhavāī dance remains unclear, and has not been ascribed to any particular community (in contrast to most other ‘traditional’ dances from Rajasthan). Bhavāī dance used to be danced by men only, but some Kālbeliyā girls have learned to perform it as well. Nowadays most Kālbeliyā dancers are able to perform Bhavāī dance. Many men from the Rāṇā (Ḍholī) community also perform Bhavāī dance in the area of Jaipur.

³⁵ In the January 26, 2014 recording, I observed the following combination of Kālbeliyā songs during rehearsals: *Binti*, one sentence of *Nimbūḍā* (Māṅgaṇiyār repertoire), *Kālyo*, *Nimbū Bhī Lāyom*, *Bārai Mat Jāje*. For the performance: *Kālyo*, *Bārai Mat Jāje*, and *Ājā Ājā Sajāre*, randomly combined with musical intermezzos on harmonium, and vocal improvisations (see video links, footnote 17).

during their practice of *pherī lagānā* and are simple melodies of only few stanzas to be sung in front of local villagers' doors. The themes of such songs are based on light, daily-life situations, mostly describing visual features of men and women, and innocent love play between husband and wife.³⁶ Because of the shortness and simplicity of such stanzas, *Laṅgā* musicians (also *Māṅgaṇiyārs*, see below, and some Jodhpuri *Kālbeliyā* musicians) began to fuse multiple *Kālbeliyā* songs into one medley, avoiding melodic repetition and creating a more interesting musical piece, which also helps to stimulate the creativity of the improvising dancer.

In Jodhpur, *Kālbeliyā* dance performances are the product of an active creation-process. The adoption of rehearsals sheds more light on the method of designing semi-improvisational performances (like the specific importance of cues) and novel ways of intercommunal communication between (*Kālbeliyā*) dancers and (*Laṅgā*) musicians. All this pre-coordination taken together reveals the conscious cultivation of a musical and visual aesthetic. Following the process of collaborative performances, it became clear that the concept of “rehearsals” (they use the English word) is quite different from determining a fixed structure in music or making some form of choreography. The rehearsals mainly serve as a tool to forge artistic relationships between dancers and musicians, and to better learn each other's performance language; this facilitates the coherence of the performance before an audience. In fact, the rehearsals are an analogue of a preparatory jam session. The musicians and dancers are both improvising and enjoying issuing challenges to each other to such an extent that the rehearsals are often more vibrant than the actual performances. They occasionally stop the rehearsal to discuss technicalities like the tempo or a certain accent (see video footnote 17).

³⁶ Komal Kothari registered other *Kālbeliyā* songs, like a repertoire of “sad songs,” “wedding songs” and “songs related to nature.” These songs, however, are not used during *Kālbeliyā* performances (as observed at the Rupayan Sansthan, February 24, 2013). Mohanlal Jodh (2011, 25-28) also divided the *Kālbeliyās'* songs repertoire into categories. The lyrics of *Kālbeliyā* songs slightly differ depending on the regional dialects and are often adapted to a certain situation or modern-realities (like the mentioning of motor cycles, mobile phones, etc.).



Figure 26 Rehearsals for video recording at Kathu Saperā's home, Jodhpur, January 2014

The centrality of rhythm is prominently discernible in Jodhpuri performances, and is considerably more complex than in the case of the Pushkari Kālbeliyās. The rhythmical structure consists of different layers played by the multiple percussion instruments. The variation in rhythm is often related to changing dance movements. The main metrical structure is continuous and stable, with changing speed depending on the demand of the dancer. Just before a performance, the *ḍholak* player confers with the dancer about the speed of the dance piece: slow, fast or initially slow with increasing speed. The *kartāl* follows the beat established by the *ḍholak*, often dividing it in shorter time units (three, four and sometimes more counts per beat, especially during *tihāī*), without too much ornamentation or variation.³⁷ Accelerations usually occur just before *tihāī*, especially when accompanying twirling dancers.

Generally the *ḍholak* player is in charge of following the rhythmic accents the dancer makes with her anklets. The *ghunghrus* worn by the dancers indicate the dancers' rhythm aurally, so that all sounds fuse. It is a tool that is especially helpful when the dancers are spinning and the speed gradually increases. The percussionist does not necessarily have to watch the dancers; he needs only listen to the sound of the anklets. If the cooperation between dancer and percussionists functions optimally, all percussionists (mainly *ḍholak* player and *kartāl* player, among others) receive subtle hints from the dancer by concentrated observation, so that change in movement, like accents in the movement of the hips, hands, wrists, chest etc., corresponds with

³⁷ In the recordings of the ICCR video, Lumnath Kalbeliya plays *tablā*. The *tablā* is occasionally used in Kālbeliyā dance performances, but not commonly.

variations in rhythmical play. If the focus of the percussionists is not present, the dancer can explicitly ask for their attention, by the subtle nodding of the head while turning to the percussionists, a more explicit shout (something like, “èhè”) or, most explicitly, by giving the percussionists direct orders.³⁸ The melody is often an important source of inspiration for the dancers during improvisations. *Laṅgās*, especially the singer and harmonium player, introduce themes and expand on them by improvising and interweaving them with other melodies. During performances, there are multiple moments of melodic communication, between musicians as well as between dancers and musicians. One lead singer can be identified, who most often does not play any instrument. When the lead singer needs a break or when the performance demands variety, the harmonium player takes over the lead voice for some time. Other musicians often join in, paralleling and countering the lead singer, or singing in question-response. Most of the *Laṅgās* are multi-instrumentalists, swapping roles between performances.



Figure 27 Kathu Sapera during Kālbeliyā Dance Performance, Jodhpur, January 2014

³⁸ Conversations between dancers and musicians during performances are quite common.

In the earliest Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā dance performances, Kālbeliyā dance was most commonly a solo performance, where dancers would alternate, if more than one was present. Nowadays, Kālbeliyā dancers tend to perform in small groups of two or three and occasionally more. Within group dance performances, one lead dancer is appointed. The musicians and the other dancers follow the lead dancer's movements. When the dancer changes the movement, it usually takes one repetition of the same movement for the musicians and other dancers to adapt the rhythm and movement. Although the musicians mostly follow the dancers, they can choose not to follow, thereby introducing a different rhythm asking for another movement or ceasing a certain movement, as indicated by the use of the *tihāī* to signal the end of a phrase, for example to end a spinning sequence. These examples show that a range of codes and communication tools were developed between dancers and musicians, so that they can easily perform together without requiring specific rehearsal. Group rehearsals serve to improve the 'code language', and consequently the quality of performance, without abandoning the improvisational element.

Royal Udaipur: Desert musicians and nomad dancers at the tourist palaces (Kālbeliyās and Māṅgaṇiyārs)³⁹

Udaipur, popularly called the "Venice of India," has a royal appearance with its many palaces and palace-like *havelīs*. Most of these lavish buildings are now transformed into museums or luxurious guest-suites mainly aimed at attracting an elite audience: rich tourists, and Indian aristocracy and nouveau-riches. The regional governmental institute for folk arts, the West Cultural Zone Center (WZCC) has its seat in the city of Udaipur. As a result, many Rajasthani folk dance performances (not, however, including Kālbeliyā dance) are organized on a daily basis in the courtyard of the Bagore-ki-Haveli, an eighteenth century mansion next to the WZCC, and activities related to folk

³⁹ During two periods of fieldwork (February-March 2013, December 2013), I stayed in Udaipur to conduct interviews and participative observation, but was not allowed to join any of the performances in the luxury hotels. However, I got permission to film some of the daily rehearsals, when the family was having new Māṅgaṇiyār musicians over who had recently arrived in Udaipur, and private home performances for potential clients (mostly from abroad). Sayari (the leading Kālbeliyā dancer in Udaipur) was very peculiar about not filming too much dance, only the music (played to accompany the Kālbeliyā dance performances). As we will later argue, Sayari has become very conscious about copyright and artistic property (which appeared the main reason for not allowing the performance to be recorded), relative to the fixed sequences of the performance. I have selected two exemplary video recordings of the rehearsals, one with dance and one without dance, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKNYO7Ij2qM (music rehearsal) and www.youtube.com/watch?v=98U4AX0UY58 (dance rehearsal).

traditions are held at the Shilpgram (the living museum ground or “rural arts and crafts complex” just outside of the city center).⁴⁰

Next to the governmental efforts to publicly promote Rajasthani folklore in Udaipur, there is a private demand for regular Rajasthani performances in elite venues of the town. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Sayari Sopera and her husband Sherunath emigrated permanently from Jodhpur to respond to that demand. They signed permanent contracts with most of these hotels,⁴¹ receiving a fixed monthly salary, which is exceptional for Kālbeliyā performers, who are normally paid per assignment and have widely fluctuating incomes. Sayari endeavors to establish respectability and a reputation for high-quality Rajasthani folk performances. In search for high-level musicians, Sayari and Sherunath regularly travel to Barmer and Jaisalmer, to visit Māṅgaṇiyār musicians⁴² among whom they hold auditions and select young talent to perform with their Kālbeliyā family members. Endowed with a good sense for business, Sheru and Sayari have a working knowledge of the different musicians’ communities and villages and their different repertoires. They have built up an extensive business network, which they operate as managers selecting artists in view of specific programs. Sheru and Sayari’s selection is not so much community- or friendship-based; they are in search for talent and performance quality. Young artists are offered intensive training and both musicians and dancers (and parts of their families) are provided with food and accommodation during their collaboration, or (unofficial) business agreement; however they are allegedly paid very little. This unusual situation harbored the development of a whole new Kālbeliyā sub-style with influences from multiple other ‘folk’ and ‘classical’ dance and music genres.

⁴⁰ See, www.wzccindia.com. Contrary to the lack of Kālbeliyā dance in the Bagore-ki-Haveli center, Kālbeliyā dancers from Jodhpur, Jaipur and Pushkar are regularly invited to perform on the Shilpgram Udaipur.

⁴¹ They perform at the Oberoi Udaivilas hotel, The Leela Palace hotel, the Taj Lake Palace hotel, Lalit Laxmi Vilas, and the Sheraton hotel, among others.

⁴² They occasionally work with Laṅgās also.



Figure 28 Rekha and her sister during performance, Udaipur, February 2013

Māṅgaṇiyār live in the districts of Jaisalmer and Barmer, and in parts of Jalor, Bikaner and Jodhpur districts (Singh 1998, 621; Kothari 2001, 206). Just like Laṅgā musicians, they provided musical services for patrons in return for donations in kind, such as cattle, crops, and sometimes cash. Interestingly, and in contrast to Laṅgās, Muslim Māṅgaṇiyār musicians traditionally had Hindu patrons. Consequently, a big portion of Māṅgaṇiyār repertoire is rather Hindu orientated. Similar to the *sāraṅgī* for Laṅgās, Māṅgaṇiyār musicians' community-specific instrument is the *kāmāychā*. Māṅgaṇiyār music is strongly related to sung poetry and composed of short musical motifs. Singers often improvise, mixing and matching stanzas and combining recitation and melodic improvisation (Ayyagari 2012, 13-17). Described by Ayyagari (2012, 14) as “ingenious cultural politicians,” Māṅgaṇiyār are known for their skill of “adapting and converting foreign elements into their own repertoire.”

Similar to performances in the Jodhpur area, Kālbeliyā performances in Udaipur are often elements of broader ‘Rajasthani dance and music’ showcases. These performances grant tourists an overview of Māṅgaṇiyār music combined with *qavvālī* and Kālbeliyā elements and other Rajasthani dances (*terah tālī*,⁴³ *bhavāī*, *ghūmar* and *cari*). Unlike the

⁴³ *Terah tālī* literally means “thirteen strikes,” or thirteen ways to strike the *mañjīrās* (handcymbals). By custom, this seated dance was executed by women of the Kāmaḍ community as part of worship for the famous Rajasthani saint, Bābā Rāmdeo, nowadays it has become a regularly performed dance by different communities, including some Kālbeliyā dancers.

Jodhpur performances, these performances are strictly structured (the sequences having a fixed order) and composed/choreographed. Sayari attributed this new approach of performing Kālbeliyā dance to the collaboration with the Canadian Philippe Tapp, formerly member of Cirque du Soleil. They conceptualized five different performances for every day of the week, comprised of the same sequences in varying order and performed in exclusive hotels. The sequences start with an *ālāp* timed at twenty minutes, followed by a more up-tempo section with percussion accompaniment, the whole show taking about forty-five minutes. The music has been composed to a great extent, with a clear structure, using recurring themes and motives, and mixing up different songs (Kālbeliyā, Māṅgaṇiyār and *qavvālī*)⁴⁴ while omitting the Māṅgaṇiyār improvisation.

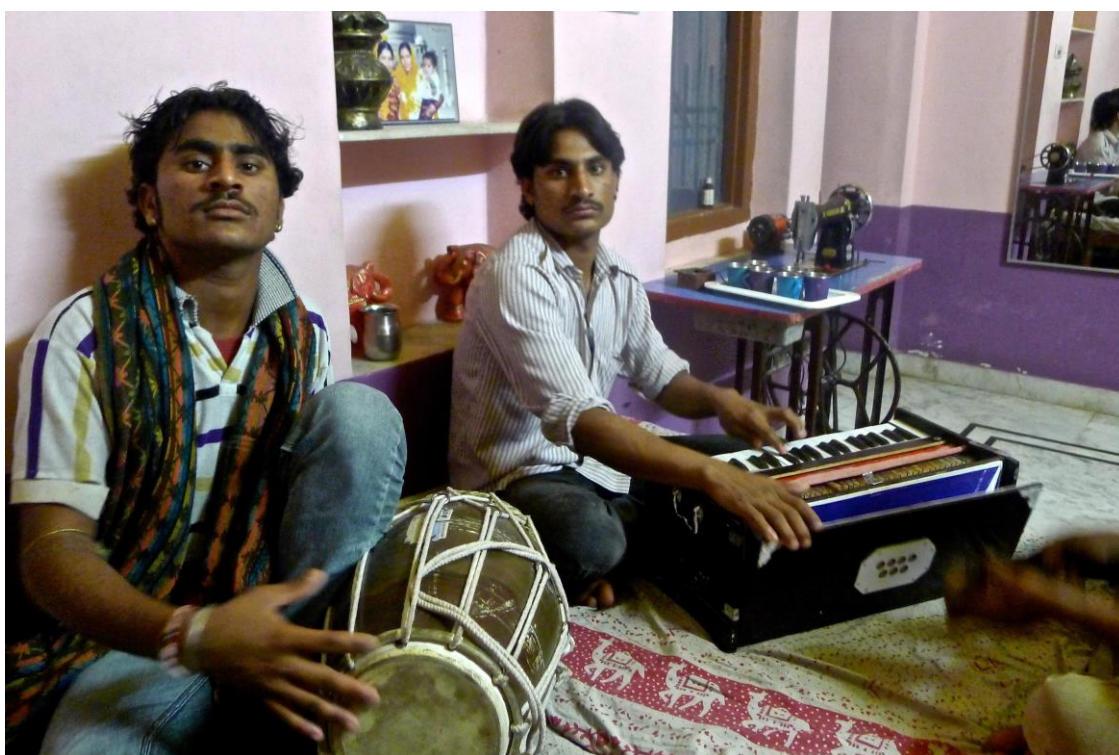


Figure 29 Ilias and Lateef Māṅgaṇiyār during daily rehearsal, Udaipur, February 2013

The hotel shows are performed by a reduced group of two or three Māṅgaṇiyār musicians, made up of one singer playing the harmonium, one *ḍholak* player also doing vocals and sometimes a *kartāl* player singing accompaniments. Since the musicians are multi-instrumentalists, while each performance usually has only one lead vocalist, the instruments and roles are interchangeable. The Māṅgaṇiyār musicians working in Udaipur with Sayari are selected on the basis of extra-community repertoire

⁴⁴ The sequence of songs in the video rehearsal is: *Lavaṇjī* (Māṅgaṇiyār), *Nimbūḍā* (Māṅgaṇiyār), *Musāfir* (Kālbeliyā), *Holiyām Meṃ Udere Gulāl* (Kālbeliyā), concluding with *Merā Piyā Ghar Āyā* (*qavvālī* repertoire).

(Māṅgaṇiyār, *qavvālī*, Kālbeliyā, Kāmaḍ, Laṅgā, etc.), virtuosity of singing and playing, and multi-instrumentalism. For certain Kālbeliyā dance sequences, Sherunath (Sayari's husband) joins in to play the *puṅgī* (Kālbeliyā specific instrument - nowadays it has become one of the main symbols for Kālbeliyā artistic identity). Sheru mostly varies between limited ranges of Kālbeliyā song tunes. The Kālbeliyā dancers, Sayari, Rekha and Indu performing in 2013 and 2014, likewise sing in alternation with the Māṅgaṇiyārs during Kālbeliyā emphasized performances, again symbolizing Kālbeliyā artistic identity, referring to more traditional roots of female Kālbeliyā singers.

Both Kālbeliyā dancers and Māṅgaṇiyār musicians performing in Udaipur have been trained to a professional level. The *ḍholak* playing style is virtuosic and subtle, with significant variation in rhythms, themes and speed. During the Kālbeliyā part of the performances, the music suddenly becomes more basic, with heavy accents in the rhythm section, less variation and virtuosity, adapting to the stamping Kālbeliyā style. When joined by other musicians, for example at special occasions with *qavvālī* musicians, different rhythmical layers are formed and the Māṅgaṇiyār rhythmical mastery and sense of improvisation becomes even more apparent.



