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RETHINKING RESOURCES: SERVICE NOMADISM ADJUSTED

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Abstract

This article is based on six years fieldwork with Kalbelia community living in the environs of Pushkar, a famous place of pilgrimage, *tīrtha*, for Hindus and a popular tourist destination, especially for foreigner backpacker travelers, situated at the edge of the Thar desert and at the foot at the outer fringes of the Aravalli mountain chain, at the centre of the western state of Rajasthan.

It will be explained how Kalbelias' traditional means of living describe a form of economic, social and cultural adaptation common to groups defined both as service nomads and as peripatetic peoples. The purpose of the present article is to show that both the definitions fit not only the past identity of Kalbelias as wandering snake charmers, but they can be still effective in describing the present of the caste and its new emerging working profile as folk dancers and musicians. It will be argued in fact that, even if in the past few years the meaning and the content of Kalbelia service nomadism have been going through a deep transformation which can be considered to be mainly a creative answer to a whole string of significant social changes occurring in Indian and Rajasthani society, Kalbelias' new occupational profile entails new forms of spatial mobility. If spatial mobility is proving to be a meaningless economic strategy as far as snake charming and begging is concerned, it is in fact yet highly effective with regard to the new professional identity of the caste. The article will deal with the way Kalbelias have been able to translate their peripatetic identity into contemporary globalized world.

Key Words: Kalbelia; Snake Charming; Tourist market; Service Nomads; Peripatetic People; *Rajasthani* Folk Dance.

This article is based on six years fieldwork with Kalbelia community living in the environs of Pushkar, a famous *tīrtha* (place of pilgrimage) for Hindus and a popular tourist destination, especially for foreigner backpacker travelers, situated at the edge of the Thar desert and at the foot at the outer fringes of the Aravalli mountain chain, at the centre of the western state of Rajasthan. Today concentrated in the Rajasthan districts of Pali, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Ajmer, Chittorghar and Udaipur, the Kalbelia caste consists of twelve exogamous clans (*gotra*) and is traditionally identified with the art of snake charming. Kalbelias consider themselves to be descendants of Kanipāv, one of the nine Nātha, the semi-divine masters of the practice of *haṭha-yoga* which inspired the *nātha-*

yogin movement, an important philosophical and religious tradition that established itself around the 12th century. Doctrines common to Vajrayāna Buddhism and Tantrism in general converge in this movement. The art of snake charming, the main social characteristic of the caste, is connected to descent from Kanipāv. There are two versions of the story explaining how Kanipāv came to practice the art (Robertson 2002: 281-288). One version has it that Kanipāv was cursed by Gorakh Nāth to carry poisonous snakes around and to use them for begging; the other one tells that Kanipāv was blessed by the god Śiva who, pleased by the former's strong faith and devotion, allowed him and his disciples to embrace the profession of snake charming¹. Memory of descent from Kanipāv also lives on in the habit of placing the term "nātha" after men's names. The same word is also used to refer to Kalbelia caste membership. In Rajasthan, in fact, there is a system of multiple naming whereby each caste can be identified by at least three names, one of which is a honorific, one demeaning or offensive and one neutral (Bharucha 2003: 57). For example, when talking within the group Kalbelias call themselves Jogi, a word used to refer to a large number of nomadic groups such as Gadolia Luhars, Kuchbandiyas and Bansdewals, all possessing specific skills thanks to which they provide the settled communities with a wide range of specialized services, of both a ritual and non-ritual nature. The word "jogī" or "yogī" is still applied very broadly (Russell-Lal 1916: 389), so much so that it can indicate both Hindu and Muslim groups able to perform functions that combine ritualistic services and other kinds of indigenous expertise (Bharucha 2003: 53). The term is also comprehensively used to refer to ascetics², above all if they practice any form of yoga. According to T. S. Randhawa, the word would include three distinct classes of persons:

