

1-1-2003

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Recommended Citation

Shay, Anthony and Barbara Sellers-Young. "Belly Dance: Orientalism-Self-Exoticism-Exoticism," *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (Summer, 2003), pp. 13-37.

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Belly Dance: Orientalism—Exoticism—Self-Exoticism

Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. (Said 1978, 1)

The past century has witnessed the phenomenon of belly dancing becoming a key icon of the Middle East in the West. This iconic representation often causes outrage, resentment, and even protest among Arabs who resent Westerners (mis)representing them by focusing on cabaret-style belly dance, a low-class and disreputable symbol for many in the Arab world, as a primary media image of the Middle East. Since the 1970s, millions of women and some men in the West have been attracted to belly dancing, investing millions of dollars and enormous time acquiring the basic skill of the dance in order to perform it.¹ This essay will address several issues that are raised by the phenomenon of belly dancing and its transformation, globalization, and acculturation in the West; it is designed to develop a newly emerging area of performance/cultural research, drawing from the fields of dance and transnational studies. Using the solo Middle Eastern form as the site of production of the rapidly expanding genre of performance labeled "intercultural performance," we hope to interro-

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gate that genre and its definitions as a way of investigating the changing relationships between "ethnic" and "hybrid" and the related national and cultural boundaries associated with them. For some time, ethnic artists have collaborated with Western artists and/or strategically deployed Western aesthetics within or alongside ethnic performance forms, complicating the "cross-cultural" aesthetic, historical, and ideological dialogue implicit in this study.²

William Washabaugh, in his discussion of music and dance within popular culture, notes that the transnational interplay of forms and images creates a global discourse (Washabaugh 1998). An examination of solo Middle Eastern dance and its global history reveals a series of influences that have spiraled around the dance's dissemination and performance. Although the outward, morphological dance vocabulary in the Middle East may appear to be similar and, in some cases, exact, the cultural codes and meanings of the dance change in the West. Thus, this essay will interrogate and analyze solo improvised dance in the regions of origin and in the West, as domestic practice and as a vehicle for professional and amateur public performance.

Above all other considerations, the images projected by Westerners in the performance of belly dance and other forms of oriental dance raise the thorny issue of orientalism. The vocabulary of the dance and its position within the framework of the West, especially the United States, as "other" provide an "empty" location, as in "not part of my culture" for the construction of exotic new fantasy identities. At the same time, as a repository of media stereotypes and thus Western fantasies of women, it also provides physical images via the *femme fatale* which the (generally female) dancer emulates in order to play an assertive sexual role in a male-dominated Western society. We begin our essay with a brief description of the dance genre we are analyzing followed by a discussion of orientalism, exoticism, and self-exoticism as lenses of analysis.

Solo Improvised Dance in the Middle East and in the West

Perhaps no genre of dance has been as subject to misinterpretation and neglect by dance scholars as solo improvised dance in the Middle East. Its assumed sexuality and frequent association with striptease dance by the general public and many scholars, and its status as a form of popular culture are among the reasons for this scholarly avoidance. The *International Encyclopedia of Dance* avoided the term "belly dance" in favor of the French term *danse du ventre*. This genre is often the principal dance form of urban centers, and in Egypt of the entire population, and local populations call it simply "dance" (*raqs*). Briefly, this dance genre might be best conceptualized as a complex of movement practices that originated in a vast region extending from the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa and the Balkans in the west to the eastern areas of China, Central Asia, and the western portions of the Indian subcontinent in the east. In addition, for purposes of this essay we include its manifestation outside this area of origin, particularly in North America and Europe.³

In each of these areas, the dance is characterized by improvised articulations of the torso, hands, arms, and head. The specific portion of the body that forms the focus of

the dance varies throughout this vast area, and probably varied historically as well. For example, in current practice, professional Moroccan dancers, known as *shikhat*, as well as people dancing in domestic venues, perform a gentle lifting and lowering of the pelvis. In Tunisia, dancers execute large, sharp movements of the hip from one side forward, while in Egypt, the dance is largely focused on rolling, articulated movements of the abdomen and vibrations of the hips that can be rapid or slow. In Turkey, the *cifte telli* concentrates on both rapid and slow shoulder and breast shimmies. Iranian dancers utilize the torso, but graceful dancers are evaluated by the bearing of their upper body and the carriage of their arms. Outstanding dancers also manipulate their eyebrows and lips in humorous or sensual ways (Shay 1999, 20–34). In Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, cultural extensions of the Iranian world, the dancers utilize shoulder movements and shimmies and, like Iranian dancers, emphasize the upper body and graceful, minute movements of the hands and arms. These very general observations must be tempered with the concept that this is a very idiosyncratic style of dance and individual styles vary greatly.⁴

Although the term “solo improvised dance” generally fits current dance practices both domestic and professional, historical iconographic sources often show duos, trios, and larger groups. Individuals sometimes danced together or were members of small performing units, and each performer had a specialty. For example, in Iran and Turkey bands of professional dancers were in heated competition for work and had to develop unique performance feats and strategies; they often sang, acted, played musical instruments, and performed athletic feats, a rare practice in our time. Although dancers are often pictured together, the historical sources give no hint of what we would today call “group choreography,” in which the dancers move in unison. Many European sources for both Iran and Turkey do mention that two dancers would take “roles” in (often naughty) playlets (And 1959; Beza'i 1965; Rezvani 1962; Shay 1999). Currently one may see photographs or videotapes with numerous dancers in the same dance space, as in a social event like a wedding, but, unless choreographed for public performance, each dancer performs as an individual. They occasionally dance in reference to one another, but rarely coordinate their movements.