Figure 30 Rekha during rehearsals, Udaipur, February 2013

In the creation process and during rehearsals for new Māṅgaṇiyār musicians, the music is composed first, and only later is the dance superimposed. A selection of songs is made and formatted into a showcase. Dance moves are carefully selected in relation to the music and the whole is rehearsed daily. This process enhances the diminution of

improvisation during the performance, requiring less direct communication on the spot between musicians and dancers. Living nearby, rehearsing together regularly, and performing beyond the context of a hotel-performance, the musicians and dancers interact and become familiar with each other's code language. As the dance is rhythmically elaborate and innovative, and the musicians and dancers alike of professional skill, a nearly organic interaction can be sensed between the two. During rehearsal, there is space for experimenting.⁴⁵ Although it seems like the whole performance is integrally fixed, there is some freedom left for variation in both music and dance. While the dancers follow musical cues, the musicians are sensitive to the dancers' movements, to the extent that they can anticipate the next movement and do not need an extra adaptation to catch up, as in the other cases. During the hotel performance, cues are given to indicate the passing on to the next 'fixed' movement, rhythm or song.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I expounded upon the variety present within the boundaries of what is currently considered a homogeneous performing genre, Kālbeliyā dance. The relatively recent creation of Kālbeliyā dance performances in Pushkar by Gulabi in the early 1980s has diversified in multi-faceted directions, and continues to do so up to the present day. The strong presence of local, national and international manager-figures, who stimulate a competitive and professional atmosphere, keeps on propelling the theatricalization and touristification of Kālbeliyā dance performances as representatives of both transnational 'Gypsy' performances as well as local Rajasthani 'folk' performances. Beside the novel, family-bound Kālbeliyā dance shows in Pushkar, I observed a phenomenon of cross-community collaboration in other areas of Rajasthan (Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur), leading to the creation of groups of different communal backgrounds, who collaborate in various ways. Ayyagari (2009, 246) similarly defined this phenomenon as "syncretic patch-working." They reproduce "new cultural material which contains bits and pieces of [...] more customary musical traditions" (ibid.). All three communal traditions are thus synthesized in novel dance performance formats.

⁴⁵ An example of innovation is the use of complex footwork by Rekha, who had a personal admiration for Kathak dance, although she never had training in this dance style.

Kālbeliyā dance performances held up as a prime example to once more challenge the idea of folk being rusty, ancient and unchanging. They demonstrate 'folk' performances to be living phenomena and contemporary cultural expressions within a global context. Current Kālbeliyā dance performances have not been reshaped by contemporary tourism and global economy; on the contrary, they are products thereof. Phillips (2013, 421-22), in her research on Flamenco and Kathak, makes the genre-eclipsing observation that dance - and performance in general - helps humans renegotiate their condition, despite, and I would even say thanks to, change in form, function, and performance context. I have sought to show how such renegotiation is a daily and ongoing reality for performers of Kālbeliyā dance, an ever-evolving, contemporary 'folk' art.

Chapter 6

Representing Rajasthani roots
Indian Gypsy identity and origins in documentary films



Figure 31 Young Kālbeliyā dancers just before performance, Pushkar, December 2013



There are some ten million Gypsies around the world, and to find out who they are and where they came from, we took the Romany trail, which led us back to every country of Europe; it took us through North Africa, and Asia, and into India, their original homeland. We discovered tribes of Gypsies still traveling in Northwest India. While others migrated around the world, these nomadic people have hardly changed over centuries.

Thus proclaims the narrator in the opening scenes of *Romany Trail* (1981). This documentary film presents contemporary nomadic communities in different countries as descendants of Gypsy forefathers, who settled in various places during migrations from India into Europe. The viewer is immediately introduced to the two central and interrelated issues at stake: the identity (“who they are”) and origins (“where they came from”) of the Gypsies. Concerning identity, the name Gypsy remains subject to debate, especially with reference to the Roma. The sensitivity of the term revolves around longstanding issues of both discrimination and stereotyping, such as the image of the Gypsy as a nomadic, poor “noble savage” naturally talented in music (see, for example, Tremlett 2013). Critical academic works have already noted biased representations of Gypsies centered on identity, language and social exclusion: although finding different outcomes both Willems (1995) and Lee (2000) have deconstructed some Orientalist ideas (e.g. Grelmann, 1783); and Tremlett (2013) has suggested focusing on hybridity and the plurality of identities instead of heterogeneity as a means in the struggle against homogenization and stereotyping of Gypsy identities.¹

The *Romany Trail* also introduces the idea that the origins of the Roma can be traced to India. This notion of the Roma’s Indian ancestry is part of a scholarly debate and has been labeled the “Indian connection” hypothesis by Judith Okely (1983, 8). Together with Willems and Lucassen, Okely belongs to a group of sociologists and anthropologists who question the Roma’s Indian origins. They debate with predominantly linguistic scholars, such as Hancock, Acton and Matras,² who accept this Indian descent (Matras 2005, 55). The idea of a shared Indian origin was first suggested by eighteenth-century scholars and was later accompanied by socio-historical narratives trying to clarify the

¹ I would like to thank Iris Vandeveld for the exciting and productive collaboration on this corresponding for the article in *Romani Studies*.

² Linguistic theories have been increasingly assisted by genetic research projects suggesting that Gypsies traced much of their ancestry to (an) Indian/Central Asian source population(s) and underwent a population bottleneck that led to the expansion of certain haplogroups in descendant Roma groups (Ioviță and Schurr, 2004 275-278).

initial migration from India. Although these narratives often included exotic and Orientalist stereotypes, some of them live on to this day, not only in a limited number of academic works (Bhattacharya 1965; Liégeois 1983; Hancock 2002, 70–74; Kenrick 2004, 75–80; Hancock and Karanth 2010, 106–110), but also in popular representations. Additionally, the Indian descent plays a crucial role in claims of a unified Gypsy identity, involving a political discussion about the worldwide unity of the Gypsies as an ethnic community, as well as about their status as a minority (e.g., Matras 2013). The bias towards unity can be situated within postcolonial celebrations of cosmopolitanism (Stam and Shohat 2012), which favor broad and inclusive (as a reaction against exclusive) definitions of communities. In the context of Gypsy identity, this inclusive approach has led to the arguable thesis that current nomads (or, more often, descendants of nomads) from Rajasthan are also covered by the Gypsy label.

Public discourse, of which documentaries are a case in point, has adopted the arguments underlying these debates. As the above citation demonstrates, *Romany Trail* directly linked the notion of Gypsy roots to “tribes of Gypsies still traveling in Northwest India.” Whereas *Romany Trail* – the first documentary including Indian Gypsies – reflects the historical and political context of the 1980s, its perspective has been adopted time and again in a series of documentary films that continue to be produced today. In line with an international public fascination with Gypsies, the appeal of these films is apparent in their successes at international film festivals as well as their prominence in educational programs. Although a growing body of work examines the representation of Gypsies in public discourse, especially in literature (Saul 2007), music (Silverman 2012) and media (Tremlett 2013), the figure of the *Indian* Gypsy remains largely absent from existing scholarship.

To gain insight into both the portrayal of Rajasthani artists as Gypsies and the representation of the “Indian connection,” I explore documentary films on Indian Gypsies produced over a period of three decades. The research strategy of this chapter uses contextualized content analyses of the films, complemented by my ethnographic research among the artist communities of Rajasthan, often proclaimed to be Gypsy. First, I argue how the Indian Gypsy identity came to be represented in the public domain by the 1980s. I examine which communities appear as Indian Gypsies in the documentaries and reveal how their profile was inspired and sustained by a variety of discursive perspectives. These range from politics, over transnational musical collaborations, to performance marketing. Second, I shift towards a content analysis of the documentaries, analyzing how the Indian connection is presented and critically examining the representation of contemporary Indian Gypsies. I also pay attention to the strategies employed to increase the sense of realism of these portrayals. Before turning to this analysis, I first address some studies on Gypsy representations and on

the particular way in which documentaries build images through representation, and second, I provide an overview of methods, as well as brief descriptions of the films under study.

Gypsies, representations and documentaries

Depictions of Gypsies appear in a variety of discourses, often rooted in “a cluster of images that are transmitted through cultural productions, fiction, sayings, metaphors and so on” (Matras 2013, 211). Many stereotypical representations based thereupon have been criticized, for instance as they appear in romantic (mainly European) literature and art (Glajar and Radulescu 2008). As Gay y Blasco (2008, 298) writes, “visual representations of Roma have drawn on a very limited thematic repertoire which has proven remarkably resilient in both historic and geographic terms” and includes among other stereotypes “the wandering, free, musical, thieving, lustful Gypsy.” In the field of minority studies, Gypsy representations in the media have also been analyzed, usually focusing on feature films (Dobrev 2007) or television (Tremlett 2013). As for documentaries, only *Latcho Drom* (1993) has received critical consideration due to its oversimplified depictions as well as its staged setup (Dobrev 2007; Silverman 2000). This lack of attention is surprising, given that

numerous inter-related social forces might contribute to our perceptions of others, mass media portrayals undoubtedly play a very important role in influencing people’s attitudes towards out-groups, especially when presented in very *realistic* ways in media such as films (Ramasubramanian 2005, 243, my emphasis).

This notion is even truer for non-fiction, such as documentary films, which are often considered by audiences as “objective representations” of reality (Hamilton 1997, 81). Indeed, audiences do not necessarily realize (or want to realize) that “the camera can, and inevitably must lie” (Winston 1995, 253), i.e. they may be unaware that the “subjective interpretation” (Hamilton 1997, 81) of the documentary maker always colours the ‘reality’ shown in a film (Nichols, 1991). As I will show, this also counts for the representations of Indian communities as Gypsies in documentaries. In fact, the latter play a key role in conceptualizations of these communities by Western European and American audiences.

Moreover, the documentaries analyzed here “do not reveal the representation as representation; they present facts, images and witnesses as unproblematic,” as “objective representations,” and therefore can be considered realistic (De Leeuw 2007, 78). At the same time, following Shohat and Stam (1994, 214), my focus lies not so much on the question of realism within the documentaries but instead on “the interplay of

voices, discourses, [and] perspectives” through which the image of the Indian Gypsy and the Indian connection theory surface. Therefore, I do not approach the documentaries through an evaluation of their verisimilitude, but rather as contextualized discursive practices in relation to broader ideologies and representations in culture and society. I highlight how the popular imagery of Indian Gypsies is grounded in several platforms, such as the political, social and cultural fields in Europe/the USA and in India, all of which play a role in the way the Indian Gypsies appear in documentary films. In turn, the documentary representations inspire other discourses, as Silverman (2007, 353) convincingly demonstrated regarding the world music scene: “Drawing upon the structure of the film *Latcho Drom*, all of the European and American festivals employ a schema depicting linear migration from an original Indian homeland.” Moreover, these representations have actual consequences for the everyday lives of the so-called Gypsy communities in India and generate interesting dynamics between Indian and non-Indian perspectives.

Methods

Following Shohat and Stam’s approach towards media representations through an analysis of framing discourses, Iris Vandeveld and I conducted a contextualized qualitative content analysis. We first identified 25 documentary films³ featuring the artist communities of Rajasthan, produced from the 1980s until today, of which three are still in production at the time of writing. After circumscribing this “complete collection” (Flick 1998, 64), we singled out through purposive sampling those films that represent Rajasthani communities as Indian Gypsies and involve the Indian connection hypothesis (either explicitly or implicitly). This resulted in a final collection of 15 films.⁴ We both independently transcribed this sample; then, these transcriptions were combined to obtain a single transcript covering voice-over commentaries, intertitles,

³ These include three TV episodes: *KINDER DER WÜSTE Leben in Rajasthan*, *Music Voyager Made in India: Gypsy journey*, *Kālbeliyā: Ek Khānābadosh Vīyasat*.

⁴ Ten documentary films were not included. Two (*Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan* (2010) and *Kālbeliyā: Ek Khānābadosh Vīyasat* (2014)) focus on the Kālbeliyā community and were produced in India, where – as I will explain in more detail – the public discourse uses the “folk” label rather than the “Gypsy” one. Therefore, these films do not refer to the Indian connection theory. Three films (*My torn Saper heart* (2010), *Leben in Rajasthan* (2012) and *Songs of the Jogi Nath Kalbelia* (2013)) similarly single out the Kālbeliyās and use the Gypsy label in the sense of nomadism, without connection to Roma ancestry. Instead, they revolve around topics such as social exclusion, poverty or low education. *There’ll Always Be Stars in the Sky: The Indian Film Phenomenon* (1992) also features “Indian Gypsies”, but without mention of the Indian connection. Yet another film, *Manganiyars: Tales from the Thar desert* (2015), was not available. Finally, three forthcoming films (*Return to Rajasthan*, *Gipsy Voyages*, and *Anita*) are mentioned on the basis of their trailers.

notes on the visuals and transcripts of interviews occurring in the films. Subsequently, one researcher developed an open coding scheme that was crosschecked and adjusted by the second researcher. In order to provide more insight into the different discourses and production contexts, we incorporated data from my ethnographical records, as the Kālbeliyās are one of the most prominent communities in the documentaries. This fieldwork took place in Rajasthan for a total of twelve months spread over four periods between 2012 and 2015, was complemented by fieldwork among cultural producers, folklorist-managers and artists during their performing tours in Europe (as elaborately discussed in chapter 1). For the purpose of this chapter, I applied what Kvale (2007, 113) calls “membership validation” interviews with the Rajasthani artists and their families while watching the documentary films in which they had participated, which led to “on-the-spot confirmations or disconfirmations” (Kvale 2007, 102) of the information provided and lent additional insight into the making of the films.

Documentaries on Indian Gypsies

After the pioneer documentary *Romany Trail* (1981), of which I already gave a taste, two more films followed in the 1990s: *Latcho Drom* (1993) and *Ancient Poets of Rajasthan: Of Sand and Stars* (1999). Ten more films were produced between 2002 and 2011. *Cobra Gypsies* and *The Rajasthani Gypsy Caravan* were both released in 2015. All selected films are American, European or Australian, with the majority produced in the USA and France – especially in the early years, often in cooperation with the music industry.⁵

Regarding general structure, we distinguished two types of films. A first group, containing four films, depicts contemporary Gypsies in different countries such as India, Egypt, Turkey, Romania and Spain, as descendants of Gypsy ancestors who traveled historical migratory routes in these countries. This presentation supports the idea of a singular Gypsy identity and builds further on Roma minority politics (see below). Within these films, cross-country parallels (in language, sociocultural customs and profession) among contemporary Gypsies are highlighted, and the Rajasthani communities appear as most authentic and traditional. *Romany Trail* already conveyed this idea and was the source of inspiration for the similarly structured and far more popular *Latcho Drom* (Girgis 2007, 37). Another, more recent film, *Romanipen* (2006), has a similar setup. Whereas *Romany Trail* and *Romanipen* include abundant voice-over commentaries, *Latcho*

⁵ For example, the French composer and music director Alain Weber functioned as musical advisor for *Latcho Drom*; *When the Road Bends...* documents a concert tour of Gypsy artists; and *Gypsy Spirit* is built around Roma musician Harri Stojka looking for his roots in Rajasthan.

Drom confines itself to visuals and music. These three films offer an overview of Gypsies the world over, starting in India and ending in Spain. *When the Road Bends... Tales of a Gypsy Caravan* (2006) is somewhat different: it visualizes a collaboration project between Gypsies from Rajasthan, Macedonia, Romania and Spain in the shape of a concert tour through the United States. Thus it presents a behind-the-scenes perspective of the tour, or as its trailer promises, “a glimpse into a secret world.” The film is composed of a collage of images, alternating between concert scenes and snapshots of the Gypsy artists’ daily lives in their countries of origin.

A second set of eleven documentaries focuses entirely on the Gypsy artists of Rajasthan, revealing their daily lives and the hardships they face. Some of these films center on a “search for the original Gypsies” (used as a subtitle to *Song of the Dunes*) and elaborately explore the Indian connection theory: these include *Jaisalmer Ayo! Gateway of the Gypsies* (2004), *Gitans du Rajasthan: Aux Sources Tziganes* (2009), *Song of the Dunes: Search for the Original Gypsies* (2009) and *Gypsy Journey* (2010). Others highlight music and dance, often by telling the story of one particular artist or community, and therefore mention the Indian connection rather briefly: these include *Of Sand and Stars* (1999), *Musafir* (2005), *La Danse du Serpent* (2002), *The Lost Music of Rajasthan* (2011) and *Cobra Gypsies* (2015).⁶ Still other documentaries cover collaborations between European and Indian Gypsy performers. In *Gypsy Spirit* (2010) guitar player Harri Stojka pursues his personal Gypsy roots in India by playing music with Rajasthani artists both in India and in Austria.⁷ The recent *Rajasthani Gypsy Caravan* (2015) likewise portrays the experiences of Rajasthani artists in collaboration with Katrina-ji, an American dancer and manager. In contrast to *Gypsy Spirit* this film does not show any images of Rajasthan (the ‘home country’), but rather focuses solely on a Gypsy Caravan tour through the United States.

Tracing the discursive Indian Gypsy: politics, music and marketing

Whereas the idea of a historical Indian origin of the Roma has developed within academic circles, the documentaries trace this to the present by connecting the Roma

⁶ The forthcoming *Anita* also belongs to this group of films.

⁷ Similarly, the forthcoming *Return to Rajasthan* and *Gipsy Voyages* concentrate on collaboration projects, more specifically between Spanish and Rajasthani Gypsy performers.

around the globe with contemporary Rajasthani communities. The question of identity then arises: which Indian communities are regarded as contemporary survivors of the original Gypsies and on what basis? In the earliest documentaries, *khānābadoś* communities (a Hindi umbrella term meaning “the ones who wear their food on their backs”) from the state of Rajasthan are presented as such. Each sub-group has its own characteristic profile: typically, Kālbeliyās are represented as dancers and snake charmers, Māṅgaṇiyārs and Laṅgās as low-caste musicians, Bhopās as storytellers, Lohārs as blacksmiths, Bhats as puppeteers and Bañjārās as wandering merchants. As the voice-over in *Romanipen* (2006) explains,

Tribes such as the Bañjārās, the Lohārs who worked in metal for centuries, the Kālbeliyā snake charmers and artists – these tribes gave birth to the Roma a thousand years ago when some of their members set out on an exodus that would carry them to all corners of the world.

All documentaries in this study portray one or several of these communities,⁸ with a growing preference for artists. This development is motivated by the centrality of music and dance in the overall Gypsy image and was reinforced by the close link between some documentaries and the world music scene. The films’ preoccupation with Indian Gypsies and the powerful link to Rajasthan came about in the context of multiple discourses that have developed since the second half of the twentieth century. First, the united identity of an ethnic Roma community (including Indians) became a central topic on the political agenda beginning in the late 1950s, marked by the establishment of the International Romani Union (IRU) in 1971. Second, the world music industry developed in the 1980s with Gypsy music as one of its main marketing labels. It found in the Rajasthani folklorist music scene an interesting commercial partner, willing to connect its artists to the Gypsy label. Third, due to its lucrative potential, the Gypsy identity was further developed as a marketing tool for local performing communities.