one comprises the purely religious mendicants of the various Jogi orders, all Hindus. The second includes such orders as are also performers in some manner – Jogi Bharatri balladeers; Jogi Kanphatta, Jogi Kalbelia, Jogi Nath and Jodi Vadi who are snake-charmers and jugglers; Barwa or Garpagari Jogi who ward off hailstorms from standing crops; Manihari Jogi, pedlars who travel to bazaars to sell various small articles; Ritha Bikanath who prepare and sell soap-nut; Jogi Patbina who make hempen string and gunny bags for carrying grain; Jogi Ladaimar who used to hunt jackals; Nandia Jogi who drive before them a decorated, deformed ox, an animal with five legs, or some other malformation, and receive alms, the ox being trained to bless the benevolent by shaking its head and raising its leg when its master receives a gift. The third category is a miscellaneous assortment of vagabonds who live by fortune-telling, practicing exorcism and divination, being quack physicians and even cheats, taking advantage of the gullible (Randhawa 1996: 166-167).

The word "kalbelia", on the contrary, describes a more restricted endogamous group and is used by members of other castes without any particular connotations being attached to such use. "Saperā" (Briggs 1938: 59-61) is another name used to identify snake charmers in a general sense and is widespread above all outside Rajasthan. The

¹ The association between Śiva and the snake is deeply rooted in Hindu culture.

² Originally the term was related only to the *gorakhnāthī*.

term "nātha" can be also used to define, but in a honorific way, Kalbelia's caste membership.

This multiple naming system is completed with the use of the term "gypsy", mainly utilized by members of the caste to introduce themselves to foreigners. A broad digression would be necessary in order to explain how the members of the caste came to be identified by the term "gypsy" (Angelillo 2012a) but, for the purposes of the present argumentation, it will suffice to recognize in the nomadic attitude of the caste one of the elements which let the caste be included in the polythetic classification the word "gypsy" refers to (Piasere 2004: 3; Piasere 1995: 3-13).

The Hindi language offers a wide range of words conveying the meaning of nomad or wandering: the construct of Persian origin *khānābadosh*, literally "house-on-shoulder", "with house on back"; the term *pariyātak*, best glosses as "peripatetic" but also and widely used to translate the English word "tourist"; the words *yāyāvar*, *bhramaṅkāri* and *ghumakkaṛ*. Quite interestingly the name of the Banjara nomadic caste, whose members are involved in the transportation of trading items like salt and red oxide, has been also used in popular Hindi songs conveying the meaning of wandering (for example: "*dil bañjārā hai...*" from the song *Dum Dum*, soundtrack of the film *Band Baaja Baaraat*, director Maneesh Sharma, lyrics Amitabh Bhattacharya, 2010). Kalbelias, referring to their nomadic status, prefer the term *ghumakkaṛ*. Even though they have been living on the outskirts of Pushkar for approximately 20 years, the members of the Kalbelia community this article deals with³ still consider themselves to be a *ghumakkaṛ jāti*. When they are asked to recall their way of life before settling in Pushkar, they state that in the past they were used to move from place to place transporting their belongings on donkeys with the bedding and tents loaded on up-ended string cots. In an interview recorded on 11 September 2012 in Pushkar, Seshnath, a young man about 25 years old, explains that the members of his caste have always preferred to live in the jungle, "jaṅgal", far from the villages, but, in the recent past, in order to improve their life, they have started to live near built-up areas, such as cities, towns and villages. Kalbelias use the Hindi word "jaṅgal" in order to refer to any area that is not included in fixed and permanent settlements of villages or towns. Like usually Hindus do (Joseph-Kavoori 2001: 998-1009), Seshnath blames the Kaliyuga (the last of the four ages of the world) for this change in Kalbelia lifestyle, which seems to him both contrary to the rules of *dharma* and a sign of the widespread degeneration of the world. According both to the oral accounts of the members of the caste and to the few written records (Raghaviah 1968: 180-182) describing Kalbelia traditional social organization I have examined, Kalbelias moved about in small groups of twenty to thirty and did stay in each camp for a

³ Unless otherwise specified, from now on, the Kalbelias we will refer to throughout the article belong to the community living on the outskirts of Pushkar.