Throughout these regions both professional dancers and the general urban population perform this dance genre as the principal expressive form of dance. Professional dancers perform variants, often highly elaborated, of the many versions of this dance that are performed in social and domestic contexts. Thus, this genre constitutes at once a social, folk, professional, and, more recently, classicized dance.

Solo improvised dance in the Islamic world of the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia is an abstract expression, unlike the narratives that characterize many classical dance forms in Japan, Bali, and India. Today in the Middle East and related areas, the overwhelming majority of the population considers this dance genre entertainment rather than an art form, and there is no compelling evidence to suggest that historical attitudes were different, despite several romantic and unsubstantiated attempts to restore dance as an honored art form in historical times (De Warren 1973; Rezvani 1962).⁵ Kathleen Fraser, in her study of Canadian Egyptians, observes that “informants de-

scribed the dance as having a legitimate place in the culture, but not a serious place. Egyptian Canadians truly love this dance but could not bring themselves to say they give it high esteem as an art" (Frasier 1993, 59).

Unlike musical forms in the Arab, Iranian, and Turkish worlds, this dance complex does not have a classical tradition (i.e., a named vocabulary, an academy, and uniformly named movements)—although recent attempts have been made in both the East and West to change this⁶—which places this expressive form in the realm of popular culture. In the scholarly discourse of the Middle East, popular culture constitutes a new and often contested area of investigation and discussion (Armbrust 1996; 2000). Our position is that this dance tradition is located at the intersection of the contested site of high-brow culture and popular culture because individuals like Mahmoud Reda in Egypt, Mustafa Turan in Turkey, and Jamal, Iranian artistic director of the AVAZ International Dance Theatre in the United States, are attempting to raise this popular form to the level of art through choreographies that utilize Western choreographic strategies.

These divergent forms from North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe are often conflated in the United States and elsewhere under the single term "belly dance." This term, coined by Sol Bloom for the dancers of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 for purposes of titillating his audiences, was given new meaning in the late 1960s and 1970s when American adherents of the form allied themselves with the second phase of the feminist movement, in which the personal was political. One goal of this phase of the movement was to negate and displace prior Western conceptions of the female body as negative. As feminist social critic Susan Bordo states, "The body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death" (Bordo 1993, 5).

In the Middle East, performance of the dance as a professional practice is held in strong disrepute, contrasting with public and elite attitudes in Islamic Java where dance is an esteemed classical art form. This disrepute stems not from prudishness, but rather from Islamic mores that dictate that women must not appear uncovered in front of males who do not stand in proper kinship relation to them. Female public dancers who appear in male (public) space strongly contravene these mores and reinforce the widely held notion that professional dancers are prostitutes.⁷ This is a stated reason from Afghanistan to Morocco when attacks are made on dancers (Mernissi 1975; Shay 1999).

Stemming from these perceptions, this dance tradition, in the varied contexts in which it is performed in the Islamic Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, comes under frequent condemnation by Islamic fundamentalists and those individuals in the Islamic world who believe that all music and, even more, dance are sinful and unlawful. In Iran and Afghanistan its performance is banned (recently rescinded in the latter country since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2002), even though numerous reports from recent visitors and videotape recordings played on Iranian television demonstrate that people perform it illegally.⁸

Currently in Egypt there is strong pressure, sometimes accompanied by threats of violence, to prevent belly dancing in both public and social contexts such as weddings

(Daniszewski 2001). Video dealers in the bazaar in Cairo report that they avoid carrying certain dance videos in their stores because of threats (Shay 2002, 141, note on 241-42). These fundamentalist beliefs are by no means universally accepted, and thus this dance genre, as opposed to regional folk dances, for example, forms a highly contested area in Muslim societies. Negative reactions to dance are so strong that Shay (1999) coined the term choreophobia to describe this phenomenon. Dance scholar Najwa Adra lists a number of euphemisms that people in the Arab world use in order to justify their movements, concluding "It can be argued that dancing is an activity that almost everyone in the Middle East enjoys but does not advertise" (Adra 1998, 403).

In Europe and North America at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, a few dancers, of whom Ruth St. Denis and Maud Allan are among the best known, performed their interpretations of oriental dancing. Rather than using actual dances, they "brought to life" movements from iconic sources from the ancient Middle East. Throughout the twentieth century major film stars Theda Bara, Dolores Gray, Hedy Lamarr, and Rita Hayworth performed Broadway and Hollywood versions of this dance in biblical sagas, "Arabian Nights" films, and "Kismet" musicals from the earliest periods of the film industry. These productions helped to create the widespread icon of exotic dance as a representation of the Middle Eastern woman.