Roma identity politics and the Indian connection

As part of a global civil rights movement and minority politics, various political attempts were made in the 1970s to gain recognition of a unified Roma identity with its own non-territorial nation (Mayall 2004, 204). Matras (2013, 217) insightfully identifies two main bases for this movement. First, since the 1950s a group of German-based Roma/Sinti, backed by NGOs, launched activist campaigns demanding the

⁸ *Romany Trail* and *Latcho Drom* speak of Gypsies in India without mentioning the difference between communities. Later documentaries are more explicit and specific.

acknowledgement of Roma persecutions by the Nazis during the Second World War. Second, from the late 1960s onward, Roma in several European countries organized activities revolving around “the notion of a shared linguistic-cultural legacy and the desire to promote and protect it” (Matras 2013, 218), aiming at the empowerment of the European Roma both by making them conscious of their cultural heritage and by reinforcing their literacy. Together, these initiatives gave rise to the official foundation of the International Romani Union (IRU) at the first World Romani Congress in London in April 1971. At the backdrop of this international movement, the Roma claimed official recognition as a transnational minority (Fosztó 2003, 102/104). In its policy, the IRU aimed to develop the “self-consciousness of the Roma” (see internationalromaniunion.org), the representation of all Roma around the world as a “non-territorial ethnicity” (Matras 2013, 212), and the defense of Roma rights internationally within their own, newly created Roma nation (Romanestan).

The Indian connection was a central tenet of this identity struggle. Important aspirations of the IRU were the unification of the Roma (using the same language and culture) and identification with the “mother country” (India) (Fosztó 2003, 113). Whereas in academia, the idea of Indian origins was always historically situated, in the political context, a first attempt was made to forge an active connection with contemporary India. The Indian government became involved in the Romani movement by providing financial aid for the World Romani Congress in 1971 (*ibid.*, 112).⁹ Due to the political lobbying of the Indian government in a joint effort with the IRU, cultural and linguistic affinity amongst the Roma on the basis of their Indian roots was recognized by the Commission on Human Rights of the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1979 (Matras 2013, 218). India’s leading position in Roma politics was mainly visible in the 1970s (Marushiakova and Popov 2004, 78-80), but has diminished in recent years. Because the current focus is on the acceptance of the Roma as an ethnic minority in European countries rather than on connections with India or its diaspora (Matras 2013, 219), India has accepted its status as a symbolic homeland (Fosztó 2003, 120).

However, India’s role in Roma politics in the 1970s and 1980s and the Indian connection as the key political argument for unity are worth stressing in the context of the early occurrence of documentary films. *Romany Trail*, for example, was strongly grounded in the political frame sketched above. In its final shots, the documentary shows the third World Romani Congress in Gottingen held in 1981, framed within its

⁹ According to the IRU website, the diplomat Veerenda Rishi, who attended the Congress, thought of adding the Indian wheel to the IRU flag, symbolizing the Indian origins of the Roma.

elaboration on Roma answers to Nazi persecutions during the Second World War. Moreover, Grattan Puxon, the “general secretary of the World Romany Congress” (as the final credits also inform us) and well-known Romani activist, was the film’s advisor. Having written scholarly books on Gypsies, he supported political and documentary discourses with academic arguments.¹⁰ Still, most importantly, the political framework initiated a link with contemporary India, which was further developed by the films. Interestingly, the link with music and dance had already been established at the Congress as well. The voice-over in *Romany Trail* explains a scene that shows the performance of Indian dancers¹¹ at the Congress:

So Indian dancers displayed to all the delegates of the World Romani Congress, the origins of their music and dance. Dancing together, the delegates of some ten million Gypsies around the world symbolize the newly found unity of the Romani people after a thousand years of wandering.

Shaping the Indian Gypsy artist: rapprochement between the world music industry and Rajasthani folklore

A second context crucial to the emergence of Indian Gypsies in documentaries was the interplay between transnational demands, Rajasthani folklorist-managers and artist communities in the domain of staged performances. After the rise of a world music industry during the 1980s, mainly Western-European and North-American cultural producers began to search for peripatetic artist communities in India, inspired by the popular and political ideas of transnational Gypsy-hood and Indian Gypsy roots (Girgis 2007; Silverman 2012). Due to a concurrence of changing circumstances since the 1960s, this quest came at precisely the right time for the Rajasthani performance scene. The gradual collapse of customary patronage systems forced a reorientation among hereditary artists. At the same time, the directors of Rajasthan’s tourism policies had decided to focus explicitly on the region’s cultural charm and had taken the first steps in profiling the area as royal Indian heritage. In this context, Rajasthan’s first folklorists-managers began to promote local performing arts and predominantly highlighted the preservation of folk traditions by reorienting them from patronage services to staged entertainment for broader audiences.

¹⁰ Another scholar and active political figure, Ian Hancock, similarly appears in the credits of *Song of the Dunes* and *When the Road Bends....* The latter was also supported by the political project, “Decade of Roma Inclusion” (2005-2015).

¹¹ These were male Bhaṅgrā dancers from Panjab.

The folklorist-managers' preoccupation with Rajasthani performances gained momentum after 1985, when the Indian Ministry of Culture decided to actively promote and support folk arts. Within this framework, the now famous Rajasthani dancer Gulabi Sapera became a linchpin in the development of the Rajasthani Gypsy label. After Tripti Pandey discovered Gulabi's dance talent, this young member of the Kālbeliyā community participated in the 1986 *Festival of India* tour in the USA. Because of Gulabi's distinctive, energetic dance style, she regularly appeared in the American media under the nickname "Gypsy," referring to her nomadic lifestyle. As a result of the response of folklorist-managers to the growing demand for Gulabi's 'Gypsy' dancing, several Kālbeliyās subsequently shifted their profession to dance. Although other Rajasthani artists had toured internationally before Gulabi,¹² she marked the first use of the 'Gypsy' designation, which increased rapidly; by the end of the 1980s, the first 'Gypsies of Rajasthan' company was established by musician and artistic director Hameed Khan Kawa under the name *Gitans du Rajasthan*. He and the French musician Thierry Robin released the CD *Gitans* in 1993. Two years later, with an eye on a broader international market, this mixed troupe of Rajasthani artists was transformed into *Musāfir* ("traveler"), under *The Gypsies of Rajasthan* label, by Hameed and his French wife and manager Marie-Noëlle Jaffré.¹³ *Musafir* set the trend for similar Gypsy collaboration projects, resulting in the foundation of additional troupes from Rajasthan, such as *Dhoad Gypsies from Rajasthan*, *Nomads of Rajasthan*, *Rhythms of Rajasthan*, *Banjara - The Gypsies of Rajasthan* and *Rajasthani Gypsy Caravan*.

At the outset, folklorist-managers had promoted mainly the community-based folk music of Rajasthan, but as demands for commercial Gypsy music increased outside of India, they reoriented toward international programs and initiated the cross-community collaborations listed above. This led to the creation of a Rajasthani Gypsy fusion practice, whereby the communities' artistic profiles were Gypsified, loosely based on the Indian connection theory. The historical provenance as well as contemporary significance of Gypsy identity in Rajasthan, thus culminates in the creation and commercialization of the Rajasthani Gypsy as a distinctive dance and music style. These newly created troupes began travelling predominantly outside India, generally using the brand 'Gypsies from Rajasthan' for self-reference. During these transnational performances, they relate to the idea of a unified Gypsy identity, conscious as they are of the Gypsy label's popularity. For instance, their principal musicians casually mention on stage the idea of the Indian connection. Their perspective can be illustrated by the

¹² Komal Kothari has toured in Europe and the USA with groups of Laṅgā and Māṅgaṇiyār musicians since the 1970s under the label of Rasthani folk.

¹³ Information derived from an interview with Hameed Khan, April 2012.

following comment made by Rahis Bharti during a show of the *Dhoad Gypsies of Rajasthan*, where he explained, “We, Gypsies, travel the world to show our art, we never stay on one place, before we travelled by camel, today we took the TGV, but we are still nomads,”¹⁴ or in film *The Rajasthani Gypsy Caravan*, where Immamdin Khan Manganiyar gives his perspective on the Indian migrations:

We toured by van, we never went by flight, so it was a good caravan, Gypsy caravan, because all Gypsies come from India because we have many camel karma, root coming Jaisalmer from the town – Jaisalmer was on silk road...

Not surprisingly, these artists who have adopted the Gypsy identity are exactly the communities featured prominently in documentaries on Indian Gypsies.

Although *Romany Trail* was produced before the creation of staged Gypsy fusion projects (with *Gitans du Rajasthan* as a pioneer), it was still inspired by the early development of the world music label and its early steps into collaboration with Rajasthani folklorists and cultural brokers. Jeremy Marre made the film as part of an award-winning series of world music documentaries,¹⁵ and folklorist Komal Kothari was his Rajasthani advisor.¹⁶ The next film featuring Rajasthani Gypsies, *Latcho Drom*, further solidified the link between the world music scene and Rajasthani Gypsy performers. The French musical advisor for the film was Alain Weber, a central figure of the world music industry. He likewise worked with Komal Kothari as his local advisor to select Rajasthani musicians and dancers for the documentary (Neuman 2011, 134). These pioneering films, as Silverman (2012, 243-244) showed in a case study on *Latcho Drom*, “provided both the performers and the structural model for early Gypsy festivals” and “helped create the viability of the marketing category ‘Gypsy music’.” Girgis (2007) describes how these performers’ carriers were subsequently boosted. Indeed, Rajasthani artists started to use the Gypsy image in their self-promotion.¹⁷

¹⁴ This transcript is derived from my recordings of their performance in Brussels, February 15, 2012.

¹⁵ See, www.harcourtfilms.com/beats.html.

¹⁶ Personal communication with Jeremy Marre, December 18, 2015. Komal Kothari (1929-2004) was a pioneering researcher who also adopted the role of international manager for the artist-communities within which he worked. Many other folklorist-managers have followed in his footsteps, including his students or employees, such as Kuldeep Kothari (his son who succeeded him as director of the Rupayan Sansthan), Vinod Joshi (community director of the Virasat Foundation, according to its website, the organization aims at “heritage-based social and economic development”), or Nitin Hrsh (founder of the collaborative organization for artists of Rajasthan, Rhythms of Rajasthan).

¹⁷ For instance, Kālbeliyā dancer Suva Devi became the promotional face of *Latcho Drom*, and still benefits from this fame, as the 2015 film *The Rajasthani Gypsy Caravan* proves.

Local marketing of the Rajasthani Gypsy identity

Whereas the political climate surrounding Gypsy activist intellectuals of the 1970s and the partnership between world music and Rajasthani music platforms in the 1980s can account for the Indian Gypsy in *Romany Trail* and *Latcho Drom*, respectively, it does not explain why this representation has persisted in subsequent documentaries. Here, we have to turn to Rajasthan during the last two decades: ever since the inception of Rajasthani Gypsy fusion, the international popularity of its artist communities has risen. As a result, the Rajasthani music and dance groups and, more importantly, their managers, have taken advantage of this international marketing opportunity by fully developing the Gypsy profile, although the Gypsy label could initially be considered a European product. The idea of being ‘Gypsy’ soon pervaded the artistic identity of the Rajasthani performers, and appears in the discourse of their international music impresarios (who play a critical role in the management of the artist communities’ international performances and, consequently, in their representation), their local folklorist-managers as well their personal expressions on stage.

Interestingly, the topics mentioned so far are only part of the story. My fieldwork amongst Kālbeliyās revealed that the Rajasthani groups use the Gypsy concept for self-reference only in non-Indian circumstances, for instance, on international stages, or when they come into close contact with (predominantly European and American) tourists in India.¹⁸ Thus, ‘Gypsy’ has become a sort of contact term. In India, the term ‘Rajasthani folk’ is used instead. In contrast with the commercial success of the Gypsy concept internationally, on Indian stages, the marketability of a Gypsy identity is minimal. The global stage functioned as an initial stimulus for the creation of the ‘Gypsies of Rajasthan,’ who later gained popularity in India and were consequently relabeled according to national standards and transformed into ‘Rajasthani folk ensembles.’ Folklorist-managers and Rajasthani artists together have begun to apply audience segmentation, making distinctions between non-Indian audiences and Indian audiences, thus adopting a two-sided stance in their (self-)portrayals. Overall, the Rajasthani response confirms the transnational imaginary of the Indian Gypsy. Indian folklorist-managers and performers from Rajasthan have transformed exotic representations into profitable cultural projects, in collaboration with world music impresarios. In line with the twofold representations sketched above, the Gypsy profile of the Rajasthani performers also appears in the documentaries in our analysis, all

¹⁸ For instance, in films like *Jaisalmer Ayo!*, the use of the English word “Gypsy” by Kālbeliyās living in Pushkar has been captured on screen.

produced by non-Indians. Interestingly, documentaries about Rajasthani artists made in India for the domestic market, do not mention the ‘Gypsy’ profile, but indeed stick to the ‘folk’ label.¹⁹

Representing the Indian connection: documentary films on the origins of the Gypsies

So far, I have explained how political and cultural contexts paved the way for the representation of certain Rajasthani communities (especially artists) as Indian Gypsies in a series of documentaries. Let us now explore these representations, as resulted from our content analysis. How do the documentaries account for the Indian connection and how do they present the Indian Gypsies on screen? To substantiate the claim of an Indian background of the Roma, the films put forward a range of arguments. First, they look for explanations of the historical Gypsy exodus from India. Although some films provide no further clarification (e.g., *When the Road Bends...*), the majority attributes these migrations to climatological changes²⁰ or cites a variety of socio-historical suggestions from scholars. These are (now revised) academic hypotheses, which try to shed light on the specific ethnic origin of the Gypsies’ ancestors, and to explain the geographical as well as temporal details of and reasons behind their collective migration. For example, *Romany Trail* refers to the exportation of musicians from Rajasthan into Persia:

From the Maharajas’ palaces, the Gypsy entertainers traveled north. The Persian poet, Furdusi, described how almost 1000 years ago, a prince of the Sassanid dynasty brought Gypsy musicians from India to entertain him in the Persian courts.

Here, the film echoes a theory of John Harriott (1830), a British colonel on post in India, who formulated one of the first socio-political hypotheses on why Indian Gypsies may have begun their migration. Harriott’s source of inspiration was an eleventh-century

¹⁹ These films are *Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan* (2010) and *Kālbeliyā: Ek Khānābadosh Vīyasat* (2014).

²⁰ In *Gitans du Rajasthan: Aux Sources Tziganes*, for example, Hameed Khan, tabla player and artistic director of the internationally known group Musafir, explains that “the Gypsies began to travel the world, starting from Rajasthan, Jodhpur and its surroundings. They had problems because of water scarcity” (my translation from French).

book, “Šāhnāmeḥ,” written by the Persian poet Firdusi. Parts of this famous work relate the story of Shah Bahram Gur (fifth century), who married the daughter of the Indian king Shankal and received large numbers of Indian musicians as a wedding gift. Harriott’s conviction that these Indian musicians were the first Gypsy migrants was based on their similar occupations (both being musicians) and therefore rather speculative. Indeed, linguists now generally agree that westward migrations probably began centuries later (Hancock 2002, 4).²¹

Another revised academic hypothesis, the *Rājput* theory, has remained popular, as the voice-over in *Jaisalmer Ayo!* shows:

It is believed that ancestors of the nomads of Northwest India left the area in the eleventh century, either as followers of defeated armies or driven from the region by wars, droughts and famines generating waves of migration out of India [my emphasis].

De Goeje (1903) and Kochanowski (1968) proposed this explanation for a linear migration from India to Europe and referred to a twelfth-century historical event in which Prithviraj Chauhan convened a confederation of *Rājput* clans to fight off the attacks of king Muhammad Ghuri and his Muslim invaders.²² After the defeat of the *Rājput* armies, several warriors were imprisoned and transported to Persia along with their workers and families, becoming the Gypsies’ forefathers. Recent scholars refute this hypothesis because it entails chronological anomalies (e.g., Fraser 1995; Matras 2002).

In summary, to support the narrative voyage from Rajasthan to Europe, the films employ socio-historical hypotheses based on academic writings dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which have been revised over the last few decades. Instead, based on their analysis of the Romani language, scholars of contemporary linguistics (Hancock 2010; Matras 2002) argue that migrations from South Asia to Europe were dynamic and multiple. They state that several communities left India in different waves, likely coming from a plurality of regions (i.e., not only Rajasthan) and speaking a variety of languages. Later, these communities would have

²¹ Nevertheless, references to this story recurrently appear in a handful of scholarly works (Kenrick and Puxon, 2009; Tcherenkov and Laederich, 2004). Although Puxon (advisor for *Romany Trail*) and his co-author Kenrick noted in the 1970s that “[n]o conclusive proof has been produced for any hypothesis,” he follows Harriot’s Gypsy lore theory on Firdusi as a proof of Gypsy migration in his writings: “North India formed the cradle of the Gypsy nation [...] The Persian poet Ferdowsī and the Arab writer Hamza, both writing in the tenth century, place their arrival some five centuries earlier” (Kenrick and Puxon 1972, 13-14).

²² Muḥammad Ghūrīor (Ghazna) lived from 1173 to 1203 (He was one of the most powerful rulers of the Ghūrīd dynasty in Khurasan, Northwest India).

(re)connected outside India, indicating a more dispersed and complex migration history. At the same time, the overall picture remains quite vague, especially because linguistic research has not been able to date these waves of migration.²³ Nevertheless, the earlier migration theories²⁴ still nurture documentaries, because they lend themselves to an appealing and easy-to-understand narrative setup. At the same time, we should not overestimate the role of academic writings in the filmmaking process. As Irwin (2004, 232) rightly notes in his study about Oriental representations in *A Thousand and One Nights* films, “the film-makers worked with a set of clichés, stereotypes and audience expectations” rather than with academic theories.