fortnight. They moved in small portable huts, with small reed-roofs slanting on either side being barely of three to four feet height in the central position. The wings touched the ground either side, rendering the hut snug and warm in cold weather. They made their living by taming the King Cobra and performing in the neighborhood. Even though V. Raghaviah (1968: 181) writes that they used to sell the poison extracted from the snake's fangs to medical practitioners for medicinal use, Seshnath firmly denies such a statement, explaining that the members of his caste have never – both in the past and in the present– sold or given the poison to anyone, since they fear the consequences of its misuse. Nowadays the poison is used by Kalbelias in order to produce some medicines for their personal use, such as the so-called *surmā kā patthar*: a small grey dark stone they apply inside the eye, on the surface of the eyeball, near the inferior eyelid. Kalbelias think that the *surmā kā patthar* is good for the health of eyes and is able to cure headaches and promotes a deep, dreamless sleep. They attribute to the use of this medicine the general good health of their eyes, proved, according to them, by the fact that Kalbelias, even the very old ones, never need to wear glasses. The poison is extracted from the snake at the very moment of its capture: Kalbelias, who usually catch the serpents in the jungle, trap the animal by a stick placed across the back of its head and press to the ground. Then, keeping the head of the snake pressed between the thumb and the index finger, they empty out the two poison sacs placed under its mouth. Contrary to what I came to know reading the few available books on this subject (Robertson 2002; Raghaviah 1968), Kalbelia men I talked to always regularly stated that they do not remove permanently the poison sacs and that it takes about six months for the poison to be produced again. Once caught the snake is kept for no longer than two months and an half: after this period the snake is released on some wasteland outside the town or in the fields where it can find mice to eat, or else in the forest. During its captivity, the snake is fed twice a week with cold milk, raw meat, curd and raw eggs. Kalbelias keep their snakes in small, round baskets, one for each serpent, which they also use to carry the animals outside their settlement.

Several members of the Kalbelia community still earn their living as snake charmers. In order to point out how snake charming can be a money-earning occupation it is necessary to understand the place that snakes and snake belief occupy in Hindu religion and social life. Hindus associate cobras with the god Śiva and revere them on that account. In fact the snake is regarded by many communities, especially in rural areas, as the embodiment of God, and Kalbelias "are regarded as the priests of snake" (Bharucha 2003: 53). They are able to attract donations with a creature which to Hindu people is rich in religious symbolism. Moreover, cobras are thought to grant fertility to barren women and, according to Asutosh Bhattacharyya (1965), the serpent's cult is widely distributed all over India. Therefore snake charming, before being a permanent

element of western imagery of India, is an activity loaded with spiritual and devotional meanings. The Kalbelias living near Pushkar catch their poisonous snakes in the surroundings of the holy town: not all the men of the community actually catch the snakes themselves, so the majority of them borrow the serpents from the few expert Kalbelias able to do it, in order to beg as snake-charmers. It happens that Kalbelias are asked to remove snakes from houses, hotels, etc., but basically snake charming is related to begging, and begging, with or without snakes, is still the main daily activity for the greatest part of the members of the Kalbelia community. Being Pushkar both a *tīrtha* and a touristic place, the snake charmers attract donations not only from Hindu pilgrims but also from tourists, for whom snake-charmers are an essential part of the Indian folklore. As beggars, Kalbelias beg in a guise appropriate to the society they live in: when begging, with or without the cobra, they usually wear the ochre color of renunciators in order to be identified with ascetics and attract more donations. Kalbelias go out in the streets masquerading as ascetics: even women practice this deception and while in the past the female members of the caste were not allowed to carry snakes and to beg as snake-charmers, today even they practice snake charming. In order to beg as snake-charmers or pretending to be *sadhu*-s, Kalbelias usually leave the camp where they live early in the morning and through a 30-40 minutes walking they reach Pushkar's main street, where they spend almost the whole day, coming back home around 4 in the afternoon. Their method of begging as snake-charmer is to sit in a shady corner of the street and to call the passers-by, inviting them, especially foreigner tourists, to take a picture of the animal and to put a donation in the basket where the snake is kept. In order to attract people, snake-charmers remove the lid of the basket and show the animal to the public, encouraging the serpent to move and to stand up. The expression used by the members of the caste to describe this part of their performance as snake charmers is "sāmp ko nacānā", "to cause the snake to dance". If people finally approach, the snake-charmer urges them to touch the snake or to take a picture with the animal. As long as Indian pilgrims or Rajasthani people are concerned, Kalbelias try to stimulate their generosity reminding them the divine status of the snake and as soon as a donation is offered, they shower the giver with any kind of blessings. As far as the snake-charmers of the Kalbelia community living in Pushkar are concerned, their musical instrument, the *pūṁgī*, is almost never used in this kind of performance. Nevertheless the snake charmers who work in exclusively tourist contexts, such as the ones who perform in heritage hotels or near monuments, forts and other similar tourist attractions, accomplish their traditional occupation by playing strains on the *pūṁgī*. This musical instrument, a sort of double clarinet inserted into a gourd reservoir, is, in fact, an element of snake charming which in tourist imagination seems to be as important as the snake itself. When they perform as snake charmers for a public of tourists, Kalbelias wear a set of dresses