Beginning in the 1940s, the first performers of actual belly dance, as it was presented in nightclubs catering to people of Greek, Lebanese, and other Middle Eastern backgrounds, were primarily "ethnic women." Later a few American women with other dance training, like flamenco, began to appear in these places, learning their craft from the established ethnic dancers. Since the 1970s, when this dance began to reach hundreds of thousands of American women, teachers, primarily women, have taught students the solo dance forms of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Persia, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia and developed new variant hybrids with names such as "American tribal," "spiritual," and "cabaret." They have also, via international festivals, spread the dance to Europe, South America, Australia, and Asia. This large, eclectic, and primarily female community maintains daily communication via a seven-hundred member e-mail list serve, proffers itself to the cyber world on more than three hundred Web pages, and shares moving images of the styles or hybrid forms of the dance through video. Thus, the divergent forms—ethnic and hybrid—have become part of global performance culture staged in restaurants, Renaissance faires, concert stages, and international festivals. Within these contexts, the performers and students of belly dance engage in constructions of women that are, as Marta Savigliano (1995) points out in the case of the tango, the result of the global cultural politics of orientalism.

The twin movements of feminism and sexual liberation that many women felt were manifest in this genre spurred the revival of interest in belly dance in the 1970s. In the beginnings of the "belly dance movement," this once unacceptable presentation of the female body became a powerful means of transcendence as a group of women decided to redefine belly dance as a symbol of personal and sexual liberation. The following passage neatly sums up many of the feelings expressed by participants in belly dance:

Recently, in thinking about the function of belly dance in my life, I realized the dance was multi-functional. In its placement of breath, pelvic orientation, and learning the relationship between body parts, it integrated my mind/body and therefore connected me to my erotic (using Audre Lorde's definition) nature. This, of course, increased my sense of personal power. However, it was in its vocabulary a means to learn and then display (thus proving my knowledge) the cultural codes of femininity in a heterosexual society. It was also a site to dramatize, through dance, the media images of women and thus bring them within the realm of play. The latter seems to me to be an unconscious and very personalized therapy. When I combine this form of role play or unconscious dramatization with the community experience of witness that takes place via a stage performance, it seems to increase the potential empowerment of the participants. Thus, the dance has a healing power. At the same time, there are dancers, and I think I was one of them, who create characters they consistently enact in performance. I was always playing either party girl or shamaness. There was in these roles a self-representation that is related, I think, to a form of exotification. (Sellers-Young 2000)

Orientalism, Exoticism, and Self-Exoticism

The basic points of Edward Said's theory in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) are well known to scholars throughout the humanities and social sciences and his ideas do not need to be extensively rehearsed in this essay.⁹ Homi Bhabha sums up its salience for this discussion: "Orientalism . . . is on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; and on the other, it's the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions, and requirements. . . . However, this site is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability" (Bhabha 1994, 71).

The topic of self-exoticism is less often addressed and analyzed, and also forms part of our discussion. Said neglects this sensitive area of the orientalist discourse. By self-exoticism, we mean a process in which individuals native to a dance's place of origin utilize orientalist elements, often originating in Western sources, in their performances, both enunciated and embodied. We look at these performances in both the East and the West, for they constitute a form of globalism uneasily circulating between the East and the West.

For the past century orientalist and exotic images have flooded dance productions throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, and the West.¹⁰ They could be seen in Iranian dance productions in Pahlavi Iran, in Egypt and Lebanon, in Uzbek, Azerbaijani, and Russian ballet productions in the former Soviet Union, and in the contemporary Iranian diaspora and Arab-American communities. Similar and different images flowed through productions of Ruth St. Denis and Maud Allan, Hollywood and Broadway musicals and dramas, and the oriental dance communities in Europe and North America. In hundreds of productions, both professional and amateur, Per-

sian miniatures and paintings from the walls of Egyptian tombs and temples come to life. Hollywood-inspired visions of sheiks and sultry beauties dance in scanty garments never seen or worn in the Middle East against exotic backdrops of minarets and mosques. Kings dance with chorus girls, poets dream in paradisiacal gardens, whirling dervishes whirl, myths become reality, reality disappears.¹¹

Thus, for purposes of this discussion, orientalism is any distortion, exoticizing, or romanticizing of the Orient by Western choreographers and dancers. Self- or auto-exoticism describes instances in which individuals from the Middle East and North Africa incorporate romantic and/or orientalist images and staging strategies in their works. Scholars who come from areas outside Europe and North America often articulate their irritation in strong terms:

Exoticism is a way of establishing order in an unknown world through fantasy; a daydream guided by pleasurable self-reassurance and expansionism. It is the seemingly harmless side of exploitation, cloaked as it is in playfulness and delirium. Exoticism is a practice of representation through which identities are frivolously allocated. It is also a will to power over the unknown, an act of indiscriminately combining fragments, crumbs of knowledge and fantasy in disrespectful, sweeping gestures justified by harmless banality. (Savigliano 1995, 189)

Ali Behdad observes that "The media and memories of later personal encounters remind me of the continued reanimation of negative representations of the Middle East and Islam in the West today. That Orientalism as a Western discourse on the Other continues to operate so powerfully only makes the need for counter presentational practices more urgent" (Behdad 1994, viii).