A second argument presented in the documentaries to confirm the Indian connection and the link with Rajasthan relates to linguistic and cultural parallels between Indian and European Gypsies. For instance, in *Romany Trail*, the viewer is informed that “the Romany language is based in the Hindi dialects of North India; it’s still spoken by Gypsies everywhere,” whereas the voice-over in *Of Sands and Stars* proclaims: “It is generally assumed that Gypsies are the descendants of Manganiyars from Rajasthan and the Sindh. Cultural and linguistic indications seem to bear this premise out.” Later on, the voice-over more specifically explains: “The *khartal*²⁵ are made of two wooden blocks that the musician clacks together like castanets. These are the probable ancestors of the castanets, which links the Manganiyars to the Gypsies and the Andalusian flamenco.” These arguments can be found in writings of “activist intellectuals” (Matras 2013, 220)

²³ Fraser (1995, 18) attributes this gap to the limited knowledge of Middle Indic languages (Prakrit and Apabhramsha) with which to compare Romani.

²⁴ Initial scattered linguistic research on Romani language dates back to the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and was further established in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Halfway through the nineteenth century, Pott, often considered the founder of modern Romani linguistics, asked for attention on “a layer of pre-European loan words from Armenian and Persian, which he suggested were acquired during a gradual migration from India to Europe” (Matras 2005, 61). Afterwards Sampson (1923) and Turner (1926) further strengthened this migration idea based on the relationship between Romani, Domari (of the Dom people in Persia/the Middle East) and the Lomari/Lomavren language (of the Lom community in Armenia). Sampson provided arguments for a singular migration of the ancestors of Romani speakers from Northwest India (Dardic speakers) through Persia and Armenia into Europe. Turner claimed that more than one migration of one single community (the “Jāts”, whose profile was unclear) took place from Northwest India (Hindi-speakers) to Persia, and that after reassembling in Persia, the ancestors of the Roma travelled on to Armenia and Europe (Fraser 1995, 20).

²⁵ Regarding this particular case, the *kartāl* instrument appears to be first used in the 1970s, and might therefore be considered a recent phenomenon. Due to its popularity, it has spread rapidly among the Māṅgaṇiyārs and in other communities. Sadiq Khan Manganiyar is considered the first *kartāl* player, as stated by Ghazi Khan Barna during an interview (February 2013), and in Girgis (2007, 51), and likewise stated by Zakhir Khan in the documentary film, *Gypsy Voyages* (2015).

attempting to specify which Indian language is most similar to the Romani language²⁶ and to reveal musical parallels between the Roma and musicians from Rajasthan (Hancock 2002, 71-72). However, these suggestions remain speculative (for a comment, see also Silverman 2012, 23-49).

All these arguments are put forward by means of interviews as well as voice-overs providing a cohesive storyline, both supported by the images visualizing the narrative. Especially the interviews with knowledgeable insiders, lending voice to international tour managers, Indian folklorist-managers or the artist communities strengthen the argument. These accounts are used to confirm the links between Indian and European Gypsies (see, for instance, *Jaisalmer Ayo!* or *Cobra Gypsies*) and appear as the “insider perspective,” suggesting a “shared authorship” (Ayisi and Brylla 2013, 133) between the filmmaker and participants. This gives the latter agency in the filmmaking process, creating a sense of increased realism.

For example, Roberto Nieddu, manager and artistic director of the annual Jodhpur Flamenco & Gypsy Festival, explains the Indian connection through music:

The kind of connection between Flamenco and the Gypsies [of Rajasthan] was incredible. Not only on the level of music but also on the level of personal ..., you know, they felt like brothers, they felt like they were coming from the same tribe (in *Gypsy Voyages*).

Regarding Indian folklorist-managers, Aditya Bhasin, for example, acts as a cultural broker between Roma guitar player Harri Stojka and Rajasthani Māṅgaṇiyār artists Kutle Khan and Gafur Khan, as shown in *Gypsy Spirit*. Recognizing Indian roots among European Gypsies, Bhasin describes a fellow (Roma) musician in the film as follows: “It’s like he has discovered his Indian roots before even meeting any Indian or going to India. He already has the roots, the... you know... the Gypsy roots.”

When the artists themselves are interviewed in the documentaries, their testimonies or self-representations are likewise dominated by the ‘Gypsy’ discourse. An interview with Lumnath Kalbeliya in *Gitans du Rajasthan* illustrates this point:

We live out of [the] village, because our caste is a traveler family. [...] Eight hundred or nine hundred years before... you know, [...], one country to another

²⁶ Romani, considered as the core language of the Gypsies and attested since the early sixteenth century, is generally used as a collective name for its various dialects (Matras 2002, 1). Twentieth-century scholars pointed either to a close link between Romani and Northwestern or Dardic (i.e. Kashmiri) languages or to the Central Group, which would later become Hindi, Rajasthani, and so on (Fraser 1995, 20-21).

country they go because they are afraid. And after they go by foot from Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Turkey, Hungary to Spain. [...] And European Gypsies, Romania, they are playing music and dancing. So I feel... we have the feeling... because they are our blood people, we're very happy to meet them.

Nevertheless, artists' knowledge about the theoretical framework behind the idea of an Indian Gypsy ancestry is often restricted to a basic hypothesis: their ancestors traveled to Europe long ago to play music and dance for people whom Rajasthani artists call "foreigners" (*aṅgrez*), as they still do today. Often folklorist-managers supply the artists with scripts in which such statements are prescribed. In this case, Hameed Khan (artistic director of *Musafir*) apparently prepared Lumnath's declaration before filming.

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As mentioned previously, the documentary discourses amplify the Indian connection by portraying contemporary artist communities in Rajasthan as the living legacies of the proto-Gypsy. The voice-over in *Jaisalmer Ayo!* affirms: "a few remaining nomads arrive to us as a testimony of a free, medieval way of life that has survived the passage of time." In the context of Gypsy music, Silverman (2000, 362) has argued that "Rajasthani music in 1990 isn't the same as Rajasthani music in 1100." She continues,

[N]o one has been able to pinpoint the modern-day descendants of Roma. Many scholars [...] now believe that Roma as an ethnic group coalesced outside of India. So labelling various contemporary service nomads of Rajasthan "Gypsies" is a big stretch.

According to the documentaries, these Rajasthani artist groups actually differ very little from the Gypsies who were the forefathers of the European Roma, as "these nomadic people have hardly changed over centuries" (voice-over in *Romany Trail*). Rajasthani artists are stereotypically characterized as peripatetic, primitive, performing craftsmen threatened with extinction by modernity and typically living in desolate, arid areas of Rajasthan. "Isolated within the haven of the desert, nomadic communities have lived throughout the region for millennia," the voice-over in *Jaisalmer Ayo!* informs us, while footage of the Thar desert is shown. It is sometimes suggested that "the rigorous Hindu caste system" lies at the basis of these unchanging, stagnated communities because "with a deep sense of tradition originating in a remote past, the caste defines the occupation, beliefs and behaviour of everyone" (voice-over in *Jaisalmer Ayo!*) and "their occupation and status as musicians are determined by their birth" (voice-over in *Song of the Dunes*). This depiction of Indian society reminds us of Orientalist and colonial

²⁷ Interview with Lumnath conducted on June 10, 2013.

discourses, some of which represented India as unchanging and static in contrast to the developing and modern “West” (for a critique of Orientalism in connection to India, see Dirks 2001; Inden 1986). Scholars such as Lee (2000) and Saul (2007) have also demonstrated the parallels between nineteenth-century studies on Gypsies and Orientalism, showing how the “otherness” of Roma became more apparent as soon as their “exotic Oriental origin in India” came into focus (Lee 2000, 140).

In some documentaries, references to modernity are carefully avoided, although many Rajasthani artists, such as the Kālbeliyās, Laṅgās and Māṅgaṇiyārs, currently have international careers and travel from festivals in Europe to the United States, Japan, China, the Middle East and back to India. Indeed, the image of their international travels and performances does not fit the image of tradition and authenticity that these films convey. Other films (e.g. *Gypsy Caravan*, *Gypsy Spirit*, and *The Rajasthani Gypsy Caravan*), however, do show Rajasthani artists as internationally traveling artists. However, in their portrayals of India, the same proto-Gypsy representations often pop up. Similarly, recent developments in India are presented as a threat because the “last generations of nomads” are “struggling to survive the sweeping changes of the modern world” (voice-over in *Jaisalmer Ayo!*). Artistic talents are endangered and must be rescued as “the rush toward modernity in India threatens to bury this music” (voice-over in *The Lost Music of Rajasthan*). Indeed, portraits of communities that are, as Okely (1983, 28) described the Roma, “helpless in the face of industrialization, modern technology and urban advance” prevail in documentary representations on Rajasthani artists as well. As we have argued, the Indian Gypsy concept developed in a transnational context, but paradoxically, the documentaries glorify its locality and authenticity and criticize its involvement with modernity and the global.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the representation of Rajasthani ‘nomads’ (usually performers) as Indian Gypsies as well as the Indian connection nourishing this image, in a series of documentary films. Grounded on the notion that the European Gypsies were of Indian origin, these documentaries portray a selective group of Rajasthani artists as descendants of Roma ancestors in India. Thus, they underscore the idea of a united Gypsy identity around the world and emphasize the parallels between ‘Gypsy’ and Indian nomadic performance culture. The portrayal these films construct, can be traced back to an interesting interplay of multiple discourses, which constituted their contexts

of production over time. These included a political discourse (mainly by activist intellectuals) and two interrelated commercial discourses, one developed within the world music industry and the other within the Rajasthani performance market (through joint initiatives of international managers, Indian folklorists as well as performers). As an accessible, informative, consumable and popular medium, the documentary films channel these discourses to the broader public by means of visual expression. Our content analysis revealed that the films themselves verify the Indian connection by two main arguments. On one hand, they explain the historical Gypsy exodus from India either through climatological changes or through socio-historical narratives they inherited from now revised academic hypotheses. On the other hand, they confirm the problematic links forged between contemporary Rajasthani communities and the Roma, by drawing parallels in nomadism and occupation (craftsmanship and artistry) and, to a lesser extent, the evolution of Indo-European languages. Further building upon these arguments, an Indian Gypsy identity emerges, often characterised as ‘pre-modern’ and static. These coloured representations, reflecting both the contexts of production and the “subjective interpretation” of the documentary makers, although an unintentional cultural imperialism of sorts, are troubling if we consider the powerful ‘realism’ of documentaries. Although the connection between contemporary Rajasthani performers and the Roma has no ground scientifically speaking, its manifestation in the popular discourse through documentaries strikes a chord with the elasticity of the Gypsy term and the stereotypes it entails more generally. The search for more detailed knowledge about the Gypsy ancestry will and should continue as well as the fascination with Rajasthani culture, and it would make a refreshing and interesting documentary if it would disconnect the two and critically assess the image of the ‘Indian Gypsy’ that has dominated representations so far.

Chapter 7

Intangible Inventions

Kālbeliyā dance from its creation to UNESCO recognition



Figure 32 Indu, Nageena and Khatu performing in Jodhpur, February 2013



In recent decades, Kālbeliyā dance has swept the transnational market as one of the most popular emblems of Indian dances. In 2010, during the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Kenya, UNESCO declared the “Kalbelia [Kālbeliyā] folk songs and dances of Rajasthan” an intangible cultural heritage.¹ This is perhaps surprising, considering that the practice of Kālbeliyā dance seems to be a recent phenomenon that began in the 1980s. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, Kālbeliyā dance does not really descend from a lineage of ancient customs. Nevertheless, since the 2000s, Kālbeliyā dance began to be discursively linked to an old dance form of the snake charmers (see, for example, Jodh 2011 or Bhanavat 2004). The narrative of female dancers embodying snakes has subsequently been spread as a nationalist legitimization strategy: accompanying male Kālbeliyā musicians, women began to replace the function of dancing snakes after the capture of these animals became prohibited in India in 1972. Although in practice this change was contrived, the link with snake charming authorized Kālbeliyā dancers to label the practice as a form of folk dance because it was ostensibly part of ‘ancient,’ and ‘ritual’ practices. Commercial opportunities, academic research and heritage policy in Rajasthan, mainly driven by tourism,² induced national impresarios to include Kālbeliyā dance in their programs. These local managers assisted the dance’s transformation from recent invention to intangible heritage.³

In this chapter, I explore the shift in perceptions of Kālbeliyā performers, from their former identification as contemporary entertainers to their status as folk artists who represent Indian heritage as part of nationalist cultural commercialism and the global tourism industry. As Scher (2010, 200) notes, intangible heritage status, which now includes Kālbeliyā dance, is currently presented as an “emblem of national identity in tourism.” The conditions for recognition as an intangible cultural heritage, as formulated by UNESCO in the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICHC)” on 17 October 2003, will be analyzed and compared with the IGNCA (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts) criteria. These criteria were used by

¹ See UNESCO website, Kalbelia [Kālbeliyā] section: www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?RL=00340. To read further about the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Nairobi, Kenya (November 15 - 18, 2010), see <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/5com>.

² Rajasthan is currently considered an important representative of the “real” and “authentic” India, or the heritage state of India (in Henderson and Weisgrau 2007, xxv).

³ The content of this chapter was published separately as an article in *ARCHIV ORIENTÁLNI* 83 (2015), p. 71-93.

the Indian government to prepare a nomination file for UNESCO when it applied for the recognition of Kālbeliyā folk songs and dances as an intangible cultural heritage. I will highlight the contradistinctions and problematic issues raised by the specific case of the Kālbeliyās in relation to these two sets of criteria. Regarding the nomination process, I will discuss the importance of certain concealed economic and political strategies that motivated the application.

What constitutes an Intangible Cultural Heritage?

The criteria and the corresponding Kālbeliyā adaptations

UNESCO's 2003 Convention (ICHC) is designed to safeguard living, traditional cultural heritage, primarily by raising awareness and highlighting its importance. The 2005 Council of Europe Faro Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society defines cultural heritage as follows:

Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions.⁴

Many scholars (see, for example, Askew 2010, Kragh 2012, Leimgruber 2010, Scher 2010, Smith, Laurajane and Akagawa 2009, Smith, Messenger and Soderland 2010), however, have criticized the UNESCO cultural heritage policy, highlighting its problematic features. In this chapter, I will join this critical scholarly discourse not merely by contributing new theoretical perspectives but by offering insight into pre-existing ideas through a specific case study of Kālbeliyā dance traditions.

Scholarly perspectives on UNESCO's cultural heritage criteria

According to Askew (2010, 20) and Leimgruber (2010, 164), UNESCO deems the application of intangible heritage policy to be necessary to safeguard⁵ cultural diversity from the destructive effects of cultural globalization. Such measures counter the

⁴ 'Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society', Section I, Article 2 (a), (2005) [conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/html/199.htm].

⁵ UNESCO prefers the term "safeguarding" to "protection" (in Blake 2009, 51).

homogenizing and impoverishing culture industries associated with capitalism. UNESCO's "black-and-white" vision underscores the institution's role as the guardian of diversity in culture (the force for "good") against the all-absorbing and threatening processes of globalization (the force for "bad"). Therefore, UNESCO attempts to stimulate "global emancipatory politics" or "globalization from below," in which "world culture" ("a set of shared normative values") is enriched by multiculturalism (Askew 2010, 25). UNESCO opposes the disappearance and destruction of traditions (especially small-scale, indigenous practices) that have been transmitted from generation to generation and impart a certain identity that is specific to one group or community. Askew (2010, 19) further argues that UNESCO not only displays normative values but also commercializes these values, linking preservation and restoration to representations of history, culture and nature. Rather than actively promoting these heritage values, UNESCO serves mostly as an administrative apparatus whose primary focus is "protocols, declarations of universal principles and, most crucially, the compilation of inventories" (ibid., 20). Cultural heritage policy interweaves administrative pressure from a global bureaucratic apparatus (the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO), economic advantages for a global tourist industry, and the political stakes of national governments (Askew 2010, 10; Scher 2010).

The recent creation (or invented tradition) of Kālbeliyā dancing appears to fail to meet UNESCO's definition of intangible cultural heritage. The Kālbeliyā case demonstrates the deficiencies of the scientific international verification process associated with the UNESCO policy (its main principles) and its practical application with respect to nomination proposals. It also appears that there has been no constructive follow-up resulting from UNESCO recognition, particularly in relation to funding and monitoring by UNESCO's umbrella organizational council (the *General Assembly*, see p. 182-183). Finally, the Kālbeliyā community, although it was portrayed as having been the driving force behind the request for nomination, appears to be largely unaware of the recognition it has been awarded, an issue that will be explored below.

UNESCO as the defender of cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is given parallel prominence in the political agendas of both UNESCO and Indian national(ist) cultural policy. According to Askew (2010, 24), UNESCO presents itself as the advocate of the world's cultures and their distinct identities (diversity), protecting them from the challenge presented by globalization. Furthermore, UNESCO also promotes the safeguarding of heritage by recognizing "universal cultural rights" (unity). The UNESCO convention indicates that safeguarding intangible heritage is of

vital importance “as a mainspring of cultural diversity and guarantee of sustainable development.”⁶

This idea of cultural diversity was also promoted in India after Independence in 1947. The Indian Ministry of Culture established multiple autonomous bodies to administer cultural matters. These autonomous bodies are subdivided into particular disciplines (creative arts, music, dance, theatre, literature, etc.). In the early 1950s, the *Akademis* were founded: the National Academy of Art (the *Lalit Kala Akademi*), the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama (the *Sangeet Natak Akademi*), and the National Academy of Letters (*Sahitya Akademi*). These *Akademis* primarily provide institutional support for classical art forms. To provide additional support, the *Zonal Cultural Centres* were established in the 1980s. These seven centers are spread throughout India, deliberately located outside of the capital cities.⁷ Because these centers “work for national unity through cultural integration,”⁸ they are compelled to be more accessible to the common man to fulfill their mission of protecting and supporting folk and tribal art forms.

Consequently, the West Zone Cultural Centre (WZCC), which is responsible for folk and tribal arts in the area of Rajasthan,⁹ declares in language similar to UNESCO’s objectives:

In India—a country with rich and diverse cultural heritage, the need for openness and understanding amongst people and a healthy response and respect for different traditions becomes imperative.¹⁰

Kālbeliyā dance represents one of the main and most attractive examples of cultural diversity to national and international audiences. In addition to the commercial potential of this dance form, the community and its artists are frequently portrayed as indigenous victims by local cultural institutions. This has reinforced the sympathy expressed toward them by international organizations, including UNESCO. The

⁶ “The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” [www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006].