that always includes a colorful turban, a long *kurtā* and a *luṅgī*. Wearing this kind of traditional Indian clothes, Kalbelias try to satisfy what they think the tourist expectations are. For the same sort of working strategy, when they beg in the roads of Pushkar, they never take with them their cellphones as, in their opinion, these do not suit neither the image of poor people nor that of ascetics. In general, Kalbelias think that through the displaying of their poverty they can obtain different kind of material advantages: not only in the relationship with foreign tourists, but even with public institutions, such as the police or the Collector, they always admirably fill the role of poor people. They are convinced that people, whoever they are, may comply with their requests only out of sympathy for their poverty. At present, the spatial mobility of Kalbelias, as far as the activity of begging is concerned, is limited to Pushkar and Ajmer. Ajmer is 14 kilometers far from Pushkar, and being a Muslim holy place, one of the most important and famous in India, attracts as many pilgrims and tourists as Pushkar, if not even more. Kalbelias can easily reach Ajmer by bus, but since other Kalbelia communities live on the outskirts of Ajmer, the members of the Pushkar settlement tend to practice their traditional profession in Pushkar. Even though begging can be still consider a widespread activity among Kalbelias, and snake-charming its main corollary, the members of the Pushkar group present undoubtedly a great occupational flexibility, which is a characteristic common to all peripatetic people.

In fact the Kalbelias' traditional means of living describe a form of economic, social and cultural adaptation common to groups defined both as service nomads and as peripatetic peoples. The purpose of the present article is to show that both definitions fit not only the past identity of Kalbelias as wandering snake charmers, but they can be still effective in describing the present condition of the caste and its new emerging working profile.

Service nomads (Hayden 1979) in India are endogamous groups that offer highly specialized services to settled populations, such as entertainment, ritual religious specialties, folk medicines and repairs of specific types of implements. Their movement is caused by the limited demand for their services in any one location (Hayden 1983: 292) and they derive most of their subsistence from settled communities. Although the Oxford English Dictionary traces the origins of the word "nomad" back to the Greek *nemein* meaning "to pasture" and defines a nomad as "a member of a people continually moving to find fresh pasture for its animals and having no permanent home", contemporary anthropological usage has broadened its meaning to include all groups of people who practice spatial mobility to enhance their well being and survival. Anthropological research (Berland 1986, Gilbert 2007) suggests that there are three main categories of nomadic people: pastoral nomads, nomadic hunter-gatherers and peripatetic service nomads. For all of them spatial mobility, far from implying wandering aimlessly, is a

highly precise and calculated strategy that permits access to resources, both natural and social. The term "service nomads" refers to those spatially-mobile peoples who are observed to primarily exploit resources in the social environment (Salo 1982: 276). On the other side, peripatetic people (Berland 1979, 1982, 1983) are defined as a social type, delimited by several common characteristics and a shared set of values and traditions, including a strong sense of genealogical, historical and/or mythological origins, endogamy, separate language or argot that simultaneously reinforces their sense of self and distinguish them as different from others (Berland-Rao 2004: 3). The analysis of the anthropological and ethnological literature related to peripatetic people, on one side, and the studying of Kalbelia's linguistic, religious, devotional and social qualities, on the other side, lead to the conclusion that the caste can be fully considered part of the peripatetic category. A detailed analysis of all the characteristics that allow the association of the Kalbelias to the peripatetic people group goes far beyond the purpose of the present argumentation, for which it will suffice to dwell on two elements. The first being the reasoned, planned, and deliberate patterns of mobility as aspects of the adaptive strategies of these groups, while the second concerns flexibility and resourcefulness as "the most common and vital characteristics attributable to the cognitive, structural, and organizational features of spatially mobile communities, notably peripatetic peoples" (Berland-Rao 2004: 19). I argue that Kalbelias, as worldwide ethnological records indicate as far as peripatetic people are concerned, are resourceful in being "especially tuned to the changes in social and economic circumstances as well as a broad spectrum of other factors that may influence patterns of human needs and desires in each region, community and even specific households they exploit" (Berland-Rao 2004: 19). But in order to show the professional adaptability of the caste and the adaptive meaning of its nomadism, it is necessary to further think over the relationship between snake charming and spatial mobility.