The causes and effects of orientalism, exoticism, and self-exoticism flow from a number of impulses and reasons, rather than one simple factor. It is a multilayered and complex phenomenon. The undeniably orientalist images that fill the choreographies and writings of those involved in the presentation of dances of North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia are sometimes based on a genuine disinterest in, or lack of knowledge of, the actual dance traditions and the societies in which they are performed. Hobbyists in the "Danse Orientale" community have often invested heavily in these exotic daydreams and fantasies, both emotionally and financially.

The writings that enhance and reinforce orientalist fantasies of Mother Goddess worship, fertility, and love rituals are sometimes appropriated and quoted in an unproblematic manner in works that purport to be serious scholarship. Examples of this are Judith Lynne Hanna's extensive citations from Wendy Buonaventura's romantic writings on belly dance (Hanna 1988, 45-57), which detract from her scholarship dealing with Middle Eastern dance, and Amnon Shiloah's unfortunate use of Curt Sachs (1937), Medjid Rezvani (1937), and Buonaventura (1990) for his otherwise excellent study of music in the Islamic world (Shiloah 1995).¹²

We address several general assumptions about dance in the Middle East first raised by Curt Sachs, among others. We focus on these crucial topics not in order to demean

Sachs's work, a landmark volume in its time, but because Sachs is still widely cited and his assumptions are still current among some writers. Finally, we focus on how orientalist images that are produced in these various media become manifest in dance performances. An important point that Said raises is that the Orient becomes a site of "imaginative geography" or, as Kiernan called it, "Europe's collective daydream of the east" (quoted in Said 1978, 52). Said claims that this imaginative geography causes certain aspects of people's lives, such as our spirituality, to become overvalued. This point will be the primary focus of our analysis of orientalist images, their manifestation in dance performance and in other visual arts, appropriation by individuals in the oriental dance community, and use by native performers and choreographers in the process of self-exotification.

There are several kinds of orientalisms, if by this we mean Said's "distortion of the Orient." There are national orientalisms (German, French, English, Russian, and American), but we argue that orientalism also appears across genre lines—orientalist images and viewpoints are expressed in dance, films, music, theater, literature, architecture, politics, and anthropology, among other fields. These expressions of orientalism are in turn highly colored by time and place. For example, scholars have largely ignored the considerable outpouring of orientalist ballets, music, and operas produced by various Russian artists, both tsarist and communist, primarily (mis)characterizing their own colonized Muslim populations in the Caucasus and Central Asia—an orientalist project fully as egregious as that of the British and French that Said deconstructs. We emphasize this last point because the Russians' vision of the Orient has had, first through Diaghilev's productions of orientalist ballets such as *Schéhérazade* with costumes and sets designed by Léon Bakst, and subsequently through other dance companies, a major and vital impact on dance production and its accompanying capacity to create images throughout the world (Wood and Shay 1976). Since the turn of the twentieth century, the ballet *Schéhérazade* has set styles for Hollywood and Broadway, and Igor Moiseyev, since World War II, influenced the depiction of Muslim peoples within the former Soviet Union and in Egypt, Iran, and other Muslim countries (see Shay 2002).

Early Orientalist Assumptions in Dance

In this context we can begin with a look at the work of Curt Sachs, whose *World History of Dance* (1937) is still used as a text for dance history in some institutions and has been highly influential in shaping and reinforcing orientalist views in dance. Without addressing the many problems associated with Sachs's work, we wish only to focus on the chapter "The Evolution to the Spectacular Dance and the Oriental Civilizations" (218–236), which bears directly on this study. Make no mistake, in Said's terms this is an orientalist project: the Orient is one (highly exotic) place. For Sachs, the Orient was the site of two opposed poles: sexuality and sensuality on the one hand, and on the other religious fervor and spirituality, usually ancient and timeless. These orientalist concepts were combined in a strikingly visual way in Ruth St. Denis's choreography for

Radha, deconstructed in terms of orientalism by Jane Desmond (1991). The placement of this chapter in Sachs's book, between the Stone Age and Ancient Greece, positions the Orient as "Other than Europe," a sort of halfway station in his evolutionary scheme of dance moving from uncontrollable primitive frenzy to high art. In Sachs's scheme, Persia, India, Japan, Siam, China, and Egypt are conflated into one vast Orient, in which sex and religion, frenzy and high art, are commingled in a heady mix.

Several other assumptions still cited in popular articles on oriental dance are also posited as facts that encompass the entire Orient. One of these assumptions is that all dance had religious significance: "The devotional role must already have made a work of art out of dance. Its unique importance for the life and welfare of the tribe debarred random improvisation; it called for planning and precise formulation" (Sachs 1937, 218-219). We have no evidence that solo improvised dance ever had religious significance, and improvisation, as we observed above, rather than "precise formulation," is at the very core of its performance. As we will see, later writers such as Buonaventura (1983; 1990), picked up this notion of oriental dancing having religious meaning without examining its implications or sources. We are not claiming that because today solo improvised dance in the Middle East is largely a form of entertainment, it did not have spiritual or religious meaning in the past; we are arguing that no one can write with certainty about dance practices that occurred thousands of years ago (Shay 1999, 56-78).