⁷ The South Culture Zone in Thanjavur (Tamil Nadu); the South Central Culture Zone in Nagpur (Maharashtra); the North Culture Zone in Patiala (Punjab); the North Central Culture Zone in Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh); the East Culture Zone in Kolkata (West Bengal); the North East Culture Zone in Dimapur (Nagaland); and the West Culture Zone in Udaipur (Rajasthan).

⁸ “West Zone Cultural Centre”, [www.wzccindia.com/index.php?q=Page&slug=about-zcc].

⁹ The WZCC serves the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and the Union Territories of Daman, Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli.

¹⁰ West Zone Cultural Centre [www.wzccindia.com/index.php?q=Page&slug=about-zcc].

Kālbeliyā nomination file calls for the introduction of policy measures to counteract the “processes of globalization and social transformation” (ICHC 2003, 1).

The correlation between intangible and natural heritage: An asset in the nomination process

The correlation between natural heritage and intangible heritage is illuminated in the Kālbeliyā nomination file. The traditional craft of manufacturing instruments, for example, including the manufacture of the *ḵhañjarī* (or *ḍaphlī*, a small frame drum) or the *puṅgi* (a wind instrument), is associated with the actual playing of traditional Kālbeliyā music. According to the nomination file (2010, 3), the instruments were initially made as non-violent tools for catching snakes in the house without killing them, and this is considered a sort of ritual act and social practice.¹¹ Furthermore, the nomination file (ibid.) adds that the Kālbeliyās also passed on mythological stories while they were catching the snakes (oral traditions and expressions).¹² The focus on snake charming practices is quite explicit throughout the nomination file, and the contrived link between Kālbeliyā daily life, dance, music and ritual practices was used as the main tool of legitimation, first to promote the acceptance of Kālbeliyā dance as a folk dance in the late 1990s, and then as a means of putting this same dance on the UNESCO world map.

UNESCO and its stand against the disappearance and destruction of Intangible Cultural Heritage

These processes of globalization and social transformation are associated with the next imperative in UNESCO’s definition of intangible heritage. The UNESCO Convention (2003, 1) opposes the “disappearance and destruction” of intangible cultural heritage. The Kalbeliya documentary film on the UNESCO website ends with this call for the preservation of the dance form from its potential disappearance:

¹¹ In particular, the cobra is mentioned in the nomination file (p. 2) and in the UNESCO documentary as a “symbol” of the community.

¹² Oral traditions and expressions are considered one of the sub-disciplines of intangible heritage (ICHC 2003, 2). Additionally, the most specific link with natural heritage in the nomination file is the extensive ‘experience and wisdom of generations’ discussion, which focuses on knowledge of local fauna and flora, which are used as alternative herbal medicine and as an additional source of income (nomination file 2010, 4).

Efforts are being made to take their [the Kālbeliyā] tradition from its imminent twilight to [a] new global dawn.¹³

Clearly, this video reflects the need to safeguard Kālbeliyā traditions. However, what is actually meant by the term Kālbeliyā “tradition”? As the title of the nomination file—*Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances*—suggests, the music and dance forms of this community are in danger of extinction. The documentary film places an equal focus, however, on the unique attire and make-up associated with this community and on its peripatetic lifestyle and the Kālbeliyās’ knowledge of traditional medicine and nature, as represented by snake charming. It therefore identifies these as important characteristics of the community, while the nomination file¹⁴ almost exclusively discusses the issue of dance. The focus on dance is based on the UNESCO statement that “safeguarding means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of intangible heritage” (ICHC 2003, 3). The Kālbeliyā nomination file (2010, 5) endorses this idea:

The Kalbeli[y]as have re-invented their dance form very creatively for the continuity and preservation of the tradition, to attract audiences, and to overcome their poverty.

Indeed, forms of heritage need to be constantly re-created to maintain their relevance to society (Skounti 2009, 78). However, the Kālbeliyā dance form is rooted in the early 1980s and thus cannot claim to have been re-invented, as the nomination file suggests. Therefore, although the nomination file consistently places the issue at the center of its argument, it is not actually the dance form itself that is threatened by the absorbing nature of globalization. On the contrary, the Kālbeliyā dance form has received significantly more international attention than local interest. The distinctive dance, which involves the wearing of consciously designed black dresses,¹⁵ has been instrumental in distinguishing the community’s (commercial) identity and has, therefore, received popular acclaim since it first appeared on the international stage at the end of the 1980s. This dance form, portrayed as one new element of the larger Kālbeliyā indigenous tradition, gained even more popularity in the 1990s, mirroring the rise of an enhanced appreciation of the benefits of “domestic tourism” in India (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007, xxx).

¹³ UNESCO Kālbeliyā documentary, *Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances*, [www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/index.php?s=films_details&pg=33&id=1701].

¹⁴ Kālbeliyā nomination file [www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?RL=00340].

¹⁵ Gulabi Sopera states that her first dance costume was inspired by the dress Reena Roy was wearing in the famous 1981 Bollywood song, *Śīśā ho yā dil ho* (interview December 14, 2013).

Although the title of the Kālbeliyā nomination file also includes Kālbeliyā music and its extensive repertoire of songs as an aspect of Kālbeliyā tradition(s), the file makes no mention of the songs (which can also be considered part of the national heritage). In fact, Kālbeliyā songs are also popular; they are sung and adapted by many other musician communities in Rajasthan and are played on various festive occasions. The melodies are also frequently used by Rajasthani pop record labels.¹⁶ Just like the dance, the songs of Kālbeliyās are therefore not really in danger of disappearing. In contrast to the threats posed to the dance form, however, the connection between the songs and Kālbeliyā identity is often forgotten. The songs therefore appear to lack or have lost a Kālbeliyā-specific identity marker. The musical instruments of Kālbeliyās, however, are explained in more detail (nomination file 2010, 1). This is likely because of their required (or at least preferable) association with “natural heritage” (as was mentioned earlier in this chapter as the first imperative and asset of UNESCO’s convention): the traditional manufacture of these instruments entails specific knowledge about “nature,” namely, understanding the natural materials used to craft them and the corresponding manufacturing techniques.

Oral transmission across generations and claims to antiquity

According to the Convention (2003, 2), intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation. This “provide[s] a sense of identity and continuity” (ibid.). The Kālbeliyā nomination file (2010, 7) adds that the Kālbeliyā tradition is “unique” and “age-old.” Kālbeliyā men are represented in the nomination file (ibid.) as snake charmers, carrying snakes in cane baskets through the “traditional” villages while the Kālbeliyā women sing and dance on the street for alms. This traditional method of earning a livelihood is described as an oral tradition transmitted to subsequent generations via participatory observation (ibid.). The Kālbeliyās seem to have re-created their tradition in response to a changing environment and in relation to nature and their own inherited history. The UNESCO documentary depicts the *Maṭkū* and *Lur* dances as the precursors of the current Kālbeliyā dance form, as though to prove the heritability and therefore the antiquity of the dance.¹⁷ The documentary implies that the current Kālbeliyā dance form is a modern adaptation of these two older forms, an attempt to survive in the current postmodern era. The majority of Kālbeliyā dancers (including their parents, i.e., the older generation), however, claim they have never

¹⁶ Examples can be found on the author’s research website, www.southandeastasia.ugent.be/aylajoncheere/songs.

¹⁷ The nomination file (2010, 4) only briefly mentions these dances.

heard of *Maṭkū* and are also unfamiliar with *Luṛ*.¹⁸ Furthermore, the nomination file (2010, 5) states that Kālbeliyā dance and music have survived the post-industrial age and preserve cultural stories from an ancient past. Again, the nomination file (2010, 5) attributes the “survival” of Kālbeliyā culture to

the community’s successful attempt at preserving and revitalizing its cultural heritage and identity through a creative intervention and adaptation to contemporary socio-cultural context.

This constructed antiquity claim is what Skounti (2009, 74) calls “the authentic illusion.” Kālbeliyā dance is portrayed as a traditional art form based on the everyday life practices of the community, when in fact it is a performing art that was consciously designed for external spectators and stage performances and is thus not related to everyday life. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, 58) ascribes this crucial need for authenticity to a “tension between the contemporary and the contemporaneous,” which leads to the “confusion of evanescence with disappearance.” She highlights the resulting paradox: “namely, the possession of heritage as a mark of modernity—that is the condition of possibility for the world heritage enterprise” (ibid.). Finally, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004, 60) writes,

[I]ntangibility and evanescence—the condition of all experience—should not be confused with disappearance. This is a case of misplaced concreteness or literal thinking. Conversations are intangible and evanescent, but that does not make the phenomenon of conversation vulnerable to disappearance.

In the case of the Kālbeliyā dance form, the concepts of evanescence and the disappearance of tradition seem to have been confused. The constant innovation in the Kālbeliyā dance form does not indicate the disappearance of some undiscovered, older traditions (such as *Maṭkū* and *Luṛ*) but, on the contrary, indicates the recentness of the genre, because of which the dancers are not (yet) bound by institutionalized rules. The contemporary, “lawless” nature of what we currently refer to as Kālbeliyā dance is what has actually permitted the dance to develop so rapidly from a simple mixture of local Rajasthani dances into a more complex, distinctive dance genre.

¹⁸ As observed during focus group interviews with Kālbeliyā dancers (in fieldwork 2012, 2013 and 2014).

Another authentic illusion: Centrality of the community

The community and its involvement in its own “identification,” “inventorying” and “safeguarding” is especially emphasized in the 2003 Convention. The community is portrayed as the main representative and “cultural gate keeper” (Blake 2009, 62) of its own heritage. In the case of the Kālbeliyās, two important arguments are made in favor of safeguarding the culture: the need to improve the community’s social status (on local, national and international levels) and the desire to maintain its distinctive identity. This is concisely illustrated in the nomination file (2010, 5):

The Kalbelia song and dance forms are a matter of pride for the community, a marker of their identity. They were on the margins of society, but they persisted with their cultural practices, innovated and carried them out with faith; and now they are recognized artists of a great talent and repute.

For Kālbeliyā women especially, becoming a professional dancer means bearing the stigma of being sexually promiscuous in local society. The low esteem with which the performing women are regarded is scarcely shared by the outside world; it is mostly the opinion of some of the Rajasthanis and especially members of the Kālbeliyā community itself. Gulabi Sopera regularly attested to her ostracism from the Kālbeliyā community because she had become a dancer.¹⁹ On the basis of her testimony (and those of other Kālbeliyā dancers), it becomes clear that a career in dance was not necessarily as customary as was indicated in the nomination file.

A third important reason for the Kālbeliyās to enter the performing business is the potential for financial improvement (nomination file 2010, 4), which is only briefly noted in the nomination. The financial benefits are, however, as important as the social benefits and the attendant community identity for those Kālbeliyās who become dancers.

An important side remark was made in the nomination report (2010, 4):

However, performance opportunities are sporadic and the whole community is not involved in it on a regular basis. Hence, many members of the community work in the field or graze cattle to sustain themselves. Nonetheless the entire community is today known for its performing art tradition.

¹⁹ See Robin and Guillien 2000, as well as my interview with Gulabi Sopera (December 18, 2013) at her home in Jaipur and TV interviews on my website: www.southandeastasia.ugent.be/aylajoncheere/kalbeliyaonscreen.

Because the centrality and the involvement of the entire Kālbeliyā community are clearly and frequently stressed in the nomination file, this claim appears to be problematic. Only a relatively small proportion of Kālbeliyās actually practice the dance and music “traditions” (see footnote 7, p. 29), which contradicts the apparent emancipation of the entire community. Moreover, the Kālbeliyā community is mostly unaware of the international acknowledgment and the implications of UNESCO recognition.²⁰

The Kālbeliyā (dance) tradition from *Pop* to *Heritage*:²¹ **A secretive trail to UNESCO**

From top to bottom: committee and stakeholder ignorance in India

UNESCO comprises a multitude of official bodies with different functions and hierarchal positions that interact on three different levels (local, national and international) (Blake 2009, 47). UNESCO consists of the *General Assembly*, which includes the *State Parties* (nation states) who voluntarily join as members. The General Assembly organizes ordinary sessions every two years, during which candidates for intangible cultural heritage recognition are selected. In addition, the *Committee*²² (select members from different State Parties who are re-elected every four years) provides support and guidance. Furthermore, the Committee promotes and monitors the heritages for which they plan to increase the allocation of resources. The Committee also supervises the heritages, verifies the reports submitted by the State Parties, and briefs the General Assembly on the reports. Finally, the Committee decides which requests to approve, in accordance with the Convention’s criteria.²³ The State Party has the primary role because it initiates the investigation and redaction of applications for UNESCO recognition. Each file must be drafted with the participation of the concerned community (the group level) and significant governmental and non-governmental organizations (the local level).

²⁰ As observed in my fieldwork.

²¹ This title was inspired by Kragh’s short article on heritage (2012).

²² In full: the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

²³ So far, I have not been able to access the UNESCO files that mention the Committee members who examined the Kālbeliyā application and how they did so.

Although the Convention (2003) emphasizes the importance of mutual cooperation between UNESCO's international community and State Parties, Askew (2010, 22) rightly notes the absence of active participation by the international community and the prominence of the State Party:

...that the so-called 'Authorized Heritage Discourse' (for which UNESCO is the principal global level purveyor) is Eurocentric and crypto-imperialist, [and] (sic) is both redundant and a conceptual red herring: it misrecognizes the real locus of power and exploitation in the global heritage game, which is the nation-state and not any dominant global institutional structure or discourse of heritage classification. My main point is that UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage program is as much, and probably more, a creature of its member states and their agendas as it is an instrument of UNESCO's specialists, intellectual apologists and affiliated professional bodies of conservation specialists.

The Kālbeliyā case also demonstrates the national and local political agendas that lie behind India and Rajasthan's cultural policies. Upon my request for information, UNESCO's central international European bureaus referred me to the Indian national institutions.²⁴ During my fieldwork in India, I therefore visited these Indian institutions.²⁵ Although all of the institutions were clearly noted in the UNESCO nomination file, they explicitly declared that they had not been involved in composing the nomination file or in the development of any post-UNESCO policies regarding the Kālbeliyās. They instantly referred me to other institutions, sending me back and forth among them. In summary, both governmental and non-governmental organizations appear to be abashed by their involvement in the Kālbeliyā UNESCO case, and they firmly deny their participation in it.

The community: uninformed or inapprehensible?

The nomination file repeatedly stresses that the request for recognition came from the Kālbeliyā community itself, that the entire community was consulted and that they had a central role in composing the nomination file (2010, 10):

²⁴ E-mail correspondence with UNESCO Belgium and UNESCO Paris (January 26, 2012, and January 7, 2012).

²⁵ I visited UNESCO in New Delhi (March 8, 2012), the Indira Gandhi National Center of the Arts (March 10, 2012), Sangeet Natak Akademi (March, 5 2012; December, 18 2014), West Zone Cultural Center (April 12, 13, and 14, 2012; January 14, 2013), Jawahar Kala Kendra (March 29, 2012), and Rupayan Sansthan (April 10 and 11, 2013; January 8, 9 and 10, 2013).

During the preparation of the nomination for the representative list of UNESCO, there were extensive interactions with a very wide range of Kalbelias across the state of Rajasthan. Contacts were established with Kalbelia groups from Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Jalore and Barmer areas, and their opinions were incorporated in the nomination dossiers. Out of the many individuals contacted, the prominent ones are the following: Gulabo Kalbelia [Gulabi Sapera] from Jaipur, Kalunath and Appanath from Jodhpur, Parasnath Kalbelia from Jalore, Kishanath Kalbelia from Barmer. ... The consent letter attached clearly states the active participation of the community in the nomination process.

On page 10 of the nomination file, it states that the “WZCC team” called for a gathering of the Jodhpuri Kālbeliyā²⁶ *pañcāyat* (a community council of elders) to brief them “about the purpose and process of nomination.” The renowned members of this *pañcāyat* gave their “free, prior and informed consent” to the nomination. In fact, the file includes formal consent letters signed by these prominent Kālbeliyā members. The consent letters were signed in December 2009 by Kalunath (Jodhpur), Appanath (Jodhpur), Parasnath (Jalore), Kishannath (Barmer), and Bhanvarnath (Barmer).²⁷ All of these men are originally from the same region of Jodhpur (the same *pañcāyat*); they migrated to other parts of Rajasthan for job opportunities in the tourist performance industry. I interviewed Kalunath (March 16, 2012), Appanath (March 22, 2013) and Parasnath (March 18, 2012) about their experiences and roles and the preliminary UNESCO outcomes. None of them claimed to know what UNESCO or an intangible cultural heritage was, nor were they aware of the fact that their Kālbeliyā arts were recognized by the government as requiring safeguarding. When they saw the UNESCO documentary, they recalled that an *amarikā se ādmī* (some American guy) or at least an *aṅgrez* (some foreigner) came to visit them and asked to make the documentary (Interview with Kalunath, March 16, 2012). The reason for making the documentary was apparently not clear to the Kālbeliyās who participated in it. As discussed in chapter 6, the Kālbeliyās receive numerous requests to participate in documentaries, and the making of the UNESCO documentary was therefore not unusual for them. Kalunath seemed to care little about the documentary’s purpose, but he complained repeatedly that he had never received a copy of the video.²⁸

²⁶ There are multiple Kālbeliyā *pañcāyats*, each belonging to a different region, e.g., Jaipur, Pushkar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer. Therefore, this gathering in Jodhpur represented only a small part of the community.

²⁷ Interestingly, the consent letters were only signed by male members of the community, though it is women who are predominantly involved in the practice of the Kālbeliyā performing arts. Not even Gulabi Sapera signed a consent letter, although she is currently a member of the Jaipur *pañcāyat*.

²⁸ The Kālbeliyās are currently aware of the importance of professional videos for the sale of their performances.

