



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

PERCEPTION OF LEBANESE CULTURE BY AUB STUDENTS  
AND CARACALLA DANCE TROUPE

by  
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The following thesis examines the relationship between dance performance and Lebanese culture through AUB students and Caracalla dance troupe. By taking Caracalla as a case study, this research understands the notion of culture through two generations. On the methodological side, visual and sensory analysis is employed to understand Caracalla's troupe, an online questionnaire is used to comprehend AUB students' opinions.

This study explores the manifestations of Lebanese culture and folklore within Caracalla's performances in relation to theories of performativity and cultural studies. Through this framework, the analysis critically engages with the understanding of culture in today's Lebanon.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

How is Lebanese performance perceived in Lebanon? Finding an adequate answer to this question is the goal of this thesis. Attention to dance performances, as a medium of study, emphasizes a spectrum of visual culture that actively shapes how we see performance as part of media studies. I will attempt at showing how Caracalla, originally perceived as an artistic performance, also claims its attachment to Lebanese culture.

Dance performance draws a strong connection between cultural studies, audiences, transnational studies, and contributes to anthropology. Performances represent the nature of the society as media depict them. They utilize the same components present for media tools such as an audience, a diffusion process and a tool. Performance participates in the distribution and reception of media texts; in other words, it is a type of medium that engages both audiences and mass consumption and deserves further elaboration within current scholarly works in relation to media studies.

Schechner (2002) claims that there is no finality for performance studies because anything can be studied as a performance. Performances operate through different types, for example, the cultural, technological, or organizational performance (Jon McKenzie, 2001). In this study, I am examining the cultural performances in Lebanon, or more specifically the ways Caracalla, a Lebanese local dance troupe, intersects with Lebanese culture. I am also looking through an intergenerational

perspective, whereby I explore how AUB students perceive Lebanese culture and more specifically Lebanese folklore as represented via Caracalla.

Dance and cultural performance portray society's everyday life; therefore, they work with the assumption that culture is unthinkable without performance (Striff, 2013). Performances are considered both a subject and a method of research, a theory and a practice, visible to an audience in a live context. Media scholars recognize that the interdisciplinary aspect of mass communication is important (Ayish & Breslow, p.63) therefore the present research centers its concerns on the manifestation of culture and artistic engagement within Caracalla in Lebanon.

To delve more into the perception of performances, I question "what do performances want?" in media studies, inspired by Mitchell's "what do images want?" (Mitchell, 2005). This study exposes Caracalla's history through times of interest to Lebanon and situate it in Lebanese culture. It also investigates how 40 Lebanese students enrolled at the American University of Beirut perceive Caracalla's description of culture. How is Lebanese folklore viewed and discussed by Caracalla and students at AUB? This study delves into a new area of research concerning media studies in the Arab world by shedding light on culture and performance.

By examining performance and performativity, this study investigates how Caracalla's performances have integrated Lebanese culture and affected their audience in locating performance within culture rather than considering it as aesthetic gestures only (Striff, 2013).

I also explore the way Lebanese media talk about Caracalla in order to better configure a holistic approach to Caracalla's cultural visibility in Lebanon.

Rather than relating media performance to business firms and commercial broadcasting, this research provides cultural feedback between performance, media and society to draw a common and continuous line about Lebanese culture, a subject that is important in the field of social and human sciences and to media scholars.

To continue, Shusterman (2001) studies aesthetic performance as a form of "dramatization" and explains two ways of interpreting it. First, it means "to put something on stage, to take some event or story and put it in the frame of a theatrical performance". Second, he proposes that performance "treat something as, or make it seem, more exciting or important". These definitions are contextualized within the present study and indicate how Lebanese culture is dramatized on stage which relates performance with regards to cultural and media studies. I question how does "playing rituals" on stage reflect Lebanese culture.

Regarding the case chosen, it is interesting to see how Shusterman's second definition applies to the Lebanese audience because Caracalla focuses on audience impact. Although audience studies are outside of the scope of this project, this study will evaluate and assess the way one particular group, students at AUB, view Caracalla.

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<sup>1</sup> Upon discussion of my study with the Caracalla founders, they were glad to perceive an interest about their company. They requested me to hand in my thesis once completed to know Caracalla's perception by AUB students.

Generally, audiences enter a praxis, a context in which meaning is not so much communicated as created, questioned or negotiated (Carlson, p.197). Carlson argues that by studying an audience, one can notice how performance acquires a new meaning to its embodiment on stage. As mentioned, this study will not study the audience of Caracalla but how it helps or not Caracalla portray Lebanese culture. Hence, the next section is dedicated to defining Lebanese culture.

#### **A. Significance of Lebanese culture**

Lebanese culture includes traditional dancing, such as *dabke*, and Caracalla advocates this element among others in the history of Lebanese culture and communication. Theatrical performances are considered one of the oldest arts (Brinson, 1991), and in Lebanon through the Dabke, a popular form of Lebanese culture. Furthermore, I am going to introduce below Caracalla and their perception of Lebanese culture.

“Although the mass media have long been criticized for the way they shape our popular culture, the culture itself plays a role in shaping media content” (Le Roy Wilson, 1994). This quote doesn’t blame mass media for its reflection of today’s society but instead highlights how individuals represent their culture through media. How is the concept of culture explored?

“Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations,

from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves” (Schwartz, 1992). Although culture is a term with many meanings, this definition closely corresponds to the idea of culture that Caracalla tries to project. It is a social construct which interprets folk, traditional costumes and music into an experience shared by a Lebanese audience; it selectively diffuses cultural patterns that market Lebanese culture to local and foreign culture.

The notion of culture that Caracalla projects to its audience is not a well-educated or a civilized way of living which would reflect Matthew Arnold’s view of culture<sup>2</sup> but it transmits Lebanese folk culture to its audience. Moreover, Caracalla’s interest in folklore led it to transform its performances into an action of peace and belief in Lebanon, through which they are trying to inspire new generations about culture including values and morals that shape Lebanese way of life.

Andrew Hammond writes on culture in the Middle East (2017) and faces the question of how to define an Arab. In this study, I must face the same statement, and question how to define Lebanese culture. This includes a need to consider specific political institutions, as well as a common language, regional diversity and historical patrimony that are a crucial aspect of Lebanese culture. In Lebanon, we deal with a contingent system of complex identities. In fact, the cultural formulation of Lebanon embraces 18 recognized communities falling under 3 main religions: Islam, Christianity

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Arnold’s understanding of the word culture is “the best that has been thought and said in the world” (1869) which refers to an elite idea associated to elitist activities presented in art and intellectual refinement.

and Druze. Lebanese culture has been expressed in both a political and a religious way, that go beyond cultural objects.

By articulating the link between Lebanon, performance and society, this study has so far defined both the meanings of performance and culture; it also pointed out the importance of analysing performance as an aspect of media studies. The next section is dedicated to the introduction of the Caracalla dance troupe and their history.

## **B. The Caracalla dance theatre**

The Caracalla Dance Theatre was created in 1968 by Abdul Halim Caracalla who grew up in the eastern town of Baalback. During his childhood, he was influenced by many artists, such as Margot Fonteyn, Miles Davis and Ella Fitzgerald, and knew that his career would be related to art. All of Caracalla's inspirations seem to be non-Lebanese, which is interesting to note considering that his subject of interest is Lebanese culture and folk dance.

“A genius mind who created something magical” is how Alissar, his daughter, refers to him. She is the current managing director, along with her brother Ivan, of the Caracalla dance school and production house.

She says:

“All our achievements – when we open at the Baalback or Beiteddine festivals, perform abroad – are welcomed into the biggest theatres around the world, applauded by people, and when we get to send our message of art and peace, and show the beauty of Lebanon and what we have to offer here; those are defining moments. I feel that

Lebanon needs me here because I'm an example of dance and theatre for the country. I think if all the talented Lebanese in the world came back, we'd be a superpower. I'm so proud to say I'm Lebanese."

Alissar talks about Caracalla as a form of Deus Ex Machina, a place where peace is acquired and where the positive side of Lebanon is shown, as if it is a purgatory theatre that will help Lebanese audience envision a more peaceful look of Lebanon. However, it's important to note that Caracalla's messages wouldn't be perceived the same way by all of its audience. Lebanese audiences might recur to different ways for attaining peace and the expression of peace through art isn't generalized to all individuals.

Alissar, through her words, expresses her interest in dance and theatre, but mostly her added-value to Lebanese culture by mentioning how Caracalla contributes to Lebanese art and to the cultural scene. The search for Lebanese culture among the Caracalla family is the same for all family members. In fact, Abdul Halim in Japan presented a program called Lubnaan 'Ibr at-Taarikh or Lebanon across History (Rubin, 1994, p.166) which reflected the Lebanese search for identity, an endeavor that has been his objective from the beginning (Don Rubin, 1994).

During an interview with director Ivan Caracalla, he introduced me to Caracalla, its history, its different shows, themes and its evolution through times of interest to Lebanon, for me to understand how Caracalla portrays Lebanese culture. In addition, Caracalla produced 18 shows (Appendix 1) related to multiple themes such as love,

marriage and cultural attachment bringing forward traditional heritage that Lebanese ancestors created. Caracalla is inspired by elements such as the traditional costume of the Levant, the lifestyle of the Bedouins, to develop and transform them into the language of theatre.