Another of Sachs's assumptions is that professional dancers were "girls." "It is thus chiefly ancient religious reasons which accord the greatest and often, indeed the only, share in the spectacular dance to the girl and not to the man" (Sachs 1937, 223). And yet abundant proof, including personal observation, demonstrates that boy dancers and, in fact, men dancers as well as female dancers were and are a fixture of everyday life in the Middle East right into our own period (see video "Afghan Village"). One need only recall Bagoas, the Persian boy dancer and lover of Alexander the Great, who danced before Alexander's troops in the fourth century B.C.

Related to Sachs's notion of dancing girls, is the unwarranted assumption, seen in several recent studies, that when men perform solo improvised dance they are "parodying" women rather than simply dancing. "These men undulate their shoulders and hips in what looks like a self-mocking parody of traditional gender roles, combined with a sheer delight in rhythmic physical movement" (Jonas 1992, 116). Like Sachs, Gerald Jonas, in his book that accompanies the eight-part PBS series *Dancing*, assumes, without proof, a parody. He states in a caption for a photograph that "Perhaps because dancing in Arab countries tends to be segregated by gender, there is an undercurrent of male dancing that parodies the social dancing of women. The male dancers [pictured are] impersonating women in Luxor, Egypt. Such dancing is considered slightly disreputable, but it requires skill and practice" (Jonas 1992, 112). These observations require some attention because they appear in other writings as well.¹³ First, the young man shown in the photograph is not impersonating a woman; he is wearing men's clothing and sporting a moustache. Second, the dance form is common to all—men and women—in urban and many rural settings. The assumption that these movements are "feminine" in a Middle Eastern context is a patent display of Western orien-

talist notions being projected on the movement vocabulary of other cultures because the movements in a Western context might be inappropriate to a male dancer (see Shay 2002, 141-42).

The disreputability Jonas posits attaches not to the dancing itself, but to dancing professionally which is, in the minds of many, accompanied by a strong negative connotation of being sexually available. One of the few historical accounts of native attitudes toward professional dancers comes from Taj al-Saltana, a Qajar princess who was one of the few literate women of her time:

That night 'Abdi Jan's troupe had been called so that the harem occupants could watch the show. Of course, you remember Abdi well. Let me, nonetheless, give you a description of his looks. He was a lad of about twelve or thirteen, with large, black eyes, languid and incredibly beautiful and attractive. His face was tanned and good-looking, his lips crimson, and his hair black and thick. Renowned throughout the town, the boy had a thousand adoring lovers. Being a dancer, however, he was unworthy of being anyone's beloved. (Taj al-Saltana 1993, 163)

That is not to say that the dance is not considered by some Middle Eastern postcolonial individuals to be a feminine activity. For example, Dr. Mohammed Chtatou, a Moroccan sociologist, states in the television film *Dancing* that dancing is "womanly, not manly." Yet Chtatou's argument, in our opinion, is belied by a large group of men depicted in the film dancing at a Moroccan party using the same movements we have just seen in the women's domestic party. Chtatou's voice is heard in voiceover narrating his opinions, which are contradicted by the visual evidence before our eyes.¹⁴

It is an orientalist position that this is an exclusively female dance. In a Western context, the movements performed by men in the Middle East are considered by many individuals as only suitable to the female body. Dance scholars have long realized that movement in dance, like all other culturally learned and constructed behavior, is culturally gendered. What is feminine in one culture is masculine or suitable to both sexes in another culture. In the eyes of some Western educated postcolonial individuals, participation of males must somehow be explained (and wished) away.

A fourth major assumption that Sachs proffers, which has been appropriated by those who glorify what we can call the "Mystery of the East" or a "standard topos of the East" in Nochlin's terms (1983, 119) is "The temples maintained dancers of both sexes as a special class. We find them over and over again in cult pictures either in the quiet dance, as our illustration shows, with gentle steps and with arms outstretched in rhomboid form, or in the most daring acrobatic positions" (Sachs 1937, 229; see also Maniche 1991, Hodel-Hoenes 1991). Sachs is referring specifically to the well-known frescoes of female musicians and dancers found in several tombs of the nobles (Nakht, Nebamun, Kheruef). The dancers he alludes to might more justifiably be shown to depict professional entertainers in a nonsacred setting. We posit this because the onlookers are sitting with cones of melting perfume on their heads, a practice common among the wealthy during secular banquets, and the body positions are also commonplace in Iranian profession dancing right into the twentieth century. The "rhomboid hands"

perform a loud snapping action (called *beshkan* in Persian), which creates a rhythmic accompaniment to the dance; a drawing from Iran of 150 years ago shows a dancer in an almost identical position (see Khaleqi 1974, 480). We suggest the possibility that Sachs received the impression of a religious practice because if one did not recognize the specific gesture of the "rhomboid hands" as creating a strong snapping sound, a Western eye might assume that the arms were upraised in supplication. Today most Iranians perform this feat for festive occasions, showing their happiness; it would be a highly inappropriate action in a solemn or religious context, probably historically as well, if the solemn processions of Egyptian dancers depicted on the temples in Karnak are any example of ancient practices.