The conscious permission of the community also seems doubtful with respect to the consent letters because the Kālbeliyā members who supposedly signed them are illiterate.²⁹ Kālbeliyā performers have become used to signing official documents on a regular basis (mainly performance contracts). On this occasion, these Kālbeliyā men did not question the signing of the consent letters. Such an act is a sign of trust in the person they are working with. None of the Kālbeliyā men were able to remember when the papers were signed or who came to have them signed. The lack of knowledge about UNESCO recognition among Kālbeliyās appears to be widespread. I regularly asked them³⁰ about their participation in the UNESCO initiative to safeguard the Kālbeliyā traditions, and generally they had never heard of UNESCO. Furthermore, they were not cognizant of concepts such as heritage, safeguarding, globalization, endangered traditions or the recognition of their performing arts in this respect.

Was the Kālbeliyā community entirely excluded from the drafting of the UNESCO file? Does this exclusion persist? Or is the community involved without its knowledge? Is it just a lack of awareness, and should there be more effort toward consciousness-raising and education about the concept of heritage among Kālbeliyās?

The economic, social and political (nationalist) stakes of Kālbeliyā recognition

Kālbeliyā recognition seems to have been mainly supported by its “management stipulations” (Askew 2010, 32), reconciled by invisible (or hidden) national and regional bureaucracies and not by a request from the community for the safeguarding of its heritage. As Skounti (2009, 75) explains, the selection of a heritage is based on “the intervention of a variety of factors;” heritage is influenced by economic, political, social, and cultural factors. Performances (for local tourism and international festivals) and job creation are considered the main economic stakes. They provide advantages to all stakeholders, from cultural organizations and government cultural programs to private entrepreneurs and the Kālbeliyā performers themselves (i.e., part of the community). Scher (2010, 200) emphasizes the primary importance of the economic benefits as follows:

²⁹ Most of the signatures consist of thumb-prints or the ham-fisted writing of first names. www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00340

³⁰ Informal interviews with Kālbeliyā artists during fieldwork (2012–2015) in Jaipur, Pushkar, Jodhpur and Udaipur.

The state's interest in public displays of national identity is in part dependent upon the degree to which those displays may function as economic engines. This holds true for a wide range of cultural tourism activities, from dance and folkloric presentations to community tourism, where visitors live with and "experience" the day-to-day activities of local people. Thus, the state's attempt to commodify and "sell" culture acts as a strategy for diversifying the economy *and* reinforces its claims as the legitimate guardian of cultural nationalism.

The Rajasthani tourism industry is, in fact, a booming business that represents Rajasthan as a cultural or heritage (these words are recurrently used as synonyms) state with a main, intangible focus on folk arts. The Indian government, moreover, focuses on maintaining a diverse but coherent national patrimony through which they can prove general "Indian-ness" (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007, xvii), as represented by diverse communities. Kālbeliyā performers have received more requests for national performances (in India and for Indian audiences) since the UNESCO recognition. Moreover, the UNESCO recognition has clearly improved the social prestige of Kālbeliyā performers. However, it is uncertain whether UNESCO recognition is actually the primary reason for this. It is possible that the recognition is only one of a number of factors in the longer-term process of upgrading the status of the Kālbeliyā community, such as the community's economic shift from being poor nomads to relatively wealthy performers; modernization (liberalization) in social stratification (the diminishing importance of caste); and, additionally, better education for the younger generation. Kālbeliyā dance performances are currently presented as one of the emblems of national identity,³¹ especially in the context of its local state tourism. They have, moreover, become a "state property" that suits "the perpetuation of a neoliberal political economy" (Scher 2010, 200). An interview with Kalunath in the magazine "TimeOut Jaipur" (2009, 39) serves as an example of the pre-UNESCO stage of social improvement:

We were outcasts in our own village, says Kalunath, his eyes bright. We were called in to catch snakes and sometimes to dance but as soon as we'd done our work, we were banished to the outskirts again, forced to live in the jungles and make whatever we could of our lives. What we are today, we owe to the Department of Tourism, which picked us out of our squalor and set us up to perform in India and even abroad.

³¹ On January 26, 2016 Gulabi Sapera received a Padma Shri award from the Indian government.

Post-UNESCO effects and future perspectives on the Kālbeliyā dance form and the community

Although the UNESCO Convention (2003, 3) idealizes the safeguarding of heritage through a wide range of actions, such as identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission and/or education, and revitalization, this idealization seems to contradict practical (state-driven) realities (Askew 2010, 23). To support this statement, I provide an overview of the practical consequences of Kālbeliyā recognition by UNESCO.³²

Education, research and youth: heritage's future

UNESCO stresses the centrality of education in the process of safeguarding heritage. Educating the young has the potential to create greater awareness (ICHC 2003, 6), which ensures respect, recognition and enhancement of heritage preservation in certain communities, groups or individuals (ICHC 2003, 2). Specific community education programs should be organized to “keep the public informed about the dangers threatening such heritage” (ICHC 2003, 7). The nomination file declares that the State Government of Rajasthan agreed (March 2007) to build a “Kalbelia School of Dance” in Jaipur (nomination file 2010, 6). According to the nomination file (2010, 6), Gulabi Sapera was consulted for this project as the conservator responsible for the “regeneration” of this dance; she was offered the position of principal. However, the dance school in Jaipur that was promised to Gulabi Sapera has, at the time of writing, not been built. According to Gulabi's son Dinesh, the government revoked the construction of the school in Jaipur. He claims to vaguely remember that administrative issues obstructed the building plans. Gulabi Sapera is currently building a school of her own in her hometown of Pushkar using her private means.³³ Other schools were promised. These schools were intended to be institutions in which Kālbeliyā children would have the opportunity to learn their “traditional skills.” Free room and board facilities were to be provided. Additionally, fellowships were to be provided for senior artists, who would transmit their knowledge of the traditional arts. To date I have found no examples of such schools. Moreover, one could question the benefits of building a formal, official

³² For additional perspectives on rethinking heritage safeguarding, see Catherine Grant, “Rethinking Safeguarding: Objections and Responses to Protecting and Promoting Endangered Musical Heritage”, 31-51.

³³ According to Dinesh, the school will open soon. Interviews related to the Kālbeliyā school of dance were conducted on December 17, 2013.

school for the Kālbeliyā performing arts. Because Kālbeliyā dance is learned in an informal way, knowledge transfer is as new as the dance itself. The acquisition of dance skills occurs through informal observation techniques, whereby young Kālbeliyā girls are enticed directly onto the stage to learn the dance through trial and error. The institutionalization of the dance in the form of a school could therefore impact the dance genre itself.

A more fashionable method of persuading the young to safeguard their heritage is through the organization of festivals. UNESCO supported the organization of Kālbeliyā festivals³⁴ to encourage additional transmission and dissemination. To my knowledge, no annual Kālbeliyā carnival has taken place to date.³⁵ The Kālbeliyā festival in New Delhi should have been organized in 2014, but I have been unable to trace information about this event. In addition, training programs for scholars and folklorists and scholarly research were included in the future plans. Indeed, one conference on the intangible natural heritage of the Kālbeliyās was organized (March 19-21, 2013 in Jaisalmer). Other specific plans for research projects, such as an exclusive survey of the Kālbeliyā population, the creation of a Kālbeliyā cultural center and archive, an Ethnographic museum³⁶ of Kālbeliyās run by the community itself, and a rich digital resource data bank of Kālbeliyā performing groups and their music (nomination file 2010, 7) are also yet to be realized.³⁷

UNESCO supports international visibility, exchange and the bringing of people closer together

Kalbelia youth, who are now forced to find employment as unskilled labour, will find a platform to re-enter into their world of performing arts, to showcase their dance form with traditional aesthetics and values intact (nomination file 2010, 5).

In the above quotation, UNESCO aims to persuade Kālbeliyā youth who are not currently working as performers to pursue this profession. The number of Kālbeliyā artists

³⁴ The list of festivals to be organized includes an annual Kālbeliyā festival at the state level “celebrating the world and way of life of the Kalbelias” and, in the third year (after nomination), a national-level festival in New Delhi. Kālbeliyā artists were to be taken, eventually, to national and international festivals (in nomination file 2010, 7).

³⁵ The Kālbeliyās I interviewed are not aware of a new, annual Kālbeliyās carnival.

³⁶ A type of Kālbeliyā camp with “traditional housing” or tents (*ḍerā*) where Indians and international artists can be invited to stay and organize workshops and training camps (in nomination file 2010, 7).

³⁷ It would appear that the budget provided by UNESCO (in total, 10.45 million Indian rupees or 314,396.53 US dollars) has not been spent on any of these safeguarding measures (in nomination file 2010, 8).

(dancers and musicians) has vastly increased in recent years; the number of dancers alone has risen from a few to fifty or more. Interest in working as performers had already increased in the 1990s (pre-UNESCO), when the tourism industry in Rajasthan expanded, as I explained earlier. The number of performers will likely grow in the future because the next generation of girls is now consciously prepared to become dancers.

As more Kālbeliyā performers are recruited, the visibility of the dancers increases, according to the nomination file. To maintain their places onstage, Kālbeliyā artists should innovate, collaborate, and exchange experiences with others, primarily with international itinerant artists (nomination file 2010, 5). Despite the apparent stimulation of innovation and cross-community collaboration associated with Kālbeliyā dance and music, the UNESCO concept of heritage strengthens the focus on group-oriented (in this case, the Kālbeliyās) culture with “the effect of creating closed-off and clear-cut borders against outside communities” (Leimgruber 2010, 169). I have observed a ‘purist’ wave in Kālbeliyā performances in recent years, which is primarily enforced by its Rajasthani local stakeholders and nationalist cultural policy makers. Multiple performance organizers currently tend to force Kālbeliyā artists to deliver ‘uncontaminated’ or ‘authentic’ shows. This usually means performances showcasing only Kālbeliyā artists and ‘traditional’ Kālbeliyā music: only female vocalists and the *puṅgi*, *caṅg*, *ḍaphlī* and *mañjīrā* (no other instruments, such as the harmonium or *ḍholak*). This approach, however, challenges the part of the UNESCO convention (2003), which states that renewed dialogue between communities should be encouraged. This folkloristic approach has led to much protest from Kālbeliyā artists who had previously successfully collaborated with musicians from other Rajasthani communities.³⁸ The protests have escalated to the point that Kālbeliyā artists are now secretly smuggling in musicians from other communities and dressing them as Kālbeliyās to create the ‘authentic’ look the organizers demand (cf. fieldwork excerpt in introduction, p.11-12). Despite of their aloofness and protectionism, the Kālbeliyās continue to attempt (successfully) to connect with the outside world through Gypsy culture, a path that many Rajasthani artists hope to follow as a marketing strategy.

³⁸ This dissatisfaction is most visible in Jodhpur, where Kālbeliyā dancers collaborate nearly exclusively with non-Kālbeliyā musicians such as Laṅgās and Māṅgaṇiyārs (see Chapter 5).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused critically on the concept of intangible cultural heritage and more specifically on the recently recognized ‘tradition’ of the Kālbeliyās. Despite the recent nature of Kālbeliyā dance practice, I have highlighted its central position within the UNESCO nomination. Consequently, this chapter has identified several challenging corollaries of UNESCO’s acceptance of Kālbeliyā dance (and music). I have also emphasized the political, economic and social stakes for national and local organizations, rather than the transnational engrossment of the safeguarding of Rajasthani dance traditions. Local stakeholders in the Rajasthani tourism industry have created a fictional past or staged authenticity to legitimize the further popularization of Kālbeliyā cultural practices, with a particular focus on its dance. Within this recognition, the motivation appears not so much an idealism for safeguarding, but rather a marketable strategy within national cultural politics and the development of Rajasthani tourism. The Kālbeliyā dance form has therefore been transformed into Indianized “folklore” rather than a contemporary art form.

Conclusion



Figure 33 Young Kālbelyā dancers playing with their veils, Pushkar, December



Negotiating embodied discursivity

This dissertation has explored contemporary dynamics in Rajasthani Kālbeliyā dance practice from the 1980s until today and how this practice has been staged as a multi-faceted form of ‘authentic’ dance from India. This thesis arose out of my preoccupation with expanding conventional representations of Kālbeliyā dance performances, their increasing narrative strategies and their corresponding identity formations. Neither programmatic nor literal, Kālbeliyā dance remains above all a lighthearted, improvised dance providing significant freedom for its performers and with the primary goal of giving aesthetic pleasure, which arguably can be considered valuable in its own right. However, embodied practice, as I acknowledged throughout this dissertation, is never simply isolated in the vacuum of its aesthetics. As the preceding chapters illustrated, multiple sociocultural, political, economic and aesthetic negotiations transformed Kālbeliyā dance into its current form of staged practice within the performance sphere. Within these negotiating dynamics of the performing arts, the essence of a staged performance lies in its discursive interactions more than in its visual and physical execution alone. Influenced by transnational (often Euro-American) dominant discourses on aesthetics and, since colonial times, under the influence of Indian nationalist perceptions, most Indian dances have become prominently programmatic, as they usually depict a story or mood behind cultural practices. One global discursive cultural tendency that anticipates semantic intent in art is to appreciate a work only when one understands its message. In this context, I showed that the process of categorizing voices and discourses interactively contributes to formations of mediated national/transnational identities. In effect, contemporary Kālbeliyā dance practices engage with nationalist, regional and Orientalist discourses, crosscut by transnational dance perspectives and the executing performers’ wishes to become socially and economically emancipated.

Rather than merely analyzing the dance form as such, the aim of this research was to understand what dance means or how it can be used either in conjunction with or in opposition to discourses about moving systems. My research has been an attempt to address how and why particular movements and their contextual meanings arise, regularly change, and might be momentarily formalized into a dance style in and across

cultures. This account, like the ongoing lives of a distinct group of contemporary female Kālbeliyā performers, is a process and therefore is encompassed by a profound sense of continuity. The corresponding dance is a syncretic genre that emerged in a hybrid context of transnational cultural commercialism and nationalist cultural policy. This study on Kālbeliyā dance critically foregrounded the interface between politics, commercialism, and social emancipation where the development of aesthetics finds itself in a negotiation between nationality and transnationalism, between its past and present, and between local and global identities. In this process, Kālbeliyā dance has become a dynamic practice characterized by local and individual variations that is an integrated part of culture with its own specific functions; its form and corresponding meaning may change, and with such responses, the cultural context in which Kālbeliyā dance emerges may also change.

Transnational tendencies/Glocalized retrofitting

My research argues that although movement systems such as dance are activated in the context of a specific culture, they are equally influenced by processes of globalization and thus fluctuate, taking on new ranges of meaning. Indian dance practices, as discussed throughout this dissertation, have been negotiated in a complex global interchange of expectations and discovery in the last two centuries. The romantic fascination with and attraction to mystical exoticism and bodily desires that accompany an imagination of the 'East' aid in the creation of advertising strategies for music and dance. Cultural neo-Orientalism (see chapter 4) permeates these local interactions and mediated images in a transnational process of exotification that extends both the self (cf. Kālbeliyā dancers) and the other (cf. spectators). By analyzing these discursive processes, more attention is given to both the transnational dynamics of the performing arts and the contemporary realities of Indian dance. By emphasizing negotiated encounters in cultural practices, the complex cross-cultural aesthetic, historical, and ideological dialogues leading to the inevitable and constantly evolving hybridity in performing arts and embodied practices are illuminated. Through such dynamic formation processes, Kālbeliyā dance's eccentricity has been materialized—and even naturalized—by the repetitiveness of discourses that serve as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of authenticity that enters into and participates in national and global imaginations.

I also see this dissertation on Kālbeliyā dance as a contribution to the overarching field of performance studies, presenting global insights by studying the specific. Although a transnational market heavily influenced the various accounts of Kālbeliyā dance that have circulated globally since the 1980s, these accounts were also intricately

retrofitted by their localities. Embodied practice articulates the political negotiation of representations as some narrative strategies are adopted (cf. the Gypsy narrative), others are adapted (cf. the snake charmers' narrative), and some are outright rejected (cf. Naṭ connection). My research adds to the discussion on how transnational influences are "glocalized,"¹ that is, how people inextricably engage with local paradigms to incorporate incoming global tropes (McDonald 2012, 28). To assess this process, I engaged in a historical overview of public discourse on the Kālbeliyā community, its dance practice, Indian dance more generally, and transnational perspectives on this dance. Because these paradigms do not operate in isolation, dance practices and their national institutions, especially when they are related to commercial industries, are affected by what is occurring elsewhere in the world (primarily through a transnational market). Such influences show globalization in action.

Dancing out a new identity

Rajasthani artists likewise participate as they adopt the desires of transnational spectators and active dance tourists, and adopt national discursive ideas in order to endure in a professionally competitive arena. Kālbeliyā dancers, moreover, develop embodied strategies in which they carve out positions that allow them to represent their own understanding of the identity and the past of their Kālbeliyā dance, along with their understanding of national (cf. India), regional (cf. Rajasthan), and local (e.g., Jodhpur) affiliations. They actively participate in a cultural production of meaning that, I argue, remains central to twenty-first-century Kālbeliyā dance, despite its numerous transformations and displacements. I exhibited how Kālbeliyā dancers consciously use dance as a new sign of identity formation in which transnational commercialism, nationalism, tradition, and regional representational narratives are interwoven. This creation of identity focuses on otherness, homogenization, difference, and entropy alongside creative compulsions and artistic ambitions (Biswas and Ghosh 2011, 197). In this dissertation, I showed that dance as a means of communication relies on polysemic, multivocal and embodied voices. I provided a practical illustration of how Kālbeliyā dance was created through narrative tactics and how its community, with its related social paradigms, receives recognition for this new profession.

In addition to exploring the performers' active agency, I provided a critical comparison of how dancers and other multiple interacting mediators relate to these

¹ The concept of globalization was first introduced by Manfred Lange (1989), and later became a matter of great concern of postcolonial scholars such as Appadurai, Bhabha and Spivak.

stories differently depending on the platform (cf. *chameleonism* towards national versus transnational perspectives). The creation of narratives of selfhood and identity emerged through encounters with their dance and the national and transnational discourses of recent decades. In the words of Soneji (2012, 190), these dances are “sites that produce personal and collective imaginations; identity lives through mnemonic bodily practices.” Indeed, dance moves with the lives of its performers and its spectators – it continues to breathe through a “process of adaptive regeneration” (Biswas and Ghosh 2011, 205). Related to such issues are the blurred negotiations of cultural specificity in globalized contexts in which cultures and their products and discourses simultaneously intermix and operate parallel to one other. Although national and transnational policies approached the Kālbeliyā dance case from different angles, they often discursively used it in overlapping ways, with the aim of creating a novel and imaginary artistic practice and linking it to pre-existing cultures (such as, in this case, Gypsy culture or snake-charming practices). Therefore, the contextualization of the Kālbeliyā dance phenomenon serves as a practical example for further theorizing the development of identity formatting in relation to cultural phenomena.