Ivan insists that culture is “not something that we created, we take all these images and we develop them in a theatrical way inherited from the past, we do our own *Abeyes* and *Cherwel* (traditional costumes); it’s not a copy, it’s an inspiration to give an idea of our identity” and theatricalizing them is Caracalla’s mission. “We divide our performance into elements of poetry and music, our theatre must be a fantasy otherwise it would not be our aim”.

Dance performance is considered by Caracalla the practice of culture. “Culture is the element we inhabit as subjects. Culture embraces the whole range of practices, customs and representations of a society” (Besley, 2003).

To critically engage with Caracalla’s shows, it is important to map the development of Caracalla situated at the heart of the development of Lebanon through time. Ivan along with the Caracalla team, aim at projecting different themes that not only pertain to Lebanon’s history, but to tackle the theme of humanity (Appendix 1). I consider the ideas that Ivan shared with me very similar to the ideas that Alissar mentioned whereby Caracalla family members associate their shows as beneficial to humanity.

By adapting Shakespeare to an oriental version called “Oriental taming of the shrew” in 1982, Caracalla believed that any story could be localized and adapted to

local culture to better understand it and communicate it to the audience. Similarly, Caracalla adapted “Mid-summer night’s dream” to “Oriental Mid-summer night’s dream and “One Thousand One Night” to “Two Thousand and One night”.

During his debut in the 1970’s, Caracalla toured the US, Japan and England. The aim was to spread a positive image of Lebanon, different from that projected by the news, especially during the civil war. “The best traveling journey I did in my life was during the war, and I kept the company as it is to represent everyone: Christians, Muslims, Druze, and Armenians” says Abdul Halim. The examination of Caracalla triggers my interest in discovering both Lebanese culture and Caracalla’s performance. It seems that Caracalla’s dance performances acquire a broader mission for the Caracalla family rather than just expressing Lebanese folklore, that is convincing Lebanese audience about a positive ending regarding the instability of Lebanon.

According to Erving Goffman, the performer is convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality, and Caracalla builds on this process to connect reality to its Lebanese audience. Caracalla tries to be the artistic bridge between Lebanese people’s aspiration for a better Lebanon and the current status quo.

From a historical perspective, Caracalla has tried to be a point of intersection between Lebanon and the Arab world, and thus to become aware of shared interests with other nations.

From a cultural perspective, Caracalla considers the mass culture of Lebanon as an important point of departure that unpacks the textual and visual analysis that this study is interested in examining. By reflecting on Caracalla, this study highlights the

manifestations of cultural products and their meanings among Lebanese students at AUB.

By revisiting the notions of culture through Caracalla's performances, this thesis contends that Caracalla is constantly trying to reach out to its audience and tries to examine cross-cultural theories of performance studies in the perspective of anthropological thinking.

Introducing Caracalla is not only to tell of its history and ways of connecting to Lebanese audiences, but it is also about presenting the dancers and the staged representation of what media performance looks like. This section will further clarify why dancers are a nucleus medium of communication, important to the analysis of this thesis. This section defines dancers as a detailed characterization and exaggeration of human movements who strive to establish a meaning through their body movements.

### **C. Dancers and cultural attachment**

Dancers at Caracalla are identified under the umbrella of a unified culture -by being part of the Caracalla family- but belong to distinct social and cultural groups from different parts of the world. Dancers can be from Syrian, Ukrainian, Russian and Lebanese origins. Most of the dancers aren't Lebanese which puts a question mark on the dancers' relation to Lebanese culture and folklore.

It is interesting to study how dancers at Caracalla examine cultural identity. This examination will be further expanded in the analysis section, and how these may affect the students' understanding of Lebanese culture.

The Dabke, performed by Caracalla dancers, takes part of informal popular practices articulated in the local and transnational media scene. This symbolic cultural value is performed on stage by dancers to Lebanese audiences. By identifying dancers as cultural transmitters, Caracalla replicates three main components of culture: date, time and lieu.

Dancers are the solid base of every Caracalla show, without them, there is no cultural diffusion or a performance in front of the audience.

Ang (1996) argues that both national culture and its subordinate cultural identity are artificial. As this study investigates the notion of Lebanese culture through Caracalla's performances, it is important to take into consideration the idea of cultural diffusion in front of an audience as well. Transnational media systems do not attribute attention to the actual cross-boundaries that separate countries but only to the virtual exchange of products and thoughts. I am interested in analyzing the "cultural synchronization" (Hamelink, 1983) or on the contrary, a desynchronization, between AUB students' and Caracalla's thoughts on Lebanese culture.

Ang says: "Defining national culture in static, essentialist terms—by forging, in a manner of speaking, authoritative checklists of Britishness, Frenchness, Greekness, Japaneseness, Australianness, and so on—ignores the fact that what counts as part of a national culture is often a site of intense struggle between a plurality of cultural groupings and interests inside a nation" (Ang, 1995, p.121, 122)

By analysing Ang's words, my idea of merging national cultural and national identities is questioned. The complexities of the "dancer phenomenon" also reaches this

dilemma whereby dancers are considered culturally complex, keeping in mind that their plurality is similar to Lebanese cultural complexity as defined in the section on popular culture.

Defining dancers as part of Lebanese culture becomes a site of interest for this study that examines the construction of cultural identity. In an increased transnational system, culture doesn't follow a calculated equation. I consider it not rigid, and it illuminates the politics of culture about new distributions between the local and the global. Dancers offer new forms of bonding as part of the transnational communication system. The consumption of traditional dances fosters a cross-cultural community that understands parts of Lebanese culture. Therefore, dancers can be viewed either as an appropriation of western techniques or an acculturation between western techniques and Lebanese folklore.

This study is interested in examining whether AUB students and Caracalla coincide in their perception of Lebanese culture. It considers different technical elements that unpack the textual and visual discourses around Caracalla theatre but also defines students' reflections through online surveys. By reflecting on students' ideas through in-depth interviews as well as the study puts the manifestations of culture through Lebanese performance in conversation with theoretical approaches for sensory experience, communication action and audience research. The thesis contends that performance is constantly speaking about culture; however, the methodological approach will further examine how students react to Caracalla's performance viewed in the lens of a cultural performance.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORY AND METHOD

In the following section, I discuss theoretical perspectives which shaped this research and my analysis. I am interested in viewing how Lebanese culture is discussed by students at AUB and the Caracalla dance troupe. I am also concerned by the way Lebanese culture is a platform that provides a critical approach for analysing the discourses of Lebanese performance in relation to cultural studies and vice versa. However, first, I explore a sample of the body of literature around art and culture.

There is much scholarship written about Lebanese culture, but under the umbrella of media studies, only a limited amount is related to performance.

#### **A. Literature review**

##### ***1. Performance:***

Anita Naoko-Pilgrim (1998) questions whether performance offers a useful arena of analysis concerning identification by examining the latter within two categories: race and gender. She chose performance as an area that could study the tensions generated by both categories. Her discourse analysis about Zahid Dar, a persona in a performed material called “PakiBoy”, situates her academic work on identification to be limited to body language. However, examining performance is a task that involves more than bodily communication. Media is not only the study of a

certain performance, it is also the study of an audience, seen as the negotiators of communication and contributors to the commercial and historical industry.

Another author that understands media in Beirut is Thomas Burkhalter. By exploring local music culture, Burkhalter's research attempts to understand how media in Beirut is interrelated to the historical events. He examines local artists' expression of music while interrelating it to Lebanon's political, social and cultural environment. Through in-depth interviews with artists, Burkhalter (2013) explores local performances in Beirut and argues that mass media has greatly contributed to the audience's attitudes and affiliation to art. He contextualizes Lebanese popular music into discourses of transnational musical practices reflecting local and intimate practices to be nationalistic ones.

Burkhalter focuses on the musicians throughout his study. For the present research, I not only focus on dance performances, but also on how one particular audience receives it.

It is useful then to define performance in its complete facets. In all societies, performances can be presented on stage through cultural symbols which fulfil three roles: being symbolic, communicative and aesthetic. For example, Noha Khattab perceives her ethnographic study about theatre groups in Cairo in Egypt as an aesthetic one. She combines aspects of theatre for change initiatives with social and political activism. Interactive street art is a form of live performance that connects the audience with a place of expression in the realm of revolutionary Egypt. "The enunciation, in the conceptual sense of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), of what we perform in real life is also not far from the enunciation of affect through staged performance" (Khattab, 2015). Therefore, the visibility that Khattab is trying to show is undoubtedly

revealed through the analysed performances. She carried out extensive field work of the performing body and its representations in social life. My study differs from hers, because, during my interviews with dancers from Caracalla, I didn't ask about the dancers' expressions on stage because of my study's limited interest; however this could be a topic for future research which would enrich it.

The second part of my literature review examines the relation between dance performance and culture.

## **2. Culture:**

One of the most recognized scholarly works on Lebanese culture is Christopher Stone's *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon*. According to Stone (2008), the relationship between popular cultures, modern forms of nationhood, and national subjectivity are related. His analysis of the Rahbani generations identifies the musical theatre efforts in Lebanon and the ways that Rahbanis celebrate the unity of pre- and post- 1975 Lebanon. Ziad Rahbani, the son of Fairouz and Assi Rahbani, believed that the Lebanon of the 1970's and the early 1980's are the same. This musical-theatrical work from the 20<sup>th</sup> century until now "works for the existence of multiple synchronic Lebanons" (Stone, p.2). His description of the artistic identification is assimilated to the public's shared conception of nationalism that intensified in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with a connection to the Baalback International Festival, considered by Stone "an actual symbol for the nation" (Stone p.9). While examining the historical development of

Lebanon, he shows how the connection between cultural sites and national ideologies is predominant.