Kalbelias' past lifestyle led to their definition as a caste of service nomads, whose primarily resources were natural (snakes), cultural (the Hindu belief in the divine status of cobras), and social (the Indian population and, more recently, foreign tourists). Nomadism was an economic strategy directed to perform both their ritualistic services and their knowledge and expertise for sedentary people. If at one level Kalbelias are recognized as snake priests, the usefulness of their ability in catching poisonous serpents and their knowledge and expertise of medicines against snake bite cannot be overlooked. Even nowadays they are often resorted to in preference to hospital treatment. Since a single village would not be able to provide them with adequate work, while others might not need their services, they had to be constantly on the move. Today, however, the meaning and the content of Kalbelia service nomadism have undergone a deep

transformation which can be considered to be mainly a creative answer to a whole string of significant social changes occurring in Indian and Rajasthani society.

Since Kalbelia nomadism was first of all related to snake charming as a means to exploit natural and social resources, one of the main reasons for spatial mobility to become meaningless to the members of the caste is the legal prohibition to gain access to their natural resources, the snakes. In fact, as a consequence of the Wildlife Protection Act issued in 1972 the profession of snake charming came to be illegal. Regardless of the customary rights of hunting and gathering of nomadic communities, this act in order to protect biodiversity maintains that "wild animals are government property" and "no person shall without the previous permission in writing of the Chief Wildlife Warden acquire or keep in his possession, custody or control or transfer to any person by way of gift, sale or otherwise or destroy or damage such government property"⁴. It goes without saying that all kinds of snakes used by the snake charmers fit the definition of "wild animals" and, accordingly, of "government property". Pleading protection of biodiversity, the Wildlife Protection Act debarred local communities from managing local forest resources and benefiting from these. The 1991 amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, banning the trapping of all birds except the crow, is, for example, affecting a variety of foraging and peripatetic communities such as Baheliya, Chirimar, Paydami, and some Pardhi. Working within a bird market flourishing right across South Asia, they snare and sell birds to thousands of rural and urban families some of whom keep them in tiny cages as song birds, while others buy them to let them fly again and thereby earn merit (Rao-Casimir 2003: 153). Kalbelias, like other peripatetic communities, have been impoverished by these kind of legal measures on the use of animals. The issuing of the Wildlife Protection Act, directly affecting snake charming, explains the actual difficulty for the members of the caste to carry on their traditional job. The description of an event occurred on 29 August 2012 in Pushkar can be useful in order to point out the status of snake charming in *rajasthani* society. Although this profession is illegal, Kalbelias, as previously explained, still openly beg as snake charmers in the roads of Pushkar. The morning of 29 August 2012 a Kalbelia lady went as usual to Pushkar carrying her cobra and she sat with her basket in one of the most popular tourist place in the town, the so-called Sunset Point, just in front of Jaipur Ghat. An Indian family from Haryana approached the Kalbelia lady, who showed her snake. While the members of the family were taking pictures of the serpent and talking with the snake charmer, suddenly the animal bit the youngest son of the family, a child about 4 years old. Even though the Kalbelia woman tried to reassure the parents, explaining them that the cobra had no poison and that the child was not in danger, the whole family run to the hospital, convinced that the child would have surely died. From the hospital someone called the