Sachs implies that temples with dancers were found throughout the Orient, but as we argue above there is simply no way that we, as dance historians, can discuss practices that occurred thousands of years ago. Dance may not have been a feature of religious life throughout the entire Middle East, much the less the Orient. As any student of Iranian history is aware, prior to written history there is archaeological evidence of many groups and cultures on the Iranian plateau, but we know little of their ethnicity, languages, and religious beliefs and practices. This is true of many areas.

Sachs continues, "Here the acrobatic dance, the ecstatic origin of which we have indicated, still survives in its initial religious function—already detached, to be sure, from the purely ecstatic and transmuted into artistic skill, but still as a magic activity and not as a mere gymnastic exercise" (Sachs 1937, 229). Again, acrobatic feats were and are an integral part of the professional dancers' bag of tricks in many areas of the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa. There is no association between these performances and magic or religion; they are strictly entertainment, although such categories as sacred and nonsacred "overlap," in Manniche's terms (1991, 24-25). Descriptions of the Empress Theodora's performances (Bridge 1993) and reproductions of Egyptian tomb drawings confirm this (Manniche 1991) as they depict popular entertainments. This is not to say that dance did not occur in religious and sacred places, but the depictions on the tombs and walls at Karnak largely show what we would call stately processions.

The last of Sachs's many assumptions we address is the notion that solo improvised dancing carries meaning such as that found in Indian mudras. "All introvert cultures tend to forsake reality, to proceed towards abstraction. In these cultures what is true of the ornamentation is often true also of the dances: it is necessary to be familiar with the motif in order to understand the meaning" (Sachs 1937, 232). We argue that there is no "meaning" in the sense that Sachs implies. There is no storytelling in dances throughout the Middle Eastern Islamic world; in al-Faruqi's terms "it is an abstract art" (al-Faruqi 1987, 7). Following this analysis of Sachs's presentation, we wish to show how his assumptions appear in current writings.

Recent Orientalist Writings in Dance

Morroe Berger, former director of the Princeton University Near Eastern Program, pointed out prior to the appearance of Said's work, that "for centuries the principal in-

redients of the popular Western image of the Middle East have been spirituality and sex" (Berger 1966, 43). Thus Buonaventura, an author widely cited in Hanna (1988, 51-52, 57, 60, 62) and others who seem to deem her an authority, opens *Serpent of the Nile*, her glossy coffee-table book on belly dancing, "Time stands still in remote places" (Buonaventura 1990, 9), illustrating Said's observation of the Western view of the Orient as a timeless and frozen place. She continues, "The first time I saw it [belly dancing], it struck me as something rare and magical. I thought then, and still think, that it is the most eloquent of female dances, with its haunting lyricism, its fire, its endlessly shifting kaleidoscope of sensual movement."

Thus, we have the orientalist view of the timeless "sensual" coupled with the timeless "feminine" as important tropes for the exoticizing of oriental dance. In her seminal study of the elements of exoticizing and auto-exoticizing the tango, Savigliano observes that "Orientalism, or in Marcel Paquot's words, the 'revelation of the Orient' (to the West), seems to have set the stage for the machinery of exoticism to develop. The practices of appropriating and reshaping the Oriental for the consumption of Western European elites were further applied, with adjustments, to other candidates for the exotic condition" (Savigliano 1995, 85).

Buonaventura makes further observations on the exotic, applying many concepts first introduced by Sachs:

Today's dance is a far cry from its ancient ancestor, one of the oldest dances in creation. . . It was once found throughout the world, a dance in which movement of the hips—sometimes vigorous, sometimes soft and sinuous—was the principal expression. Originally it had a precise meaning in terms of ritual for it expressed the mysteries of life and death as people understood them. Like all early dance, it was originally connected with religious worship, at a time when religion was an integral part of everyday life and had relevance to every aspect of human existence. But as primitive cultures grew more sophisticated and civilization suppressed the faiths of a former age, so too were the rituals connected with these bygone religions suppressed. Thus the female pelvic dance died out in many parts of the world. In some areas, however, it turned from a religious rite into a secular entertainment. (Buonaventura 1990, 10-11)

We quote extensively from Buonaventura, for in this passage we have pantheism, spirituality, primitiveness—themes echoed in countless orientalist articles on belly dancing. Buonaventura's grasp and knowledge of dance in ancient times seems breathtaking in scope, both geographically and historically. In contrast, Morroe Berger argues:

No one can say exactly how and where the belly dance originated. The dancers themselves always tell tourists and writers that their costumes, movements and gestures are deliberately based on the dances of ancient Egypt. They may be right, but they are hardly experts, for, whatever their accomplishments, Egyptology is not one of them. They make these claims for the same reason that

they minimize the sexual aspect of the dance: to give themselves a greater respectability. (Berger 1966, 43)

Following Buonaventura, Hanna states, "Heterosexual dancing has been banned in an attempt to eradicate goddess worship and isolate a female's sexuality for one man" (Hanna 1988, 48). Hanna considerably weakens her book by attempting to describe dance practices that occurred thousands of years ago and about which we cannot usefully talk. Her observation is further weakened by her reference to "heterosexual" dancing. What is heterosexual dancing? Throughout the Middle East there are many areas where men and women perform regional folk dances together: Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, Kurdistan, Fars and Luristan in Iran. These dances are expressions of community, rather than the overt displays of sexuality associated with professional dances such as belly dancing. This would seem to belie her sweeping generalization. Solo improvised dance generally takes place in segregated venues, although in more modern times men and women perform together. Urban Iranian weddings are an example. Audrey Shalinsky (1995) notes that in Afghanistan she attended segregated weddings, but when the same families immigrated to the United States they danced together. Sherri Deaver describes completely segregated dancing in Saudi Arabia (Deaver 1978). The question still remains how mixed these events may have been historically.