Stone's arguments address the metaphoric resemblance between Baalback, the Rahbanis. The collectiveness of culture is considered essential in art and artistic mass consumption. At the outset of this idea, Stone describes three types of belonging that an artist could have: The first is ownership or property in which artists belong to a certain commune; the second is the place of origin of the artist; and, the third is where the artist senses a certain belonging with a given community (Stone, p.89). The third type of belonging is developed in the nineteenth century with a type of "self-identification [...] in which artists feel the other, in this case the land and its people, as their own, as part of their selves and in varying degrees they immerse themselves in the community and its homeland" (Stone, p.90).

The link between artists and their nation is highly important for artistic production. In fact, Anthony Smith, in his paper on "The Land and Its People", reflects upon the artistic identification of nineteenth century visual artists and the way they contributed to the national image and cultural nationalism whilst considering three countries for analysis; the UK, France and the Netherlands.

"The return to nature" was omnipresent in the landscapes of the artists and revealed a growing importance of national identification, an important aspect of nineteenth century Europe. Smith's study helps articulate the rise of the sentiment of belonging among artists and explains the need to "return to nature". Smith emphasizes that "it may be helpful to employ concepts of 'belonging' and 'identification' to

research the relations between artists and their communities” because this type of relationship is generated from individuals and their culture. It’s an outward identification, which relates to the culture, yet inward as well, which relates to the individuals.

More than one study on performance, in previous samples of my literature review around theatre and social identity, reveal a collective attachment to culture. This notion is also analysed by Fiorella Larissa Erni in her book on Palestinians in Lebanon, whereby she writes on the construction of social identity, and analyzes the relationship of young Palestinians to their identity.

She mentions key issues related to cultural theories, and discusses the collective cultural attachment attached to the homeland and stresses the fact that culture is a dialogue between homeland and the self. She also talks about identification and posits that it’s either relational (between a student and a teacher) or categorical (between a group of people who share the same language for example). Identification is a process not a condition of the concept of culture and not as a substitute of it. As she notes, “the process of giving meaning to an identity, and of choosing an identity, is what I would call identification. The process of identification can be in negotiation and change therefore it could affect the individual and collective meanings of identity”. (Larissa Erni, 2013)

In my research, I understand the collective meaning of culture through the lens of a company that produces it and an audience that witnesses it.

Performance encapsulates complex and contradictory aspects of our identity, but all of them need to be considered as historical and sociological developments through time. Furthermore, this study informs how individuals consider certain objects or attitudes as part of a collective identification process through time, which brings me to discuss the configuration of a nation through Ketty Wong's work. In "Who's National Music? Identity, Mestizaje, and Migration in Ecuador," Wong explains the term *música nacional* or national music and relates the musical symbols to the concept of national identity. The recent focuses on the kinds of Ecuadorian music that people refer to as national music, the disparities between social groups in terms of who uses *música nacional* and what are the ramifications of these differences.

She investigates the attitudes of people towards what they identify as national music and "how different social groups envision the ethnic and racial configuration of the nation". In Lebanese sociological studies, Naseem Mohammad Ferdowsi has also contributed to notions of Lebanese identification. His thesis is related to multi-ethnic Lebanese self-identification and the negotiation of belonging. He writes on multi-ethnic individuals living in Lebanon and their division in society in terms of politics and sect. He also talks about the perception of others in the formation of the self and how a mixed-ethnic person is identified. He challenges notions of belonging by questioning the way a country like Lebanon is living with displaced people, refugees, and nationals with multi-ethnic diversities in a small territory whilst negotiating their integration and identification process in this society. Ferdowsi's aim is to negotiate the notions of

Lebanese identification as related to Lebanese culture, which is the basis of my research.

In this chapter of my research, I have examined works that focus on art and Lebanese culture to visualize the similarities of arguments that I am presenting throughout my research, and that can help me understand how different scholars think about research on culture and performance.

All researches advocated the meaning-making of art tools –whether music, theatre or performance- related to identity. For instance, as already noted, Naoko-Pilgrim examined how performance is usually an arena of analysis for the examination of two areas of identification: gender and race. I overlap the examination of gender and race to provide a wider analysis of Lebanese culture using performance.

The theoretical perspectives come from area studies, such as sociological, anthropological perspectives over theatre, and Middle Eastern studies that highlight the study of culture in literary analysis. These relate more than other fields of study to life experiences, like Khattab's street analysis of Cairo. Khattab says, "A theatrical performance is an imaginary world that viewers relate to from their own life experiences. There is a line that connects this imaginary with the realities that individuals live." Street performance creates the link between both imaginary and real worlds and claims public space as a space of both resistance and laughter to the artists' intentions. Her approach to street art focuses on the performing body, which I also do in my analysis of the sensory experience. Khattab also focuses on disciplining the body through a Foucauldian analysis through different ways of discipline. However, playing

is for communicating and her audience analysis wasn't enough for her to complete the sensory experience. This study aims at going further by examining the perception of Caracalla in Lebanon from an audience's perspective.

## **B. Theory**

My aim is to engage with theories of multi-sensory culture (seeing and light, hearing and sound) and communicative action, both part of cultural studies, and theories of audiences, publics and spectacle and interrelate them to cultural globalization. These varied approaches are a critical construct to performance and media studies as they engage in all the elements that constitute a performance. To borrow a sentence from Habermas, how is Caracalla creating a specific “communicative action plan”? I will explain more using cultural theory.

### ***1. Cultural studies: Sensory Experience***

The sensory experience on stage is a way of thinking multisensory in cultural studies. The visual culture defined by Laura Marks is a vehicle for knowledge (2008), which gives rise to a visual unconsciousness of traditional dancing techniques incorporated in one's mind. I use this theory to understand the senses of both dancers and students while participating and seeing a performance.

In transcendental philosophy, knowledge must be emancipated from the senses, therefore aesthetic learning is subjective and particular to an individual truth (Marks, 2008). Analogical to Marks' description of smell as a medium of shared knowledge,

seeing and hearing are essential components of the performance's understanding, effectively divided into three parts.

The first part is the action itself "to see" and "to hear"; it consists of the realization of the cultural industry and its decoding among the audience. The second part is "to associate" the shows to an "ideal semantic window" of perceiving visuality as a significant communication method. The third part is "to know" the signifying spectrum that lies behind the visuals, hence operate across the material to reach the symbolic, "populate the imaginary" and later lodge in a "sensuous unconscious" or become sensually inherent into one's feelings. One after the other, these processes are culturally analyzed to create either emotionally intense experiences or repressive experiences. After watching Caracalla on stage, the audience is brought closer to the materialistic aesthetics in the performance per se.

By projecting Lebanese culture on stage, it may be easier for Caracalla to deliver it as a commodity to the senses of the audience. Commodification can be for Caracalla the desired cultural objects that audiences want to see. These appear through intensified cultural objects (magic lantern, or abayas) then create a social nature that constitute the basis of communication between Caracalla and its international audience. Adorning the stage not only provides a means of connection but it may also exclude certain groups for specific contexts; in this case, it may assert a group's identity, tastes and values.

Frederick Bailey treats performance as a *metamodel*, used to access the models people use to construct their world and to describe how they understand it; therefore, performance constitutes a part of culture redefined in sensory ways. Culture is projected

on Caracalla's stage and intercepted through the senses. Hall agrees that cultural practices are "interwoven with all social practices and through those practices, [...] the activity through which men and women make their own history" (Hall, 1997). Hence, the use of sensory analysis as a theoretical perspective linked to performance is at the heart of contestations between art, culture and social psychology.

In conversation with sensory culture, cultural studies largely integrate sociology, anthropology, arts, politics and other humanities subjects that interrogate the relation between identification and performance and creating interdisciplinary thinking for the viewers. According to Clifford Geertz, the interrelation between anthropological thinking and drama analogy is highly visible within research on performance studies. To delve more into other cultural studies theories, I talk about expression theory, part of cultural anthropology, and follow an equation that tests the understanding of culture among spectators. I will use this theory to explain how Caracalla dance is an act of communication that intervenes in the notion of culture in Lebanon.

## ***2. Cultural Studies: Expression Theory and Communicative Action Plan***

Drawing on multiple approaches of expression, I aim at using first Jürgen Habermas' concept of communicative action (1981). His conclusions mention how, in order to grasp objects, events and feelings, we need to give them a certain meaning. Conventions and shared codes bring forward a collective experience. In this study, I add that communicating human feelings should be transmitted through the dancers and the

cultural objects on stage because they constitute the common visual code for the audience. The sensory experience takes a continuous dimension here.

In fact, what Caracalla aims at doing is applying this Habermas-related equation: X is a [cultural] dance only if the dancer communicates S to the spectator via bodily movement. Caracalla is hence a cultural dance only if dancers communicate cultural values to the spectators via bodily movements and use of stage. This equation stresses on the importance of dancers as providers of codes of communication.

If we add sentiments as a sense of transmission encompassing propositional senses, truth and culture, the Habermas interpretation becomes a learning process that expands to what is the theoretical task of exploring the senses. From this basis, Habermas discusses communicative theory as a renewal of cultural knowledge through mutual understandings on codes of communication, which also renews the bonds between collectives arising from the structural and institutional points of interest. The question of whether dancers can take part in this communicative theory is also elaborated by the analysis of the students.