Claiming inauthenticity or circling forward through dynamism?

The covert dynamics of power relations prove that culture consists of constantly evolving discursive practices. The subtle relationships between power/knowledge and culture/control (cf. UNESCO case) that have been restructured in India during colonial regimes have visibly marked the postcolonial reordering and dynamics of India’s current cultural discourse (cf. chapter 4). Studying Indian dance (such as Kālbeliyā dance) from postcolonial critical perspectives, I have again highlighted the existence of a new context for performances as a part of an ongoing reconstruction of the Indian nation, its traditions and its past. The sociopolitical needs of the present, utterly altered by colonialism, have rearranged (or in some cases, constructed) new performances to suit their own purposes. Despite its current role as a signifier of national and ethnic pride, however, we must look beyond treating Kālbeliyā dance and the women performing it as a simple national representation. Taking into account the various transformations of Indian dances into a global cultural product, the postcolonial cultural habitus in India has led to a tremendous modification. A crucial ingredient for accepting women into a dominant habitus has entered into an embodied sense of their past. The changes are evident not only in the nature of a dance practice once associated

with traditional embodied aesthetics but also in negotiations with new nationalist ideals and a new impetus to represent bodies inspired by commodity images (Chakravorty 2010, 175).

Within this discursive debate on cultural perceptions of past and present, there is an overarching debate on the temporality of cultural practice, in which there is a paradoxical stance that argues against the change of cultural forms on the one hand and that tries to fix embodied practices into an ideal (utopic) past, disregarding its contemporary function, on the other hand. First, with respect to the discussion about whether changes in cultural practices are inherently bad, it seems overly simplistic to say that change is perpetually destructive for local culture. Taking into account this study on Kālbeliyā dance, the question of whether authenticity as ‘old and unchanging heritage’ actually exists has been raised. If there is an authentic form of any embodied practice, I argue, its constant adaptation to discursive circumstances is not necessarily a very new or postmodern phenomenon, but instead, such an adaptation might have existed throughout history. Second, although the emphasis on historical trajectories of the community in political and commercial perspectives has provided a legitimizing narrative for Kālbeliyā dance history, that emphasis aims at fixing the dance in an idealizing past, shifting attention away from women in contemporary daily realities. In such a process, which Manners (2006, 81) refers to as “fossilization,” the freezing of a dance practice in its development during one period often takes place. Fossilization has the potential to cause a split in public discourse surrounding performing arts and improvisational dancing. The divergence and fluctuant character of Kālbeliyā dance forms that I witnessed contradict the current claims of their seamless continuity and conformity.

Although the historicity of dance practices is often challenged in academia, a powerful struggle for ‘authenticity,’ ‘tradition’ and ‘heritage’ in a plot among nations, their intellectual associates (such as professional institutions and organizations), cultural commercial apparatus, and even between UNESCO and the performers themselves continues to prosper in the public perceptions and expectations of Indian cultural performances (cf. chapter 6 on Gypsy documentary films and chapter 7 on Kālbeliyā dance’s UNESCO recognition). Dance as cultural heritage remains commonly discussed in terms of a conceptually binary relationship between *tradition* or ‘the past,’ which is only meaningful as a solid and unchanging authenticity, and *modernity* or ‘the present,’ which is understood as its clear-cut and discursive opposite (Chakravorty 2006, 89-90). Deconstructing this detaching division, I explicitly advanced the complex interrelatedness between the representational past and the political present in Kālbeliyā dance practice. In other words, I showed the contemporary hybridity of a Kālbeliyā dance practice linked to a dispersed sense of the past.

I suggest a new perspective on cultural heritage, moving away from the fashioning narratives of traditions, away from a strategic essentialism that creates rigid community identities and away from the politically selective constructions of history fostered by such approaches. Instead, I want to move toward the symbolic interpretation of cultural heritage as a creative interpretation of the past lived in the present. Through this alternative approach, I consider the epistemological groundings of cultural heritage as mere mental constructs that transfer the past through representations of inter-human memories, thoughts and images. Although heritage, as is the case with Kālbeliyā dance, might be an informal practice that is not bound by rules, it exists as a highly charged and condensed phenomenon. I propose to experience cultural heritage or traditions as a form of embodied continuity with the past. Therefore, we might consider symbolic references to the past as a frictionless and enabling contribution to the newness of the future or as a way to cope with the demands of the present.

Taking my observations about Kālbeliyā dance into account, I also suggest that the problem surrounding authenticity and cultural heritage does not lie within the fictitious authenticity of Kālbeliyā dance per se, as it appears to be an unattainable goal for any embodied practice to really identify its authentic form. Instead, the problem lies in the paradox that the supposedly authentic representation of Kālbeliyā dance is both a mediated conception of the dance itself and a representation that projects the dance through the hybrid lens of commercialism, nationalism and Oriental knowledge (see also Keft-Kennedy 2013, 81). It is important to call into question the very concept of authenticity of embodied practices, which claims historical and cultural accuracy, instead of highlighting the fact that performers create culture in the present. Thus, I want to contest the nature of the historical legacy of embodied practice. Although dance might have historical traces, its journey across time has never been smooth and has always been negotiated by the artistic imaginations of the individuals who re-embody these forms and by socio-political factors of the time in which the dance is practiced. Kālbeliyā dance is not authentic in the sense that it genuinely represents another time and place. At the same time, however, its performance is authentically modern and Indian in that it has become its own cultural form that speaks not only to the history of the transnational Gypsy community and its evolution through various forms of popular media but also to contemporary Indian nationalist concerns for authenticity in post-modernity. Kālbeliyā dance and its aesthetics have become their own truth and their own forms with both general structures to be replicated and individual overlying textures to be idiosyncratically adjusted, all while indexing various temporal threads of local Rajasthani, national Indian and transnational Gypsy dance phenomena. With this dissertation, I attempted to provide the first impetus for developing a frame of

reference that can keep pace with the contemporary, varied and dynamic status of the dance form. I propose a dynamic perspective on dance, given that it is constantly being reinvented, recomposed and metamorphosed. Creative responsibilities and a promise to measure against this aesthetic scale are what remains for the current performing stage.

Future perspectives

This dissertation serves as a first impetus for research on Kālbeliyās. I provided an introductory reflexive perspective on the community as intriguing in its broad sense, and more specifically, I analyzed the dancers' process of becoming stage performers, which was the delineated topic of this study. With a combined methodological approach outlined throughout this dissertation, this research has attempted to be comprehensive and multi-disciplinary. However, to keep the scope of this research feasible, this study has addressed one specific portion of a broader phenomenon of (Kālbeliyā) performances in Rajasthan and around the world; I was forced to focus more on some methods than on others (as also discussed in chapter 1). Because of this largely unexplored area of study, I acknowledge that this dissertation has barely scratched the surface of what is a vast array of related topics that remains available for further research. I thus want to stress that this exploration of the practice of Kālbeliyā dance, like the lives of contemporary women in these performance trades, remains a work 'in progress,' pervaded by a profound sense of incompleteness. The crossover relationship among dance, performance studies, ethnography, history, and the multiple other fields that I touched upon remains in a state of change and clearly, the theoretical frameworks that I chose to pursue inform my conclusions. Bearing in mind the limitations of being a single researcher with a restricted timeframe for this scholarship, there are numerous topics that deserve more attention than I have given them here. Considering the extremely limited amount of primary written sources on Kālbeliyās and my focus on dance as an embodied practice, the bulk of my attention focused on fieldwork and the exploration of general methodological approaches for mapping out this type of performing phenomenon. Therefore, there are numerous Kālbeliyā-specific themes, along with broader sociocultural topics, that often need detailed academic expertise going beyond the main ethnographic perspective that I applied so extensively in this research.

This qualitative and multidisciplinary combination of methods, which used original data only, offered in-depth results on the study of Indian performing arts. Little research has been done on Indian 'folk' performing communities (in contrast to the

multiple studies on ‘classical’ dance forms), and no research at all has been performed on Rajasthani dancing forms in general. For the purpose of this project, I specifically focused on the case study of Kālbeliyā dance. Cases such as the one analyzed here challenge and contribute to broader research on Indian dance, enriching such research by their exceptional specificities. Therefore, future research should continue to examine uninvestigated case studies of performing practices to track their dynamic pluralism. In the context of my own explorations, it would be interesting to conduct more research on the staging of Rajasthani ‘folk’ performances and on the worldwide perception of such performances in the form of a broader project. This would provide the added advantage of being able to compare many other active performers from Rajasthan. So far, the study of Rajasthani performers, with the exception of a few studies on the Māṅgaṇiyārs by Ayyagari (2009), for example, has been extremely limited. This lack of research is astonishing given the tremendously dynamic changes of recent decades and the attention that Rajasthani performers receive in popular discourses. Case studies of so-called ‘non-classical’ forms (including folk and other popular or unknown forms) of Indian performing practices, such as the one that I conducted for Kālbeliyā dance, remain rare, but such case studies might enrich and furthermore, provide new theoretical perspectives on the historical and postcolonial dynamics of Indian cultures and arts. Another subject that I did not discuss in this dissertation (in addition to the contemporary approach) that triggered my attention is the complex system of historical art patronage in the region of Rajasthan. Whereas multiple historical research projects have focused on the performing arts in India, the study of (dance) patronage systems deserves more academic attention. Often presented as a single community of artists related to a single community of patrons, I found multiple clues that indicate a more complex socioeconomic and cultural system, which, as I similarly demonstrated in my contemporary case of Kālbeliyā performances, might have had considerable influence on the practical execution of the arts and on their historical discursive discernments in the past that are still reflected in current practices.

Another intriguing subject worth investigating in more depth is the socioreligious position of householder Nāths, including Kālbeliyās, which I have discussed only in a relatively limited fashion based on available literature and complemented with some fieldwork observations, as references to these groups occasionally crossed my path while I studied their dance (cf. chapter 2). Because of the restricted historical sources on the socioreligious positioning of the Kālbeliyā community, this issue would be more relevant in relation to a larger anthropological study on the Nāth Yogīs adopting a religious studies perspective, a more elaborate analysis of which would have taken the argument too far. Because current academic sources are quite firmly constrained to highly specialized studies of Gorakhnāthī traditions, the study of other Nāth Yogī communities might provide a rich field of study that is often overlooked in this area of religious studies.

Studying the recent professionalization of Kālbeliyā dance performances, I have been working with a largely gender-segregated group of young, working women. Women taking up an outdoor profession and travelling nationally and internationally without their husbands, and sometimes without any family members, results in an interesting form of social emancipation in an otherwise masculine Rajasthani society. Therefore, it might also be thought-provoking to investigate this situation/process from a gender-methodology-based perspective. This example of an unusual and rapidly changing way of living and working by women (alone) introduces multiple gender-related conflicts and unusual situations that might be enriching for the field of gender studies and for more general research on social emancipation in India.

Another topic of study that I did not explicitly explore in this dissertation is the interplay between the cultural field and the tourist industry. Because Rajasthan is one of the most visited states of India, and cultural performances are held at many hotels, public places and tourist attractions there on a daily basis, this discursive factor is also worthy of further investigation. In relation to international tourist visitors, female European and American travelers' recent interest in learning Kālbeliyā dance (this in contrast with Indians who are till date not interested in learning dance from Kālbeliyās at all), which is increasingly recognized as a sort of new branch or tribal or Gypsy belly dance, has resulted in fascinating exchange projects between Rajasthani artists and the transnational belly-dance community.

A research project concentrating on Indian nomads as an asset to the field of Romani studies might also be an interesting new focus. As suggested by multiple Romani scholars, historical and linguistic research on nomadic communities in India is often considered a missing piece of this field of study, and such research would counterbalance the predominantly European focus within Romani studies. As Fraser (1995) suggests, comparative research on middle-Indic and Romani languages might help uncover more clues to be used in solving the puzzle of Gypsy migrations. A historical study using (pre)colonial sources, along with Indian archived sources about Indian nomadic communities, might likewise be a valuable resource for Romani studies because such material remains largely un-investigated.

Despite my eagerness to elaborate much more on possible future research perspectives, I wish to end my dissertation here, by returning to my perspective as an author, researcher and dancer, suggesting that we recognize diverse representations of dance and that we study dance from an intersubjective perspective of the performative-I (cf. chapter 1). The field of dance studies would benefit from more critical phenomenological approaches (cf. *performative turn*), studying dance as a cultural "*intervention*" instead of as a cultural "*invention*" (Spry 2006, 334). This approach also serves to attract more attention to the active agency of both the participants and the researcher, whether that agency confirms or subverts the discourses operating within

the practice. Continuing to seek understandings of operative cultural discourses through the multiple lenses of experiential, literary and theoretical knowledge facilitates these critical reflections. To conclude this dissertation, I propose to continue the study of dance from a perspective of multiple complex and interacting arenas, investigating a literal arena of embodied practice, an arena of cultural production that generates live or mediated presentations or representations and an arena of the practitioner in which the emphasis is placed on the personal experience of embodied practice and on the shaping of a dancing self. Overall, I have lifted the tip of the Kālbeliyā veil: let us continue twirling around both on and off its dynamic stage. My hope is that this dissertation will continue to spark the interest of other researchers and that more in-depth, long-term studies will follow.

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Figure 34

Portrait of young Kālbelyā dancer in Udaipur, January 2014



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Dutch summary – Nederlandstalige samenvatting

De zogeheten Indian Gypsy ('Indiase zigeuners') alias Rajasthani folk-ensembles vullen tegenwoordig de headlines voor respectievelijk wereldmuziekfestivals over de hele wereld en voor volksdansfestivals in India zelf. Eén van de meest prominente figuren binnen deze artistieke gezelschappen is de Kalbeliya-danseres. De decoratieve zwarte jurk, kleurrijke parelsieraden en felle make-up vormen haar visuele identiteit. Bovendien worden de expliciete heup- en draaibewegingen, acrobatische trucs en het ritmische voetenwerk beschouwd als de fundamentele elementen van deze dans. Ondanks de traditionele uitstraling van Kalbeliya-dans, vaak ook gelinkt aan de identiteit van slangenbezweerders (de zogenaamde Saperas), blijkt deze dansvorm een recent fenomeen. Pas sinds enkele decennia zijn een aantal Kalbeliya-vrouwen, die voornamelijk in de noordwestelijke deelstaat Rajasthan (India) wonen, professioneel beginnen dansen op zowel nationale als internationale podia. Slim inspeland op lokale en globale culturele tendensen, blijkt Kalbeliya-dans, hoewel stevast geportretteerd als 'authentieke' en 'traditionele' Indiase dans, eigenlijk een mooi voorbeeld van *the invention of tradition*.

In dit proefschrift geef ik een eerste inzicht in de innovatieve wereld van de Kalbeliya dans als een nieuw discursief product op de lokale, nationale en internationale commerciële markt. Door het bestuderen van Kalbeliya-dans, ontdekte ik de talrijke, vaak onuitgesproken ideologieën die dansende lichamen omlijsten. Ik wijs op de invloed van romantiek, exotisme en oriëntalisme die culturele vormen uit 'het Oosten', zoals Kalbeliya-dans, hebben in de huidige, kosmopolitische context. Dit gebeurt niet alleen bij ons, in 'het Westen,' maar over de hele wereld, India inclusief. Naast deze worden ook andere theoretische vraagstukken behandeld omtrent imaginaire representaties, de actieve en wereldwijde productie van cultuur, en de etikettering en de indeling van de podiumkunsten in het algemeen.

Mijn proefschrift is gericht op het beantwoorden van de volgende onderzoeksvragen:

- (1) Hoe is Kalbeliya dans ontwikkeld van een nieuw fenomeen in de jaren '80 tot een erkend dansgenre vandaag de dag? In welke mate is deze recente creatie beïnvloed

door occasionalisme en een complex web van politieke en sociaal-culturele discoursen op lokaal, nationaal en internationaal niveau? En wat is de rol van dans als processueel en vergankelijk cultureel product wanneer het in dialoog treedt met dergelijke verschillende discoursen?

- (2) Hoe hebben diverse romantische en exotische meta-narratieve strategieën invloed op de commerciële expansie van deze Kalbeliya danspraktijk? En hoe hebben deze strategieën de productie van haar dusdanige representatieve identiteit beïnvloed?
- (3) Wat is de betekenis van dans-categorisering in omkaderende discussies over belichaamde en daarom vergankelijke culturele producten zoals Kalbeliya dans? Hoe worden betekenis-geladen termen zoals authenticiteit en traditie gevormd en genegotieerd in dit kader?

Van bedelaar naar danser

Kalbeliyas (*Kālbeliyā*) worden sociaal beschouwd als nomaden van lagere afkomst (de officiële term is Scheduled Caste) en worden regelmatig bestempeld als leden van een hindoeïstische strekking, de Nath Yogis (*Nāth Yogī*). De Kalbeliyas oefenen diverse beroepen uit binnen de samenleving, waaronder een soort van geritualiseerd bedelen (*pherī lagānā*, wat letterlijk betekent “het maken van rondes”). Tijdens het maken van dergelijke rondes, gaan de Kalbeliyas van deur tot deur vergezeld van objecten (zoals afbeeldingen van godheden, godenbeeldjes en relieken) of ook soms dieren (waaronder koeien, schorpioenen, hagedissen en soms ook slangen) die een vaak populair-religieuze betekenis met zich meedragen. Door het beoefenen van dergelijke bedelpraktijken, hebben de Kalbeliyas een reputatie opgebouwd van *fake ascetics* of ook straatmuzikanten, omdat zij geritualiseerd bedelen combineren met het spelen van muziek voor aalmoezen. Kalbeliya-mannen bespelen verschillende instrumenten, zoals de *puṅgi* (een soort fluit) en kleine percussie-instrumenten; Kalbeliya-vrouwen zingen korte a capella-liederen. Hoewel Kalbeliyas dus vaak conventioneel beschreven worden als een muzikantengemeenschap, werd het beoefenen van dans, zeker voor vrouwen, in het openbaar onzedig beschouwd. Het beroep van danseres was daardoor tot voor kort onbestaand binnen de Kalbeliya-gemeenschap.