Writings and viewpoints like those expressed by Buonaventura and Hanna are orientalist romantic projections; in Said's terms, "The Orient was overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitivity, and so forth" (Said 1978, 150). One of the enduring fantasies in the literature and throughout the world of belly dancing is that this dancing has some relationship to the worship and rituals connected with (usually unnamed) mother goddesses: "In order to establish themselves, both Christianity and Islam had to destroy the rituals connected with goddess worship. Thus they attempted to eradicate female dance related to the celebration of sexuality and fertility" (Buonaventura 1990, 34-35). Although we know that three goddesses figured in the pre-Islamic Arab pantheon (Shahid 1970, 24), along with figures such as Isis and Hathor in the ancient Egyptian pantheon, we are not in a position to state with any degree of certainty what kind of dancing, if any, took place in the worship of these figures.

Thus, belly dancing is found at the intersection of dance vocabulary, media images, the feminist and sexual liberation movements, cultural appropriations, and the community of origin, creating tensions that center on its practice and representation. At one time more than a million women, and a few men, were engaged in this activity (Sellers-Young 1992). Most of them adopted an Arabic or other exotic name and often a persona of a Middle Eastern *femme fatale* or goddess as well. In contrast to the performers of Asian classical dance genres, belly dancers can sometimes begin dancing professionally with only a modicum of training and technique, especially if they are considered attractive. While many other genres such as tango contain erotic elements, what sets belly dancing apart is its overt sexuality, both in its movement vocabulary and its intent. It was this element that attracted thousands of women to learn and perform it at the height of the sexual liberation movement of the 1970s.

Many belly dance enthusiasts in North America react against the contempt they know exists among Middle Easterners for belly dancing. As an antidote, many belly dancers claim it is an ancient ritual to the Mother Goddess and a form of art. Middle Easterners remain unconvinced, thus creating cultural tensions. For example, when Middle Eastern men proposition a dancer in a nightclub, they are acting within their cultural framework, as is the outraged dancer who, if North American, is acting within her own very different one.

Issues of Representation

The individual choreographer and/or dancer who performs in a public area is placing him or herself in the position of representing the Other. This establishes a potential power relationship that is not necessarily pernicious but is often, in Savigliano's terms, "disrespectful" and "banal" (Savigliano 1995). The intention to perform often originates from the intense love, what MacKenzie (1995) describes as "a well-nigh reverential approach," and respect that either a Western or a native choreographer finds in these dance traditions. The choreographer often expresses a deeply felt wish to prove to those unbelievers in the various Middle Eastern communities that oriental dance truly constitutes an art form and not merely lightweight, low-class entertainment. Nevertheless, in appropriating the dance and performing it in a context where they represent Middle Eastern cultures, they "speak" for the silent Orient (see Monty 1986). An example of representing and speaking for the silent Orient appears in the program notes of a group based in the San Francisco Bay area, Ballet Afsaneh:

Ballet Afsaneh is dedicated to presenting the traditional dance and music of the Silk Road . . . to promote appreciation and understanding of these enduring cultures. Along with political conflicts, social and religious misunderstandings have masked the beauty and humanity of these cultures for much of the American public. The need for cultural understanding has never been greater—Ballet Afsaneh offers these rare and exciting art forms to build a bridge of world peace and understanding. (*Sbarlyn and Ballet Afsaneh*, 1994, cover)

Unlike Said, we do not subscribe to the notion that the result is always a distortion or romanticization of the Orient, although very often it is. Many choreographers try to justify the inclusion of fantasy elements through claims of dedicated research, what one colleague referred to as "a desperate search for authenticity." For example, Robert De Warren, the artistic director of the former Iranian State Dance Company, the Mahalli Dancers, for his piece *Haftpaykar* (The Seven Portraits), a work based on a poem by Nezami-Ganjavi, claims that "Each step and gesture is a reproduction of the real traditional painting, choreographed after almost two year's research" (*Mahalli Dancers of Iran* 1976). The result was a Western romanticized view of medieval Iran, not the historical reconstruction he suggests.