The complexity of relating basic systems of communication to action theory can be limited to commodity production which is defined, according to Habermas, as purposive rationality. Originally, purposive rationality was a concept discussed by Max Weber. He related it to the expectations about the behaviour of human beings. These expectations orient the person to pursue well-rationalized actions.

Dance, as a kinesthetic art, is learned and practiced by dancers. For Weber and Habermas, the question is whether should dancers restrict their footsteps to a system of expression common to Lebanese tradition?

Caracalla's dancers base their footwork on western techniques (based on Martha Graham's style) but adapt them to the Lebanese music in Caracalla's shows. Habermas' intentions are then clearly applied. Dancers are using common ways of expression to understand Lebanese consensus of traditional dancing techniques. This form of communicative action for Habermas is defined as a dramaturgical action that prompts experiences to be authentic and sincere for the audience. Through the creation of art, the artist expresses feelings which clarify the artistic act originally thought of. Expression and communication become the art intended.

Throughout my study, I watched YouTube videos to be able to find common footsteps of the dancers. Dancers' expressions should not only be analyzed through interviews, they must be seen. I watched all the videos of Caracalla's YouTube page featuring small episodes from different performances. Here, I reflect on the definition of correctness in the steps performed and question how dance, action and culture are interrelated.

The communicative action is a principle of cultural studies, testing the reception of Caracalla's performances among the students. Relating this idea to the sensory culture, Lebanese cultural products mediatized through Caracalla's stage may or may not communicate S to the spectators via bodily movements.

Culture, studied by anthropologists, is a complex phenomenon. It includes “knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871) which leads us to study the place of culture in performance.

### ***3. Cultural studies: The place of culture in performance***

Cultural studies influence different approaches relevant to this research. Douglas Kellner argues that culture in a post-modern perspective becomes more and more fragile, claiming it to be an illusion, a “dispersion of the subject of modernity”. “A postmodern cultural theory should rest content to describe the surface or forms of cultural texts, rather than seeking meanings or significance”. (Kellner, 1995, p.236) Media culture is consequently seen as a site of implosion of culture and fragmentation of the subject (Kellner, 1995). However, the examination of media products in Lebanon does not neglect the exploration of culture, on the contrary, it studies it through the audience. It is interesting to research performance studies especially with Caracalla’s cultural presence within the art scene in Lebanon because of their hypothesis about the performance of Lebanese culture on stage and their purgatory meaning attributed to each performance.

Caracalla is challenging the post-modern approach to culture, which was reiterated by Kellner earlier; culture in a post-modern perspective becomes more and more fragile, claiming it to be an illusion. However, performance becomes a “unifying

mode of the postmodern” (Benamou, 1977) which gathers all the folkloric expressions of a culture such as oral traditions, folk dance, celebrations.

This research advocates cultural studies related to both modern and postmodern analysis that investigates in the image and meanings of cultural performance. The place of culture in a multi-perspectival-cultural-studies is discussed by Kellner (1995):

To capture the full perspective of the texts of media culture, in this case, the performance, one needs to view them from the perspectives of gender, race and class. I am suggesting the continuation to a third methodology that will combine different perspectives of research by students’ critical perspectives on the place of Lebanese culture within Caracalla; that is, theoretically, the place of culture within performances.

According to Ien Ang, the postmodern relation to media audiences has been too important to be ignored, especially at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She defines postmodernism as “a heightened sense of permanent and pervasive cultural contradiction” constituting an intense postmodern “structure of feeling”, which is related to an intensified sensory experience. Since media tools have been exhaustively post-modernized, it is also important to understand audiences in such a way.

#### ***4. Audience Research***

Audience-related practices need to be researched. Their presence has been naturalized among media research in cultural studies. The process of analysis is conceptualized in a collective not individual process, contrary to how Ang defines the act of viewing in the postmodern era.

The non-profoundness of performance consumption in everyday life is precisely its way of being embedded among the audience. In other words, performance is ephemeral; it doesn't happen every day, contrary to watching television or reading the news. Therefore, its impact has a double-edged effect: either to attract the audience or not.

The performance-audience relationship starts with a psychological preference for certain themes, such as picking a television show that one prefers. People in post-modern mediatized societies consider performance as an entertainment category that will not be recurrent many times. In addition, below is an equation of audience-performance relationship, reflected throughout this study:

“People are complex and contradictory, mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory, therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture”.

This equation reflects the way both audience and performers will produce complex analysis about one entertainment or performance and will understand it in different ways. Audience research needs to be analysed through cultural and artistic perspectives.

Ang amplifies her study on audience analysis by clarifying that “the popular is implicated in the hegemonic”, which appears in its political liaisons to the cultural, part of an accelerated system of globalization. Hegemonic celebration tends to push “audience groups to construct their own meanings and thus their own local cultures and identities” however, in Caracalla's performance, I argue that the local audience are producers of cultural practices of performativity on stage, and help Caracalla produce

what symbolizes Lebanese identification. Part of this complex environment in cultural research, audiences become producers of culture.

Culture is consequently analysed through its media reception, keeping in mind that audience activeness is different than audience empowerment in the sense of taking control over the institutional management of the performance.

### **5. *Limitation within audience research***

Limits to this study, related to audience research, have impacted the process of reception analysis. My methodology consisted of inviting 40 students at AUB to an online questionnaire administered via AUB's lime survey. Online reach was preferred among the audience because time slots for meeting in person were not convenient for all the students.

Another issue that disrupted my data collection is the non-response of the first batch of 40 AUB students. After survey activation, IRB provided me with 40 emails of random students at AUB. Their non-response validated their audience experience as a non-favored one, therefore I asked the Latino and the Hip-hop dance groups at AUB to provide me with several students interested in taking my questionnaire.

After looking at the limitations of audience research, I understand how Caracalla provides a sensory experience to its audience through another theoretical perspective: Multi-sensory culture (seeing and light, hearing and sound).

The research has been analysed through the frameworks of cultural studies and audience research. Caracalla also provides a sensory experience to its audience, through

its dancers on stage. This constitutes a visual commodity to the senses that takes part of the transnational media system. I argue that the notion of culture has become remodelled through performance.

### **C. Methodology**

The following section provides the methodologies used to provide a comprehensive understanding of performance, cultural studies and culture in relation to media studies. This research employs two methods of analysis, key to its outcome: The method analysing Caracalla in the Lebanese media, that will be discussed in the analysis section thoroughly and the distribution of questionnaires among AUB students for reception analysis, also coupled to the in-depth interviews performed with both Caracalla members and dancers.

#### ***1. Questionnaire***

This research also uses an online questionnaire given to 40 AUB Lebanese undergraduate and graduate students while engaging them with short excerpts of Caracalla: *The Villager's Opera* (2009) and *Sailing the Silk Road* (2017). The questionnaire addresses issues of culture and its relation to visual culture. It also dissects the notion of performance within the framework of identification and culture among students.

Most questions were as multiple choice and open-ended question formats that call upon students' thoughts on dance and identification in Lebanon. Martin Bulmer

(2004) argues that a questionnaire principally measures the social and behavioral aspects of expressed thoughts towards a certain subject through attitude scale questions. In this case, the questions measure the scale of identification of a Lebanese student to Caracalla. The attitude scale questions highlight the social attitudes of a single individual.

While the way that a question is constructed may influence the readers' thoughts, the question wording needs to be formulated differently for a same idea to affirm the reader's verbal response; in fact, the question may be elaborated around the same idea but in a negative and positive manner to effectively confirm the same symbolic response. The questions construction process was influenced out of personal experience in performance and from readings related to performance studies.

The formal questionnaire technique proceeds by verbalizing the symbolic thoughts of the students; it supposes that there is a relationship between the "non-symbolic" and the symbolic behavior or the action (Bulmer, 2004). The questions are not generalized, they are targeted to the research's approach to viewer's feeling and belonging to Caracalla's performances.

There are two types of questions: closed questions with multiple choices, and open-ended questions requiring a short paragraph. This studying approach understands that students need to formulate their own views when it comes to a subject, such as identification. Question numbers 13, 14 & 15 focus on notions of generalization to represent a conclusion of the previous closed questions. Jean Converse and Stanley Presser's (2004) theoretical approach to questionnaires is helpful to understand why the

first batch of students didn't respond to my questionnaire. They assume that the existence of a problem or a statement wouldn't necessarily request a public opinion that can be measured in return. This constraint was also elaborated in the audience research section and will be mentioned in the methodological limitation section.

Cicourel (2004) argues that fixed-choice questionnaires are adequate for obtaining factual and precise data and extrapolate them into fixed-choice answers. Qualitative data is transformed into a quantitative one. There are 13 fixed-choice questions in the questionnaire ranging the same 5 answers: 1 being not at all, 2 being somehow, 3 being neutral, 4 being yes to an extent, 5 definitely yes. It is important to answer to guarantee the complete response to the questionnaire, yet 6 out of 26 respondents did not complete the survey to the end.

## ***2. Methodological Limitations***

One must also acknowledge that this study doesn't take into consideration the whole portfolio of Caracalla's shows and doesn't introduce them to the students through the questionnaire. The selection of two videos to be watched by the students was extracted from YouTube channel's public videos about Caracalla. The videos are brief episodes of "The villager's opera" and "Sailing the Silk Road" which are a clear sequence of two different shows, not only an advertisement of Caracalla's company.

What could have been more beneficial as a methodology is the organization of a focus group that would allow to share the complexities of the media environment interrelated with performance studies. Focus groups could also be organized in a larger

setting than AUB and could encompass more individuals rather than students only.