⁴ <http://envfor.nic.in/legis/wildlife/wildlife1.html>

police, who immediately took the snake charmer to the police station. The Kalbelia lady was asked to pay a fine of 13.000 rupees in order not to be arrested. The woman called her family, who immediately ran from the camp to the police station with several other members of the caste. Kalbelias tried to convince the police to release the woman but since this appeared to be impossible, they collected the whole amount of money and only when the fine was paid, the unfortunate lady left the police station. 12.000 rupees were paid to the Forest Department, while 1.000 rupees were given to the Pushkar police for unclear reasons. The woman was fined for the illegal possession and capture of the cobra and like her, all the Kalbelias who illegally catch and keep the snakes could be fined and obliged to release their animals as well. Notwithstanding the widespread tolerance and accommodating attitude of the police, the illegal status of snake charmers is clear. It is necessary to understand that a 12.000 rupees fine badly affects the economy of a Kalbelia family. In this particular case the relatives of the woman had to run into debt with many families in order to pay the requested amount of money.

The past spatial mobility of the caste, already badly affected, at least from a social point of view, by the colonial British policy concerning the nomadic and wandering castes and tribes (Reddy 2005, Major 1999, Brown 2003, Yang 1985, Freitag 1991), is at present unsustainable, being the profession illegal.

Moreover, for the members of the Kalbelia community living on the outskirts of Pushkar, the spatial mobility associated to snake charming and begging may be both not necessary and not effective in order to exploit social resources. Living near Pushkar, Kalbelias have the opportunity to come in contact with a huge number of people. Indian pilgrims, Indian tourists and foreigners are a population who keeps on renewing. Since social rather than natural resources are the primary loci for their subsistence activities, it seems convenient for Kalbelias to settle in order to exploit the flourishing, tourist market in Pushkar. Scholars argue that "the membership of other communities-customers-are, for peripatetic people what water and pasture are to pastoral nomads and fields for peasants. For such resourceful nomads, practically all human settlements represent potential opportunities (...)" (Rao-Casimir 2003: 107). Peripatetic peoples use both spatial mobility and more static strategies in order to enhance their well-being and survival (Berland-Rao 2004: 18) For most populations of peripatetic peoples relative levels of mobility and/or sedentarization are not viewed as polarities, as either desirable or undesirable conditions. Rather, states of being relatively mobile or static are perceived as strategies to be used as circumstances warrant (Berland-Salo 1986: 3-4). For Kalbelias sedentarization works as a strategy to help them supplement their income-producing opportunities. Both spatial mobility and sedentarization can be means to gain and assure access to clients.

If spatial mobility is proving to be a meaningless economic strategy as far as snake charming and begging is concerned, it is yet highly effective with regard to the new professional identity of the caste. Like other castes of service nomads, in recent years Kalbelias have taken up new pursuits as their old ones have become less profitable. Besides begging and snake charming, Kalbelias, both men and women, have several economic strategies, some of a cyclical nature, like agriculture, other sporadic, such as construction labor. Nevertheless they regard their involvement with these kind of activities as relatively less important compared to the economic strategy that, at present, is the mainstay of a growing number of families living in the Pushkar's settlement: entertaining as dancers, musicians and singers. At least one member in each nuclear family relies economically on dance and on the artistic activities related to, singing and music. Lots of Kalbelias belonging to the Pushkar community are booked in India and abroad by private individuals, events' organizers, cultural institutions and hotel managers in order to perform for local as well as foreign people. Besides, a growing number of female foreign tourists go to Pushkar in order to take dance classes from women belonging to the caste. Being settled near Pushkar, Kalbelias can easily gain access to a wide number of potential clients, who can provide them with work both as snake charmers and beggars and as folk artists. Besides, Kalbelias' new occupational profile entails new forms of spatial mobility: as previously stated, the members of the caste are called to perform even outside Pushkar and several among them have widely travelled both in India and abroad. Kalbelia dance has earned reputation in national as well as international level –mainly thanks to the efforts of the greatest living Kalbelia practitioner, Gulabo– and many Kalbelias, belonging to the Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Pushkar communities, have performed in international venue. Even nowadays dance serves several functions in Indian society, being, for example, a regular part of life-cycle celebrations such as weddings. Groups of 10-12 Kalbelia artists, dancers, musicians and singers, are commonly invited all over India to perform during family celebrations, such as weddings, or during public events, such as local religious festivals. Members of the Kalbelia community living in Pushkar have also taken part in state-level official events, such as the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi on 3 October 2010, and in cultural programs, such as the Festival of India. Several artists have been widely travelling abroad both joining groups of Rajasthani musicians and dancers belonging to different castes⁵ and even alone, if invited by foreigners involved in the dance business in their own countries (Indian classical dance performers, belly dance performers, dance teachers, owners of dance schools, etc.). During the past six years, the growing popularity of Kalbelia dance style both in India and abroad has been