Sinds de jaren 1980 heeft Kalbeliya-dans zich eerst op de transnationale, commerciële markt verspreid. Vervolgens, een aantal jaar later, heeft haar transnationale populariteit geleid tot de snelle integratie en institutionalisering van deze dansstijl in het kader van het nationale (Indiase) cultuurbeleid. Tot slot werd Kalbeliya-dans en –muziek in 2010 officieel erkend als UNESCO-werelderfgoed. In een creatieve zoektocht naar rituele of symbolische waardes achter de culturele praktijk van Kalbeliya-dans, gingen Indiase cultuurbeleidsmakers op zoek naar bewijs voor een vorm van continuïteit, of op zijn minst een link, met het verleden. De zoektocht naar authenticiteit is een legitimatie-strategie voor het toe-eigenen van traditie en culturele

waardes. In het geval van Kalbeliya-dans heeft een samenloop van internationaal onderzoek naar de Indiase origine van zigeunercultuur, een toeristisch georiënteerd nationaal cultuurbeleid, en de sociaal-economische voordelen voor Kalbeliyagemeenschap bij het beoefenen van dans geleid tot de oprichting van deze nieuwe dans stijl.

Indiase zigeunerdans versus Rajasthaanse volksdans

In 1981 danste een jong meisje, Gulabi Sopera, in haar nomadisch kamp net buiten het stadje Pushkar. Ze werd er opgepikt door twee vertegenwoordigers van de lokale Rajasthaanse toeristische industrie als een ongezien danstalent en betrad hierdoor voor het eerst een podium. Hoewel deze anekdote een willekeurige gebeurtenis lijkt, heeft het eerste optreden van Gulabi Sopera een geheel nieuwe dynamiek op gang gebracht. Haar eerste optreden was een succes bij het internationale publiek toen aanwezig. Hierdoor was niet enkel Gulabi's carrière gelanceerd, maar ook die van een klein aantal andere Kalbeliya-vrouwen dat in de daaropvolgende jaren ook zou beginnen dansen.

Het is door een samenloop van elkaar versterkende omstandigheden vanaf de jaren 1980, dat de dans van één persoon zich razendsnel heeft ontwikkeld tot een uniek dansgenre. Ten eerste, de conceptualisering van Kalbeliya-dans blijkt onder meer een rechtstreeks product van de toen opkomende wereldmuziekindustrie. Het is een specifiek voorbeeld van de hieraan gelinkte heersende transnationale romantiek en het exotisme rond zigeunerculturen. Deze industrie richtte zich tot het vinden van een Indiase oorsprong van Europese zigeuners, ook wel veralgemenend de 'Roma' genoemd. In de jaren 1980 en 1990 werd de Kalbeliya-dans van Gulabi Sopera een instrument waarmee artiesten en wereldmuziekmanagers de *Indian connection*-theorie konden aantonen. Deze theorie stelt dat Roma-zigeuners oorspronkelijk uit India afkomstig zijn en vervolgens gemigreerd zijn over de hele wereld. Overeenkomsten tussen zigeunergemeenschappen worden verondersteld om het bestaan van hun gemeenschappelijke oorsprong in India te onderbouwen. Deze theorie is wetenschappelijk gefundeerd op taalkundig bewijs: men suggereert dat de talen gesproken door de zogenaamde zigeunergemeenschappen, zoals Romani, gerelateerd zijn aan Indo-Arische talen. De talen van zigeuners zijn nauw verwant aan Middelindiase talen, waardoor verschillende taalkundigen stellen dat de sprekers van deze talen ergens in de vroege middeleeuwen in een complex migratie fenomeen vanuit India naar Europa en de rest van de wereld gereisd zijn. De populaire en romantische notie van de zigeuner-artiest als gemeenschappelijk, vaak zelfs twijfelachtig voorgesteld als genetisch bepaald, kenmerk verbindt al deze (semi)nomadische groepen met elkaar tot in India. Deze populaire theorie heeft echter veel meer impact op de commercialisering van het Gypsy-label binnen de wereldmuziekindustrie dan dat er

wetenschappelijke bewijzen voor zijn. Door middel van deze populaire beeldvorming van de zigeunerartiest, is Kalbeliya-dans, dat zijn oorsprong binnen een nomadische gemeenschap heeft, uitgegroeid tot een bekend product binnen het Gypsy-gerichte en internationale wereldmuziekcircuit. Zij worden immers vaak populair geïdentificeerd met de term ‘zigeuner.’

Ten tweede werd Kalbeliya-dans sinds de laatste decennia omgevormd tot een volksdans van slangenbezweerders. Door de populariteit van Kalbeliya ‘zigeuner’-dans op transnationale podia, werd deze dans getransformeerd van haar oorspronkelijke, pre-UNESCO, en eerder onbeduidende positie binnen de lokale en nationale sociaal-cultureel context, tot een recent erkende vorm van erfgoed (post-UNESCO). Deze transformatie heeft het statuut van Kalbeliya-dans en haar uitvoerders aanzienlijk verbeterd op sociaal-economisch vlak in het algemeen, en binnen het Indiase landschap van podiumkunsten in het bijzonder. Met de hulp van lokale folkloristen en cultuurmanagers is Kalbeliya-dans omgevormd tot een traditionele volksdans, waardoor het een beter verhandelbaar product werd voor het grotere publiek in India zelf. Om haar positie als volksdans, dus traditioneel en authentiek, te legitimeren werd een artificiële link gelegd tussen Kalbeliya-dans en de praktijk van slangenbezweren. De rituele functie van slangenbezwering heeft gediend als bewijs voor een link met het verleden, en dus een zogezegde continuïteit van de praktijk. Vandaag wordt Kalbeliya-dans in India doorgaans beschreven als een authentieke dans waarbij de vrouwen van de gemeenschap de traditionele functie van dans, voorheen uitgeoefend door de slang, hebben overgenomen. Het nogal plotse opnemen van dans als een beroep voor Kalbeliya-vrouwen wordt gestaafd door het nationaal verbod op het vangen van slangen (*The Wildlife Act*) in 1972, waardoor veel slangenbezweerders hun job verloren.

Kalbeliya-dans als cultureel verhandelbaar product

In tegenstelling tot het transnationale, romantische perspectief, waarin de (her)vereniging van Kalbeliya-cultuur met zijn Gypsy identiteit via dans wordt gestimuleerd, wordt Kalbeliya-dans steeds meer gebruikt binnen het nationaal, post-onafhankelijkheids-cultuurbeleid om diversiteit van de Indiase cultuur (als een eenheid) aan te tonen. In het specifieke geval van de podiumkunsten, streeft een nationaal cultuurbeleid naar het verkrijgen van een culturele eenheid binnen de bestaande diversiteit (unity in diversity). De ‘rijkheid’ (diversiteit) aan patrimoniale kunstvormen binnen een samenhangend kader (eenheid) van klassieke en volkse culturele praktijken vertegenwoordigen India als politieke natie.

De recente UNESCO erkenning van Kalbeliya folk als immaterieel erfgoed heeft geleid tot een toenemende belangstelling voor de dans onder de bredere Indiase/Rajasthaanse bevolking, een interesse die tot voor kort was vrijwel afwezig was. Het belang van de UNESCO-erkenning heeft er zelfs toe geleid dat Kalbeliya-dans recentelijk als één van de belangrijkste nationale vertegenwoordigers van de 'traditionele' Rajasthaanse podiumkunsten geportretteerd wordt.

Door creatieve interpretaties van een geschiedenis en bijbehorende narratieve opvattingen over traditie, zijn de Kalbeliyas eerst beroemd geworden als de voorouders van de Europese Roma-zigeuners, en werden zij later ook officieel erkend als 'authentieke' volksdansers. De aanhoudende, meestal fictieve voorstellingen van deze mensen als outcaste-Yogis, slangenbezweerders, goochelaars, bedelaars, nomaden en traditionele kunstenaars, hebben de mogelijkheden voor deze gemeenschap versterkt om sociaal te emanciperen of op zijn minst hun financiële situatie te verbeteren. Jonge Kalbeliya-artisten zijn bovendien over de hele wereld vrij beroemd geworden, omdat zij op prachtige wijze voldoen aan het stereotiepe beeld van 'de' 'Oosterse', quasi utopische en zeker exotische, danseres. Zij werken vandaag als zelf-geëxotificeerde, transnationale artisten op het globale wereldtoneel. Met de transnationale en lokale dynamieken van de afgelopen dertig jaar, werden de fundamenteen gelegd voor de vorming van een geësceneerde Kalbeliya-dansstijl. Factoren zoals de opkomst van het toerisme in Rajasthan vanaf de jaren 1960, de ontwikkeling van de wereldmuziekindustrie op transnationaal niveau, de toenemende interesse in onbekende volkskunsten op Indiaas staatsniveau in de jaren 1980, de oprichting van het internationaal erkend immaterieel erfgoedbeleid van UNESCO sinds 2003, en last-but-not-least het verlangen naar sociaal-economische emancipatie van de Kalbeliya-gemeenschap zelf, hebben geleid tot het actief creëren van een cultureel verhandelbaar product. Kalbeliya-dansers hebben zo een ruwe, inheemse en alternatieve representatie van Indiase cultuur op de kaart gezet.

English summary

In recent decades, so-called ‘Indian Gypsy troupes,’ or ‘Rajasthani folk ensembles,’ have become regular participants at transnational world music festivals and national folk fairs. Kālbeliyā dance, which is performed as part of these shows, has thus become increasingly well known around the world. Whereas the ornamental black dress, colorful beaded jewelry and expressive makeup distinguish the new visual identity of the Kalbeliya dancer, explicit hip movements, fast spins, acrobatic tricks and rhythmic footwork are considered the foundational elements of her dance. However, despite the Kalbeliya dance’s traditional appearance, purportedly a custom of itinerant snake charmers, it is likely to be a recent invention. This contemporary dance, popularly known as an ancestral, Indian form of Gypsy dance or alternately, as a traditional folk dance of snake charmers, is performed by women of the Kalbeliya community.

This dissertation gives an account of the swift development of Kalbeliya dance from its first appearance on stage in 1981 to the present, elucidating how this inventive dance practice was romanticized in national and transnational narratives with the aim of commercializing it globally and of generating a new, lucrative livelihood for these Kalbeliya families. It discusses the purpose served by dance as an expression of contemporary sociocultural dynamics, along with its potential as a means for the appropriation of social statuses, a space for narrative commercialization, and even a tool for illuminating and influencing shifting cultural norms. I analyze how dancers utilize dance for socioeconomic purposes and how the dance plays various roles within Indian society and in a transnational cultural marketplace. By focusing on these subjects, the dissertation aims to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How did a staged form of Kalbeliya dance evolve from a new phenomenon in the 1980s, to a distinctive dance genre today? How do occasionalism and the complex web of political and sociocultural discourses on the local, national and international levels figure in this narrative? What is the role of embodied practice as a processual and ephemeral cultural product in such multiple discourses?

- (2) How did various romantic and exotic meta-narrative strategies influence the commercial expansion of Kalbeliya dance practice? How did they subsequently produce its corresponding representative identities?
- (3) What is the significance of dance categorization in framing debates about embodied and therefore ephemeral cultural products such as Kalbeliya dance? How are authenticity and tradition negotiated in this respect?

From beggars to dancers

Kalbeliyas (*Kālbeliyās*) are generally considered low-caste peripatics (officially enlisted as Scheduled Caste) and are regularly depicted as members of the Hindu Nath Yogi (*Nāth Yogī*) tradition. Kalbeliyas offer diverse services, including types of ritualized begging (*pherī lagānā*, “making rounds”). With respect to these begging activities, Kalbeliyas have been described as buskers playing for alms. The Kalbeliya men predominantly play the *puṅgi* (wind instrument), *ḍaphlī* (frame drum), and *mañjīrā* (hand cymbals), while the women compose songs of a few stanzas, sung in small groups of two or three. Although the Kalbeliya community is regularly portrayed as a musicians’ community, until recently, public dancing was considered dishonorable for women and typically was forbidden by the community.

This dissertation traces the origin of Kalbeliya dance practice to the early 1980s, thereby demonstrating that it is a recently constructed tradition. It highlights the rapid establishment of the dance as a distinctive genre, first on the transnational market and later within the framework of Indian national cultural policy, where its integration has led to its institutionalization as a national folk heritage and ultimately, to its UNESCO recognition in 2010. I argue the importance of traditionalism and narrative legitimization within a shifting adaptation process to fit into multiple discourses. Based on the principles of claiming authenticity, the creative search for ritual or the symbolic nature behind the cultural practice of *Kālbeliyā* dance serves as proof of its uninterrupted link to the past. I show how Kalbeliya dance can be understood as the confluence of a transnational pursuit of Indian Gypsy culture, national cultural policy, the expansion of local tourism, and socioeconomic benefits for the Kalbeliya communities, all of which are factors that led to the creation of this dance.

Indian Gypsy dance versus Rajasthani folk dance

When the timing and circumstances are right, apparent minor events and actions of particular individuals can set new dynamics into motion. Occasions such as these can produce consequences that, as in the case of Kalbeliya performers, were never intended. In 1981, Gulabi, a young Kalbeliya girl in her early teens, was discovered at the outskirts of the Pushkar Camel Fair, where she was dancing at the edge of her temporary nomadic

encampment. Tripti Pandey and Hanumat Singh, at that time officers of the local governmental Rajasthani Tourist Department, spotted Gulabi dancing to the tune of her father's *pungi*, a snake charmer's flute. The up-tempo, exotic and mesmerizing performances of Gulabi Sapera and the Kalbeliya women who have followed in her footsteps since the early 1990s touched the 'Western' world's imagination about the lost Gypsy ancestors of the European (Roma) Gypsies.

This dissertation illuminates how the conceptualization of Kalbeliya dance is both the result and a product of romantic and exotic narratives brought about by a growing world music industry in which transnational cultural managers specifically focused on retracing the origins of Gypsies back to India. When staged Kalbeliya dance developed in the mid-1980s, it became a tool employed by artists and world music managers to support the so-called "Indian connection" hypothesis, which proposes that Gypsies originated in India and then migrated around the globe. The trope of the 'artist-Gypsy' is a popular image that facilitates the assimilation of those who are considered nomads into a transnational Gypsy world. Through this image, Kalbeliya dance has become a familiar feature of the Gypsy-focused international world music circuit. I also focus on the initial (pre-UNESCO) marginal position of Kalbeliya dance within local and national sociocultural spheres and its recognition in 2010 (post-UNESCO) as a snake charmers' folk dance, which has improved the status of Kalbeliya dance within India's performing-arts landscape. Indian folklorist-managers began to depict Kalbeliya dance as a performing art that was marketable to larger audiences and transformed it into a traditional folk dance. Its alleged continuity with the past was necessary to legitimize its claim to authenticity and tradition. To establish this sense of continuity, an artificial link was introduced between dance and the practice of snake charming. With the addition of an older ritual function, i.e. snake charming, Kalbeliya dance befitted a nationalist framework of staged folk performances. The prohibition of snake charming by the Wildlife Act of 1972 is used to explain the shift from using dancing snakes, a sort of folk dance in its first existence to using female dancers to personify and replace the ancient function of these 'sacred' animals or a folk dance in its second existence.

In other words, this dissertation demonstrates the powerful interplay of multiple parallel discourses and its agents that facilitated the development of Kalbeliya dance. Whereas the global romanticist perspective stimulated the unification and (re-)union of Kalbeliya culture with the transnational Gypsy identity via dance, Kalbeliya dance is increasingly used in post-Independence Indian cultural policy (particularly since the late 1980s) to represent the idea of *unity in diversity*. In the case of the performing arts, *unity in diversity* describes a rich variety of patrimonial art forms (*diversity*) within a cohesive, tripartite framework (*unity*) of classical, folk and tribal practices that represent India as a nation. The recent (2010) UNESCO recognition of Kalbeliya 'folk'

dance as an intangible heritage has led to increased interest in the dance among the wider Indian and Rajasthani population, interest that until recently was more or less absent. This recognition further increased the Kālbeliyā community's national and international renown because they are now seen as one of the main representatives of 'traditional' Rajasthani performing arts.

Kalbeliya dance as a marketable product

Typecast narrative productions of identity and representation have formed the present status of Kalbeliya performers in their modifications of national and transnational paradigms. These persistent and (primarily) imaginary depictions of a community as low-caste Yogis, snake charmers, magicians, beggars, nomads, and traditional artists reinforced opportunities for women to self-exoticize and become transnational laborers on the global stage. They enabled some Kalbeliya women to socially emancipate or at least to change their livelihoods. From the constant negotiations between desirable imaginations, global fantasies and sociocultural forces of communities, on one hand, and forces of local communities relative to discursive structures of global economic and political power, on the other hand, these representational images arose.

The advantageous transnational and local dynamics of the last thirty years planted the seeds for the formation of staged Kalbeliya dance performances in fertile soil. Kalbeliya dancers expressed themselves as belonging to an Orientalist imaginary. A cultural and marketable package of 'rough,' 'indigenous', and alternative 'Indianness' has contributed to the current status of Kalbeliya dance. At the same time, it evolved in relation to national and transnational cultures and has been used by women globally as a means of self-exotification and masquerading for empowerment. In this dissertation, I discuss the representative transformation of these performance practices from more or less marginal street musical settings to the purview of internationally renowned intangible heritage. Pursuant to its rusty nomadic imaginary, the state of Rajasthan is equally celebrated as "India's heritage state" by the Indian government in its promotion of tourism and in international disseminations of Indian culture through performances and festivals. Kalbeliya dance, recently transformed into the chief saleable dance expression of this Indian state, was deemed eligible for UNESCO intangible cultural heritage status in 2010.