However, I didn't think that this methodology would succeed because people may not agree to gather in the same timing.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS

This section examines Caracalla's messages drawing from the theoretical ideas of cultural studies (multisensory experience and communicative action), audience research, and the place of culture located in performance studies.

As Gabriele Brandstetter elaborates in her book on dance and theory, it is best to “interrogate aesthetic models representing aesthetics that stand in a special relationship to dance and dance discourses –and can be considered part of the history of reflection on this relationship- instead of taking historical approaches to concepts and discourses on the relationship between dance and theory”. (Brandstetter, 2013)

This section focuses on three aesthetic models: first, the examination of articles around Caracalla's latest performance called “*Sailing the Silk Road*”. This method will allow me to understand how Caracalla is seen in the Lebanese media, and whether media is associating it to a cultural institution or not. Secondly, I analyze interviews with dancers to explore whether dancers attribute to Caracalla its cultural attachment; and thirdly, I analyse the responses to the surveys sent to AUB students in order to understand their views on Caracalla.

#### **A. “Sailing the Silk Road” in the media**

Sailing the Silk Road is the road that Timor, a young tourist visiting Baalback, the city of the Sun, took from Lebanon to the East to explain the origins of a medallion held by

God Jupiter. The analysis of this performance will be concentrated on the articles that Lebanese media have written about it, rather than the performance itself, to establish the role of media vis-à-vis Lebanese culture.

In the context of Lebanese media, the articles examined were in English and French. The Arabic articles weren't elaborated as the other articles. They just consisted of delimiting the date and timings of the shows and didn't review the performance.<sup>3</sup> Here, I explore the media production of articles confined to the notion of cultural visibility. By examining Lebanese newspapers, it is evident that Caracalla acquired an ephemeral visibility during the times of its live diffusion in Lebanon. Lebanese newspapers such as *L'Orient Le Jour* and *Daily Star*, and international ones such as *Xin Hua* net and *CCTV* promoted the Silk Road initiative by President Xi Jinping through their articles on *Sailing The Silk Road*.

Through the examination of different articles, all the samples engage with culture as Caracalla's primary attribute. Articles constructed their message around the description of the play. Two articles are thoroughly examined to see the media responses of "*Sailing the Silk Road*" in that context: The Daily Star "[Dancing down the Silk Road](#)", by Susannah Walden, and *L'Orient le jour*, "[Un conte bleu de Caracalla piquet de danses exotiques](#)" by Edgard Davidian.

There are an abundance of adjectives describing the scenography, the costumes, video effects and sound on stage labelled as a "dramatic scenery". The articles denote

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<sup>3</sup> I conducted a translation into English to perform the analysis of this section.

the encounters of Eastern cultures together which the theme of the *Silk Road* explicitly signaled as part of the title of the article of the *Daily Star*. These elements are part of a “grandiose” theme chosen by Caracalla for their performance where they also reiterate Marks’ (2008) visual culture as a vehicle for social knowledge. The idea of a clear language design related to identification is visible in the French article which also recognizes the theatricality of Caracalla by highlighting common features with the English one, such as the description of the costumes. There’s a clear admiration for the performance on stage by making the reader imagine the visual footages and by also posting photos of some scenes.

I argue that the articles contribute in establishing an awareness of Caracalla as part of Lebanese culture but do not express it. Media recognize the importance that audiences should belong to a certain national culture especially by having a precise meaning of what culture means. The articles refer to culture as a collective property recognized by the sensory experience of the “audiences” or students, and significant to many of them. The articles necessarily invoke an aspect of national identification which is also argued by Herder (1965) as “the mobilization of the techniques and cultural resources that create a shared representation of the nation”. (p.48)

However, when assessing Caracalla’s performances through online articles, the in-depth analysis on performance is not observed here, which means that they are limited by the description of the play. I elaborate that media reporting is not a dominant methodology in terms of performance analysis for Caracalla -and this notion may be extrapolated to other performances in Lebanon as well- but contributes in the general

description of Caracalla's branding. Cultural analysis in Lebanese media is subject to restrictive description during the release time of the shows. The narrative of national culture is still very limited in the content of the articles as well as any other narrative.

According to Ross Poole (1999), two pillars of national culture can be examined: inescapability, and the richness of the cultural resources that form the national community.

Based on the articles read, what are defined as inescapable are the commodities on the stage in a direct relation to culture such as the costumes and the décor. The latter are used in the definition of culture and folklore.

Like oral histories, a national performance is an important source of traditional folklore; the *finale* showcases the primordial attachments that both the public and the performer elaborate. It involves the traditional Dabke dance, but it also involves the celebration and unity that Caracalla is trying to promote about Lebanon, which is also "inescapable" in every show. By completing a traditional closure act on stage, Caracalla sees the final Dabke scene as a symbol of "harmonious" end that refers to the Lebanese wide interest of creating a new Lebanon through the unity of its talents.

Caracalla also privileges the cultural heritage of Lebanon by "implicating" the audience to take part of the performances. In fact, I see that Timor is represented in the articles as the son of the "hero of civilization" in this case every citizen as the "hero of Lebanon", preserving his/her "country's place in the world". The articles emphasize on the aspect where he is asked to make sacrifices for his nations and to understand the values embodied in it.

The first methodology is the monitoring of media's impression of Caracalla. The second methodology used is the analysis of key informant interviews with three dancers, who can also provide me with their understanding of their "Caracalla experience".

## **B. Interviews with the dancers**

As previously mentioned, dancers understand the Lebanese consensus through traditional dancing techniques. Through Habermas' perspective on communicative action, dancers make their lived experiences at Caracalla meaningful. In fact, drawing from my interviews with the dancers. The main ballerina of the troupe, Tatiana Taran, from Ukraine, believes that:

"After three years, I love Ballet, but I like something more. I couldn't express myself through ballet, I couldn't go outside of the lines of ballet. Caracalla gave me something more, a new style".

Muhannad from Syria joined Caracalla at a later stage. He started dancing in Syria and came to Lebanon in 2009 to audition for Caracalla. He says that when he joined Caracalla, he *"learned the culture of dance which is far more important, which feeds you, and gives you the movement, the soul to perform the show"*.

It is interesting to note that the troupe that attempts to celebrate Lebanese culture is made up of non-Lebanese dancers and is inspired by western techniques. While commenting on this notion with the dancers, they, along with Ivan, criticized the Lebanese system for not producing a Lebanese national dance school that could potentially graduate professional dancers, as Ivan aims at finding. Moreover, they noted

that there is no bachelor's degree in dance history and practice, which then denies people to be fully committed to dancing.

It is clear that the dancers perceive Caracalla as a significant transcending institution within their lived reality. Dancers learn the rules of a "good dancer" on stage, which include the perfection of their techniques, their knowledge about dance in general and about "baladi" dance in particular.

I consider them an important foundation of the Caracalla company because they embody three senses as part of a sensory experience: the visual with their costumes, the auditive and the sensation when they are dancing on stage. I argue that the sensory experience on stage is primarily acquired by the dancers and then creates the media content that becomes a valuable transnational literacy tool affecting both the audience and the Lebanese culture, part of Habermas' idea on communicative action. The question of culture is examined through the lens of the dancers through my in-depth interviews with them.

According to Tatiana Taran, the representation of national culture in the dance scene emanates from Caracalla. She looks at the authentic culture that Caracalla expresses through its entertainment and research procedures. She says: "Caracalla brought the art in this country. Only Caracalla brought the art of dance to Lebanon but also is part of the Lebanon we know". For instance, the fact of having many nationalities of dancers on stage expresses the diverse environment that Lebanon symbolizes in terms of sects and distinctive minorities.

Hagerstrand (1986) supposes that the more media highlight a distinct place and its way of life within a national output, the more potential of the media to contribute to cultural identity, and Tatiana's answers assess Caracalla through categories of thought related to nationalism, dance education, the particular-milieu that Lebanon represents for dancing and vice versa. She explains the reality of dancers who participate in the way Caracalla creates a communicative action plan -through multi-sensory abilities- on stage.

As for the dancer Cherine Ghandour, who is also a student at AUB, she points out that "the mutual relationship between the dancers and the stage taught me a lot about the heritage and culture of Lebanon". In fact, she thinks that dancers provide the cultural attachment that constitutes Caracalla's communication strategy. She applies the set of movements and imagines the described set of cultural "*pas*" (or moves) as a reason for normative cultural integration.

Cherine's expression on stage is a transformative act from self-expression to a cultural substance of dance.

Finally, the last discussion with Mohamad highlighted the importance of referring to Caracalla whenever someone aims to contract him for a private show. Ownership to the original cultural institution reinforces the solidarity that dancers feel towards their company in order to show it to their audiences and to their teams. Mohamad emphasizes the value of his choice in all given performances and perspectives.

Caracalla represents for him a sponsor for his stay in Lebanon, knowing that the Syrian refugee crisis has forced the Syrian population in Lebanon to demonstrate the intentions of their stays. In fact, the surveillance of refugees in Lebanon is secured through their sponsorship, their working activities and papers presented to the Lebanese government and Caracalla is a go-to provider in that sense.

Dancers bring forward three important criteria, all of which participate in forming Caracalla's communicative action plan:

Firstly, the main discourse that dancers adopt is considering the institution of Caracalla as an artistic group that participates in entertainment consumption while at the same time, being an institution that produces a body of ideas relative to Lebanese society. Through its dependence on the dancers, Caracalla perpetuates its legitimacy of the visual and re-shapes the notion of dance education in Lebanon, which I saw through the discourse of the dancers, emphasizing the cultural creation and attachment between them. The ethnic composition of the dancers has been already reiterated as a symbol of Lebanese diversity.