⁵ Usually in these groups Langa, Kalbelia and Manganiar artists perform together.

paralleled by the deeper and wider involvement of the Kalbelias living in Pushkar in the dance business.

Today Kalbelia dance style is considered to be a distinguishing mark of Rajasthan's peculiar culture, to such an extent that in 2010 it has been inscribed on the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Even if at present it is widely perceived as a significant part of Rajasthani folklore and an "authentic Rajasthani tradition", Kalbelia dance style, as it is performed today, is a relatively new dance form. In the past Kalbelia women were allowed to dance only during the celebration of some Hindu festivals and their performance was bound to an inter-communitarian and inter-caste fruition. Until a recent past for Kalbelias dance was a spontaneous display, absolutely not codified, opened to the free expressivity of the members of the caste, inspired by sheer devotion and free from any commercial purposes. Thanks to the intertwining of a series of social, political, cultural and biographical circumstances we have dealt with on other occasions, in the past twenty years the dance style embodying more and more the specificity of the caste has acquired its present artistic and commercial shape, becoming a recognizable and codified product of Rajasthani folklore (Angelillo 2012b). In fact Kalbelias cannot be considered to be a caste of hereditary performers, unless we consider snake charming as an entertaining activity. In any case they do not belong to a caste of hereditary professional folk musicians or dancers. Kalbelias as dancers and musicians have never enjoyed in the past any patronage either from royal courts or from common people. They have never provided musical services to patrons, receiving in exchange cattle, camels, goats, cash, and a share in the patrons' income from agriculture or animal husbandry, as generally happened to hereditary professional artists in Rajasthan (Kothari 2001: 209-210). Yet they have found in the tourist and folk market the new meaning of their service nomadism: tuning their culture and their tradition to the changes in social circumstances and to the tourist and folk markets' needs and desires, they have been able to translate their peripatetic identity into contemporary globalized world.

The greatest part of the members of the Kalbelia community living in Pushkar keeps on moving, all over the year, especially in India but even abroad, in order to perform in cultural events, hotels, marriages, public functions, religious festivals etc. etc. Groups of 8-10 artists are commonly booked for two-three months by hotels all over India in order to perform daily: this working option entails living in the hotel they are working in for several months. It seems that the service nomadism of Kalbelias has found a new meaning (artistic instead of devotional), a new content (dancing instead of snake charming), new places (hotel, schools, theaters instead of streets, temples, forts), and new patrons (tourists instead of Hindu devotees). Kalbelia experience shows how globalization is not about homogenization or massification of Indian culture, but it is

manifested in the array of distinct local cultures produced by interaction of transnational flows and local practices. Globalization does not produce a global culture except in the most superficial sense; instead, it serves localized cultural purposes and helps to reshape pre-existing system of thought (Guneratne 2001: 527).