Secondly, the idea of an artistic/cultural quality is expected to maintain confidence between dancers and the institution. This regulates the "labor-intensive" trainings perceived as an inception of cultural ideology and continuous widening in some dancers' performing possibilities. Caracalla keeps pushing its dancers to perform to the best of their abilities.

Thirdly, dancers have an impact on the cultural content which is being circulated through the plays. My media research over this topic demonstrates, through the in-depth

interviews, that dancers participate in the growth of the process of culture and the communicative plan of Caracalla. The promotion of “good” performances is a demanding process for the dancers; it requires their diligent attention to all details which reinforces at the same time the commitment to a “Caracalla identity” as mentioned by Mohamad. This section enables me to go forward with the idea that bodies don’t belong to a certain culture. Bodies learn intercultural dialogue from the transnational and global exchange in the world of dancing.

My argument contradicts some students’ perspectives. However, if we imagine the stage of Caracalla being solely Ukrainian dancers, it would disturb the traditional gaze of cultural dialogue with the audience and harden the fluidity of exchange between the viewer and the performer.

I had previously argued that the cultural construction of culture is formed by the audience itself, but dancers also participate in the transnational images that Caracalla aims at creating about Lebanon. The dancers’ appearance on stage constitute a necessary bonding between cultural communities in Lebanon, which maintains a national dialogue at the level of entertainment, and performances.

Caracalla’s added value claims to take the western techniques of dancing and apply them through the dancers. The cultural imposition of the West is an important point that mixes culture and globalization, keen for students who perceive globalized techniques as not fulfilling the performance’s search for national culture.

After this thorough look at media’s portrayal of Caracalla and through my interviews with the dancers, I now understand Caracalla’s institution more. So far, I

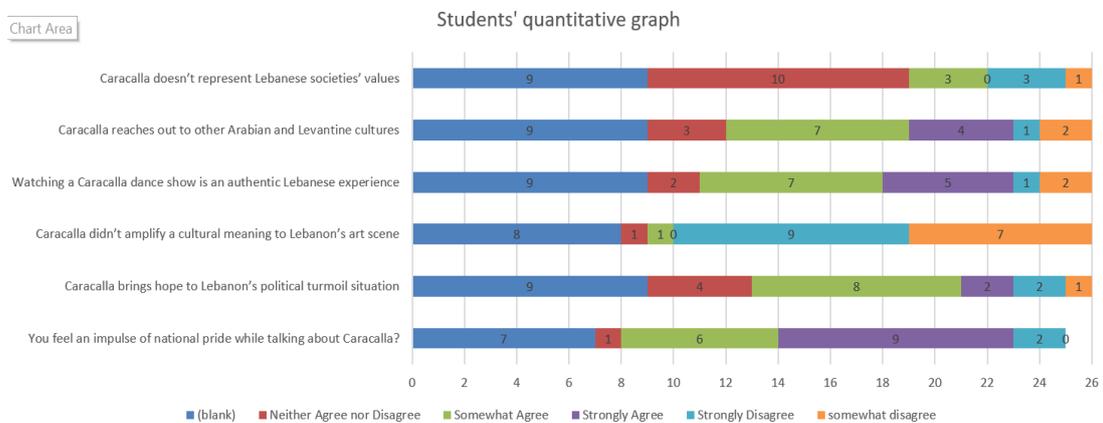
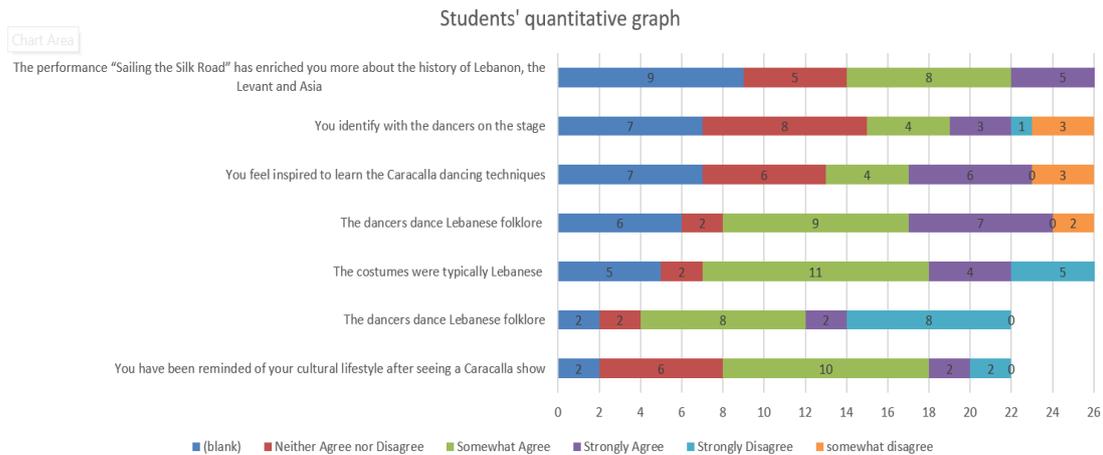
have examined the dancers' visibility on stage and their intentions of relating dance and culture on stage, I also explored the articles describing Caracalla's performance. It is now necessary to look at another medium by which performance is judged. To do so, I analyse the results of a survey conducted among 40 AUB students in relation to the topic of culture and identity.

### **C. Students' surveys**

Originally, 40 students were invited to take the survey. However, 26 responded only after sending a gentle reminder. Notably 7 students did not complete the survey until the end with some of them stopping at the first question, others at the penultimate question.

Here, I borrow Ien Ang's perspective on audience research to be able to theorize the responses of the "audiences" or students in this study. Contrary to what Ang believes, the students form a "comprehensible social entity" generally showing acceptance to Caracalla's relation to Lebanese culture. I had previously argued that audience research is essentially viewed as a marking reference point for Caracalla, central in creating its media performances. Here, I consider the answers of 26 students which describe results that participate in this idea.

The students somewhat agree that the dancers dance Lebanese folklore when on stage, which reminds them of Lebanon's cultural lifestyle. To further develop their responses, it would be better to use graphic forms to supplement my analysis.



As seen in the graphs, 42% percent of the students agree that they have been reminded of their cultural lifestyle after watching a Caracalla show, that the costumes were typically Lebanese and that the dancers dance Lebanese folklore. This concludes that the transmittable image, generated by Caracalla, shows an effective sociological interaction between culture and performance.

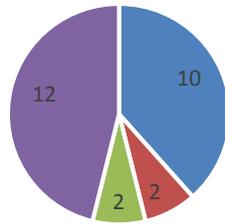
Students also feel strongly inspired to both learn Caracalla dancing techniques after seeing a show and introduce Caracalla as a national pride of Lebanon when talking about it. Knowing that they don't identify with the dancers on stage, Caracalla still

amplifies for them a cultural meaning to Lebanon's art scene. Watching a Caracalla show becomes an authentic Lebanese experience for them. Shared attributes such as Arabic language, costumes and songs were recognized by the students as a sense of inclusivity in the "Caracalla experience", and therefore they rated it as an authentic Lebanese experience. Cultural form finds articulation through the students' answers. Knowing that Caracalla is an intercultural performance, students raise a point relevant to performance's interrelation to globalization. They claim that performance reflects past identity, however the intercultural performance of everyday life shows that it is very much of the present. It's a hybrid fusion between Lebanese culture, western techniques and creators determined to privatize scenarios of culture.

"The new global culture" as Gómez-Peña puts it, is to un-distinguish global entertainment from cultural apparatuses transforming performances into cultural corporations. (Gómez-Peña, 2001)

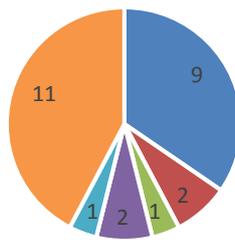
In addition, the students encourage Caracalla to bring hope for Lebanon's political turmoil. The survey shows the students' neutrality with regards to Caracalla's representation of Lebanon's social values. What is also remarkable is the alignment between students' strong disagreement and agreement concerning the dancers on stage. Until now, the students are generally satisfied with Caracalla's performances situating it as a "very professional" and "enjoyable to watch" company. Correspondingly, they have also discussed their opinions on the types of art that they identify the most as Lebanese. Below are qualitative data extracted from the students' answers.

Do you think that Caracalla brings a cultural national support to Lebanon?



■ yes ■ no ■ neither disagree nor agree ■ Blank

To which type of art do you identify the most?



■ dabke ■ music ■ Arabic poetry ■ Cuisine ■ dance ■ Blank

The answers narrate the reference of “dabke” with a recurrence of 9 responses. As for the other responses, to which students have denoted as a reference to national art are “the art of cooking”, “Arabic poetry”, “music such as Fairouz, Wadih El Safi”. They also share their agreement on Caracalla’s embodiment of Lebanese national identity. These practices of cultural nationalism are the ideal performance discourses of Lebanese students. They offer an assimilation of cultural and ethnic symbols, such as the art of cooking that limits food to cultural preservation. It is interesting to note that

dabke is isolated from the dance category even though it is a dance. Dabke seems to be in the eyes of the students a particular aspect of Lebanese culture.