Kalbelias have been shifting from one set of adaptive strategies to others: in the adoption of new means of surviving they have partially modified the structure of their nomadic way of life. Today the members of the Kalbelia community settled on the outskirts of Pushkar live in a camp, *qērā*, whose number of fixed structures, such as pens and brick houses, has been in the past five years slowly increasing. The greatest part of the families still lives in huts or tents but in 2011 a small temple has been built and at the end of September 2012 there were seven brick houses with flat roofs in the settlement. The land they are living in doesn't belong to them, but it seems that City authorities may be ready to register a small share of it (two *bīghā*, less than a half of the land at the present occupied by the *qērā*) in the name of the caste. Kalbelias have not always been living in the present camp: six years ago they were living in another settlement on the outskirts of Pushkar which was destroyed by the City authorities in order to build a tourist resort. Forced to leave their settlement, they moved in a camp about three kilometers far from the previous one. Even though they are living in a squatter settlement, Kalbelias behave as if the land belonged to them and as they were supposed to live there permanently. Trees, ornamental plants and flowers have been planted, few brick houses and a temple have been built, a couple of families have a generator which, although rarely used, let them have some electricity in the camp, without being obliged to move daily to Pushkar in order to, for example, recharge their cellphones. In the settlement there is also a water pump provided by the Government five years ago. The camp is getting more and more organized as a small village: narrow roads cross the settlement and a very simple and basic tea stall has been opened by a man living in the neighboring village of Ganaheda. This shop, apart from the temple and its wide platform, is the only public space where Kalbelias can gather and spend time far from their private houses. We may say that the Kalbelias living in the Pushkar settlement are experiencing a change into a kind of sedentarization. The Pushkar *qērā* can be considered to be a sedentary settlement mainly because of the presence of a majority of year-round inhabitants, as children, old people, snake-charmers and beggars working in Pushkar are. Nevertheless the settlement is a mixture of people living year-round in static houses together with others who are very mobile and come into the settlement for irregular periods of the year. Performing as dancers and musicians is not the only reason for the present spatial mobility of the Kalbelias: the greatest part of the married couples keep on moving all over the year in order to visit their relatives living in other squatter settlements scattered all over central Rajasthan. Although the usual practice of residence

after marriage is patrilocal, the married couples pay regular visits to the families of the wives living in other Kalbelia camps and they can spend a considerable amount of time with them. In the same way, visitors keep on coming to the Pushkar settlement from other Kalbelia camps in the region. Kalbelias move to other camps where members of their own caste live, also in order to be employed as seasonal workers: when the opportunity arises, Kalbelias do agricultural work for farmers. During, for example, the *bājrā* harvest time, many members of the Pushkar settlement move to the camps in the Marwar region and live there for all the time required by their seasonal job. In order to discuss the degree of nomadism or sedentarization Kalbelias are experiencing, it is not enough to know that they move or do not move, or that they move between two camps twice a year, as Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath (1999: 190) state. We also need to understand how they live in their settlement. "A sedentary lifestyle can be perceived in the degree of use of fixed structures, such as winter sheds, fenced pastures or wells, or the presence of static activities, such as tending pigs, chickens and vegetable gardens. (...) in our view all three factors should be taken together to give an indication of the degree of sedentarization of a given community" (Humphrey-Sneath 1999: 190). Equally important is the perception of nomadism itself by Kalbelias and by the members of the wider Rajasthani society. Kalbelias seem to be fully aware of the change they are going through. The way they recall their past life-style tells about their perception of the present: "Memories are, above all, about change and difference; about contrast between past and present. Memories are (...) symbolic and embodied, hence neither individual nor collective" (Grodzins Gold-Gujar 1997: 70). As Seshnath clearly explained (oral communication, Pushkar, 11 September 2012), Kalbelias still consider their caste a *ghumakkar jāti*, whose members, in order to improve their life, have been adapting their own traditions and values to the demands of the society they are living in.

Spatial mobility or more static adaptations are perceived by the members of the Kalbelia community living in Pushkar as risk-spreading strategies that enhance community survival. Kalbelias consider nomadism and sedentarization as strategies of flexibility and resilience and their shifting from one to another is the evidence of their professional adaptability, which, according to the ethnological record (Berland 2003: 104-124), is definitely a characteristic of peripatetic people. The professional adaptability of Kalbelias has been surely enabled by the existence of a tourist industry, whose needs and desires Kalbelias have been able to tune to. Kalbelias are proving that their involvement in the tourist market is not the inevitable consequence of the onslaught of tourism, but quite the opposite, the result of conscious and deliberately calculated acts by creative individuals seeking to maximize their opportunities in an ever-widening world. By presenting and discussing the changes Kalbelias are going through we have tried to give back to Indian society and its members the agency, flexibility and

resourcefulness that first the Orientalist enterprise and then social sciences have long denied the South Asian communities, representing them as bounded and static rather than dynamic and mobile.

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