The most central of information collection comes with the last question in the survey. I ask the students on the themes of dance, heritage and identification, and how they could expand on them. In assessing their answers, here are the key findings:

Heritage and identification are two interrelated themes that should always be present in students' lifestyles. To preserve them, students will need to shift back to their "cultural values" and dancing could be an efficient way of reminding them of heritage and nationalism, knowing that Lebanon is heavily influenced by "western soft power". They agree that dabke typically represents Lebanese culture and creates a sense of national pride; in fact, a student reiterated that "Dance and dabke is part of you being Lebanese". The expression of nationalism is proportionally distributed through dabke dancers and therefore there are two basic variants when talking about dance: dabke and the other dances.

According to this analysis, dance and heritage are not detached. This feedback was drawn from one answer in particular:

"I think of a cultural tradition that will not wither away. Our heritage is a way to identify ourselves as Lebanese. Caracalla becomes part of the identity portrayed to the Arab world and beyond. They form a major part of our culture and they make it unique. It is almost unthinkable to identify as Lebanese without knowing your dances."

Through the survey, students voiced recommendations concerning dance, identification and globalization related to Lebanese culture:

“The dancing community is starting to grow in Lebanon...which is of course something beneficial for our heritage ... yet still some people don’t accept dance as one of the identifications of the Lebanese identity”.

“It is sad that as people with great notion of identity and with the strong identity that we have, we are unable to transmit to younger generations or even connect to our inner Lebanese personality due to what we are surrounded with relating to globalization”.

“Dance is a great part of our heritage and key indicator to that is the Lebanese Dabke that Lebanese people are dancing abroad. I just wish that people in Lebanon would embrace it as well”.

This survey allows me to understand how students coming from cross-cultural boundaries, such as different religions, genders, ethnicities, speak about Caracalla. I continue by listing answers of the students, related to the sensory experience:

“Yes. Caracalla represents a form of art that surpasses all time and space in the Arab world, including Lebanon. During these politically stressful times, Caracalla stands tall and portrays a professional artistic image of what the country's heritage was and still is to all generations. There is a national pride that comes with watching Caracalla perform the way they do.”

Another student emphasized the costumes by saying “With the costumes and choreography, Caracalla projects an authentic image of our true Lebanese culture in times where new western practices are invading Lebanon, modernizing its culture, and detaching new generations from their roots”.

Caracalla's connection to culture is seen by the students as a connection to the past, which also represent the students' perception to Lebanese culture. Although a performance may not have a lasting effect in someone's mind, Caracalla is committed to produce a lasting dance heritage, part of the cultural realm. At the same time, the students' experience with Caracalla risks to be gone; hence their hesitance about Caracalla's permanent attachment to Lebanese heritage and culture. This idea affirms the continuous struggle of attributing performances as a defining proclamation of culture, keen to what this study is examining.

#### **D. Integration of culture and dance**

Now I expand my study through the lens of Chee Meng Wong's analysis on dance heritage in Singaporean society. The challenge of discussing cultural assimilation through the framework of performance studies is to comprehend the different cultural standards of the students and whether that may complicate national cohesion and the rationality behind it. I consider that students overcame differences in culture through the dance representation of Caracalla to show the interaction between cultural systems of thoughts.

First, it is important to cite Anya Peterson Royce's definition of dance. It is considered as a 'rhythmic movement done for some purpose transcending utility', it differs from normal rhythmic movements because the cultural component is added to it. Here, I label dance as serving a cultural function only, differentiating its aesthetic from its folk purposes. Such decision is not supported by Anya, who specifically defines the

phenomena of dance “as an aspect of human behaviour” and should therefore be analyzed in its holistic perspective. Through this functionalist perspective, I relate the aspects of culture which are related to dance.

Based on Royce’s definition, dance’s rhythmic movements are also divided into two parts, the aesthetic and cultural part whereby these are expressions of human movements. One of the students responded to an open-ended question by saying “dance is about expression, performance, and identification. Some can argue that it’s a universal language, that all humans can relate to, on some level, while others see that matters of nationalism and even localism are conveyed.” All dancing is movement and all humans can move, therefore all humans can dance and express themselves. This explanation insinuates that the notion of dance is necessarily “a form of behavior”, as Wong says. In relating it to the interest of this thesis, and to the analysis of the students’ surveys, the attempt to find the cultural meaning of forms and shapes is to divide its essential nature of being performed “as an end to itself”.

The goal of a performance can be recognized solely as an aesthetic enjoyment. However, for the student, it is also performed as a ritual activity defining the intentional acts of a performance as sensory, communicative and necessarily cultural. The students clearly did not make a distinction between dance as a form of pleasure and its anthropological notion of cultural acts. The thoughts transmitted also highlight dance’s social function, in the wake of media studies, as a non-verbal communicative action.

To return to the earlier discussed notion of globalization and dance, dancing is considered more tribal than civilized as to students’ comment, mentioning that “we need

to preserve more our heritage and shift back to our cultural values. Dance is a good way to remind people of our heritage and nationalism, especially since Lebanon is heavily influenced by western soft power”. Here, dancing is connotated as a lesser civilized version of society’s activities; it is a cathartic way of reminding civilization that it has gone too far and needs to get back to its roots. In her book on dance, modernity and culture, Helen Thomas (1998), talks about the behavior of dance: “subculture is to dominant culture as primitive is to modern culture: a dangerous, exotic, non-rational marginal other”; however, they are both tightly interrelated to represent the past, present and the hybrid Lebanese culture.

Caracalla is a close follower of Martha Graham’s style and ideas. For Graham, “dance should not be tied to narrative, the movement should be suggestive of feelings or ideas, not a direct reflection of them, form should not be subjugated to content”. While reading her analysis on modern Americanism, I appreciate Graham’s beliefs on coinciding American culture to dance culture. Unlike Lincoln Kirstein, Graham wasn’t concerned with the establishment of modern American identity. Her intention was to establish “a dance form that would express and communicate the rhythms of American life [...] culture cannot engage its creative force towards a dance form that lacks the expressive and communicative possibilities of the shared experience of the culture”.

From this important quote, I consider two parallel ideas intertwined: performance elements, such as lighting, décor, music and costumes are equivalent to culture’s elements, such as music, dance, geographical sites. The coexistence of these elements help establishes the shared experience of culture that Graham mentioned.

Caracalla's dance as a signifying practice will enable the audience to appreciate the aesthetic visuality performed through the technique of the dancers.

My findings allow me to conclude that Caracalla constitutes a modern Lebanese dance company that is influenced by traditional and contemporary Lebanese dance trends; they introduce and discuss the language that performances use to think identification with their audience.

Dance performances are a fusion of acting and dancing styles that enact in a liminal space, a space of reflection on the past and the present, in a post-modern globalized world. As mentioned, the dancers' and students' opinions reiterate the experience of being brought up into dancing and adhering to traditional dance as a form of folk media.

This thesis aimed at discussing the representation of the traditional on stage. Is the representation really traditional? Students generally agree that Caracalla shows a real Lebanese experience on stage.

I shall now move into my conclusions and finalize thoughts of my findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

Do performances constitute a cultural experience? While analysing the process of viewing an artistic performance, I differentiated the lens of dramatization from the creators', the dancers' and the students' points of view. This study was also concerned with the media discourse around performance that helps mediate the vitality of this experience to the public.

To reinforce their discourse on culture, Caracalla restored the symbolic return to one's roots adopted through traditional costumes, meanings of the songs, and other aesthetic objects.

New transformative performance is a version of applied tradition. This sentence is what and how the dancers define the act of cultural performance which takes part of media studies' interrelationship to cultural studies keen on developing the discussions about the impact of theatre performances on audiences.

The elaboration of the analysis on Caracalla was reinforced by different theoretical perspectives.

Audience research helped in defining the phenomenon of viewing keen to be a social and a cultural practice that influences the creation of each performance. Its feedback is different than that of cinema and television viewers.

Audience research was applied through the survey, which drew the attention of the students to the visibility of Caracalla as Lebanese culture and its consideration to be a cultural apparatus.

This same visibility is argued in the sensory experience appropriated by the discourse of commodities and visual experience. The activity of viewing has enabled the cultural knowledge of the viewer to articulate the phenomenon of commodity production and assimilate cultural products as a response to globalization.

I continue my exploration of Caracalla's relation to one's notion of being Lebanese by analyzing the dancers' communicative action. The focus of this part was centered on Habermas' theoretical perspective but also through the key informant interviews conducted with three dancers. My ability to examine the relation between theatrical performance and dancers opened up to understanding the cultural way of dancing that reflected upon popular Lebanese culture. The performativity of the dancers revealed features of modern and traditional dancing that redistribute the sensible among the audience.

For performance to be understood as a component of Lebanese media studies, it had to develop a set of goals that pertain to the understanding of media theories.

The articles about Caracalla didn't argument why performance is a culturally-driven mode of expression because articles were restricted to their descriptive understanding of the play.

The discourse of culture was relatively found in terms pertaining to globalization and the approach to dance aesthetics.

While my research has been concerned with Lebanese culture through the investigation of Caracalla, there are less-elaborated areas that could have more attention in future research. Possible research could investigate the signifying practices of other performances in Lebanon as part of cultural/aesthetic dialectic. One can also refine other theoretical perspectives that could input other significances to the study such as relating performance to other theories in media studies, for example post-colonial interrelated to the cultural becoming of a certain society, and also the psychoanalytic part. In fact, one way to pursue my research is to relate performance theories to different types of analytical theories, such as orientalism, media technology necessarily tied to the post-folk media order.

The main limitations that this research faced were many. The IRB approval phase took almost a month to be completed in order to start data collection. When the surveys were active, the first batch of students were not responsive which delayed my analysis stage. The other challenge of this research was the limited use of media in terms of analysis. In other words, this thesis did not depend on media solely to examine the relationship between performance and culture. In fact, performance analysis was done through other mediums, such as surveys, interviews and theoretical analysis. A relation to media was completed when exploring articles related to Caracalla. However, due to the limited number of articles produced around this thematic in 2017, media's contribution was less visible.

What could also be further explored is the concept of modern nationalism whose founding fathers are Rousseau and Herder and could expand on previously-noted ideas such as attachment to the nation and identification.

Due to time limitation and work commitments, this study couldn't describe the performance "Sailing the Silk Road" more thoroughly. It would be interesting to discuss a certain sequence of the play in order to study the theatrical interpretation of culture. To sum up, Caracalla's performance constantly reiterates Lebanese folklore in their shows and tries to describe their attachment to it as part of reality. This study has taken the lens of a viewer, of a dancer and of the creator of performances to track the realm of culture in three different ways. It has succeeded in mediating a discourse around performance and culture with a critical examination of visibility, sensory experience and communicative action on stage. The discourses extracted through this study restate the cultural implication of Caracalla to Lebanese folklore; the discourses manifested a symbolic folk order that connote Lebanese culture.

A proto-performance is a source of impulse that gives rise to a performance (Schechner, 2002) and I think that one of the sources that strongly influence Caracalla to shape their performances are the kind of Lebanese culture they want to project.

As Jupiter declares to Timor in *Sailing the Silk Road*:

"That medallion you carry has a long story dating from Timor the Elder your ancestor... Walk with me and let me show you the past before the present washes it away... as you must preserve the values of humanity to improve the world of today; your destiny young Timor is written in glory... embrace it and don't turn your back on it!"

This thesis studied the relation between performance, Lebanese culture and forms of sensory expression. The representation of the Lebanese nation in the artistic scene and especially through Caracalla remains particularly dedicated to a certain Lebanese culture viewed as a folk experience. The increasing diversified group and the commodified objects are not enough to celebrate Lebanese culture. My discussion of Caracalla interrelates different ideas together: it is not immune to Lebanese nostalgia of pre-war days, it is also the reflection of today instead of the past.

There are several reasons for the growing importance of cultural attachment by the artists Caracalla. One was the return to the Baalbaki life, or the return to nature as Smith puts it, the simple life of Lebanese ancestors, as Ivan talked about. The other reason is the unification of Lebanon to form a modern nationalist ideology keen on developing the three senses of belonging discussed in the literature review: ownership or property in which artists belong to a certain commune; the place of origin of the artist; and where the artist senses a certain belonging with a given community. The reflection of authentic culture seems to target a specific class and a specific social stratification. The idea of identification is nationally classified; however, each institution -specifically Caracalla- creates its own site of belonging, its feeling of being Lebanese, to make it a natural virtue to others. This preoccupation is included in each show and recurrent with the Caracalla family. The return to the state of the natural was a rediscovery itself of the meaning of belonging.

## APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Caracalla's timeline

Play	Theme	Main plot	Times of interest to Lebanon
Today, Tomorrow, Yesterday (1972)	-	-	Israeli Air raid in Syria and Lebanon
Bizarre of the Miracle (1974)	-	-	Lebanese civil war about to clash
The Black Tents (1978)	-	-	During the Lebanese civil war
Shot of Glory (1980)	-	-	During the Lebanese civil war
Oriental Taming of the Shrew (Shake speare) (1982)	Love, shrew, marriage	In Italy, Katerina is the shrew, her sister Bianca is loved by Lucentio. After a series of conflicts, the ending scene	Departure of Palestinians from Lebanon Lebanon war or Operation Peace for Galilee

		shows three newly married couples: Bianca and Lucentio, Hortensio and the widow, Katerina and Petruchio. The play ends with all men marveling at how successfully Petrucho has tamed the shrew.	
Echoes (1985 ) - World Tour	-	-	Cooperation between Syria and the Lebanese National front
Oriental Midsummer Night's Dream (1990 )	Wedding, love,	Hermia. Lysander, Dimitrius, Helena, four Athenian who go on a journey of love, jealousy, hatred. Fairies of the forest try to	Taif Agreement signed

		intervene by giving them lotions of love.	
Elissa, Queen of Carthage (1995) (Tunisia)	nationalism	Carthage is a city in modern day Tunisia and Dido or Elissa was ruling over the city. She decided to sacrifice herself and stay faithful to her first husband instead of marrying Larbas, the King of Mauritani. After this self-sacrifice Dido was deified and was worshipped as long as Carthage endured. In this account, the foundation of Carthage occurred	-

		72 years before the foundation of Rome.	
Andalusia, the Lost Glory (1997) (Spain)	-	-	-
Much Ado about Nothing (1999)	love	-	-
Two Thousand and One Nights (2002)	love	Two Thousand and One Nights is a modern-day version of the classic One Thousand and One Nights, or Arabian Nights. The immortal tale of passion and the fatality of love using fantasy and the	-

		stylized Lebanese folklore.	
Knights of the Moon (2007)	-	-	Post July 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon  War between Fatah Al Islam and the Lebanese Armed Forces in Nahr Al Bared.
Zayed and the Dream (2008): (UAE)	-	Caracalla Theatre's Zayed and the Dream is a state-sponsored pageant. It celebrates the life of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the United Arab Emirates,	Military car bombing in Tripoli
The Villager's	-	-	No confidence from the Lebanese youth within

Opera! (2009 )			the political system, political strife and sectarianism
Kan Ya Ma Kan (2012):	-	-	Syrian Crisis debuted and impact towards Lebanon by welcoming refugees in the Bekaa valley and other regions
The Enchanted forest (2015)	Nationalism	The forest, home to the Cedar trees of Lebanon, was the main theme of Caracalla's show. The play was showcased in the Tannourine Cedar reserve on August 28, 2015. In the opening, a speech was given to the audience to greet	During the Syrian crisis, more migration has devastated Lebanon.

		<p>them and thank them for coming in these circumstances that Lebanon is passing through. Even though Lebanon was confronted to a turmoil of violence, Caracalla chose to express their belonging to Lebanon in Tannourine and to transform the performance into an action of peace and belief in Lebanon.</p>	
<p>Thousand and One Nights (2016) ( repetition of</p>	-	-	<p>Michel Aoun was elected president of Lebanon</p>

Two thousand and One night)			Beirut municipality elections and defeat of Beirut Madinati
Sailing the Silk Road (2017) (China and the Far East)	-	Timur sails on a journey from Baalback to Xi'an in China in order to discover the silk Road. A journey of self-discovery and international encounters.	Political instability

Appendix 2: Questions asked to the dancers:

- 1- How, when, where did you start dancing? And when did you join the Caracalla team?
- 2- (If foreigner) do you feel connected to Lebanese culture?
- 3- (If Lebanese) do you feel connected to Lebanese culture
- 4- As a Caracalla dancer, how do you describe your feeling of belonging to Lebanese culture?
- 5- Can you describe how the movements of the body are related to culture?

Appendix 3: questions for the students:

On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not at all, 2 being somehow, 3 being neutral, 4 being yes to an extent, 5 being definitely yes. To what extent did you feel that:

- 1- The costumes of Caracalla dancers on stage were typically Lebanese (refer to this link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJbRni1eq74>))
- 2- The dancers dance Lebanese folklore
- 3- You have been reminded of your culture after seeing this brief section of a Caracalla show
- 4- You feel inspired to learn the Caracalla techniques
- 5- You identify with the dancers on stage
- 6- You feel an impulse of national pride when talking about Caracalla?
- 7- Caracalla didn't amplify a cultural meaning to Lebanon's art scene
- 8- The performance "Sailing the Silk Road" has enhanced your understanding of the history of Lebanon, the Levant region and Asia broadly (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TXh0Ah13NA&feature=youtu.be>)
- 9- Caracalla brings hope to Lebanon's political turmoil
- 10- Watching a Caracalla dance show is an authentic Lebanese experience
- 11- Caracalla reaches out to other Arabian, Levantine cultures (other citizens of Arab countries may identify to Caracalla)
- 12- Caracalla doesn't represent Lebanese society's values

Open-ended questions:

13- Which type of art do you identify most as Lebanese?

14- Do you think that Caracalla is bringing cultural and national support to Lebanon and the Arab world?

15- Last thoughts about dance, heritage and identification?

Appendix 4: Questions asked to Caracalla's director Ivan

**Section 1-**Has Caracalla projected the same image of Lebanon since its creation in 1968? What did Caracalla become during the civil war? Did all the factions accept Caracalla's performance?

**Section 2-** How has Caracalla adapted Shakespeare to make it more Lebanese? What does it mean to perform Shakespeare in Lebanon? Do you "Lebanise" or "Arabise" the other plays in any ways? What does it mean in your opinion to "Lebanise" a play? How does Caracalla adapt their western-centered plays to Lebanese audiences?

**Section 3-**Being a leading institution of dancing in the Arab world, would you feel that every play caters sameness in folklore images through look-alike costumes? Why have you decided to talk about "Two Thousand and One night" while originally being called "One Thousand and One night"? How do you think Caracalla contributed to Lebanon's image here and abroad? What is Lebanese history through the lens of Caracalla's shows?

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