Orientalism in Middle Eastern Dance

Dancing in the Middle East, especially the solo improvised version, of which cabaret belly dancing is the best-known example in the West, has been subjected to relentless romanticizing. Caliphs, sultans, sheiks, slave girls, veils, harems filled with scantily clad beauties, caravans, and mosques and minarets are familiar images in moving pictures, Broadway and Las Vegas performances, and the many publications for belly dance hobbyists and aficionados. Terms such as "allure," "mystique," and "fantasy" abound in advertisements and articles in belly dance publications. Most of the American and European practitioners of Oriental dance take on romantic Arab-esque names: Zoheret, Chandra, Samisha, Samaweyyah, Chantel, and Mahala are a few appearing in the advertisements in *Arabesque*, where you are invited to purchase "The Cleopatra Headdress for the Egyptian Goddess in You" (*Arabesque* May-June 1986, 31-33). On the self-exotic or perhaps "occidentalistic" side of the coin, Egyptian belly dancers often self-identify with chic Western names like Fifi, Dina, and Lucy.

Orientalism and Self-Exoticism in Middle Eastern Dance

We suggest that this desire to "clean up," sanitize, and make respectable a dance form with undeniably sexual and sensual content compels native and Western choreographers to create stagings that make the dance acceptable to the new middle-class elite, both in the Middle East and the West (see Shay 2002, 126-162). Largely in the twentieth century, this class developed in several countries of the Middle East, including Iran, Turkey, and parts of the Arab world like Lebanon and Egypt, partly in response to the general availability of educational systems built on Belgian, French, and English models that inculcated a system of moral values based on nineteenth-century middle-class European notions. Similar events occurred in the Central Asian regions with the spread of public education on a Russian communist model.

Although some of the governments, such as those of Iran and Egypt, claimed that they were the righteous upholders of Islamic values, their new educational values rejected traditional native modes of cultural expression, especially traditional dance (see Armbrust 1996). Many people of the new middle class no longer wished to see dancing they considered embarrassing and old-fashioned, preferring instead European forms as more cultured and respectable.

In this respect, the postcolonial elite and middle classes carried forth the colonialist educational project of inculcating Victorian morality in the colonized population—a project that successfully continued long after the departure of colonial authorities (Mitchell 1988). Chaitanya Nitya Yati states that "After the advent of Christianity, Indians as a whole became oversensitive about erotic references, and the general tendency in present-day India is mostly to keep away from erotic expression in art and literature" (Yati 1979, 21). Thus, in order to use native dance forms as art, most choreographers and dancers, native and Western, felt that they needed to be transformed into art and purified—made cultured and respectable like ballet. "As the fame of the belly dance

spread to the Western world, it became something of an embarrassment to the cultural and political custodians of the East, who began to consider themselves above their own popular arts . . . the [Egyptian] government encourages instead the performances of a sort of folkloric dance that only vaguely resembles the belly dance" (Berger 1966, 43).

In the former Soviet Union, presentation of solo improvised dance took the form of wholesome miming and finger-wagging, boy-meets-girl clichés approved of by the Party and commonly seen in Russian dances. This style, under Russian guidance, took root as well in the government-sponsored Egyptian folkloric troupes, the National Folklore Troupe (Qawmiyah), and the Firqah Reda. Lois al-Faruqi makes an important point regarding concert dance in the broader Islamic world: "In the Middle East, recent attempts at programmatic dance by companies like Firqah Reda of Egypt are obvious attempts to imitate an alien tradition (European dance) rather than one native to Egypt" (al-Faruqi 1987, 7).

State Folk Ensembles in the Middle East

National dance ensembles in Turkey, Egypt, and formerly Iran and Lebanon produced several choreographic works that incorporated Western orientalist elements and images. The Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble, departing from their typical performances of regional folk dances, has included a highly orientalist, sanitized *cifte telli* in their current repertory. A solo improvised dance in its native state, the Turkish Ensemble's dance features a bevy of beautiful women acting as a chorus, with a soloist in a contrasting color, all performing a highly choreographed work that parts company with the original in both movement and costuming. Mustafa Turan, the director of the ensemble, regards the inclusion of the *cifte telli* choreography as a corrective step in the direction of recovering the (romanticized and sanitized) Turkish Ottoman past, until recently a taboo area in Turkish life (see Shay 2002). The company has received sharp criticism from Turkish purists for its inclusion. They decried the addition of the *cifte telli* choreography to the repertory as "appealing to the orientalist images of foreigners" (Baykurt quoted in Cefkin 1993, 140). The two Egyptian state folk dance companies, the Reda troupe and the Firqah Qawmiyah (National Folk Troupe), have borrowed freely from Hollywood-inspired images to provide their middle classes with a pleasant, nostalgic, and highly sanitized version of their past.

Like many choreographers of staged versions of traditional dance forms, Robert De Warren takes great pains to explain his research strategies in order to justify the authenticity of his choreographies. He states that women perform this dance primarily for their husbands or for other women, a standard line from belly dance enthusiasts who use this approach to justify the frankly sensual content of their dances. As Deaver (1978) has shown for Saudi Arabia, and Safa-Isfahani (1980), 'Enjavi-Shirazi (1973), and Shay (1995), among others, have demonstrated for Iran, until recently, this dance genre was performed in domestic female space, with women performing for and entertaining other women.¹⁵ Men, perhaps less often than women, performed in male space. All our informants rejected the notion of a woman dancing privately for her husband as an ori-

entalist fantasy, not as the widespread Middle Eastern practice that is suggested by De Warren and others. Performing in sexually mixed social occasions is a very recent, largely middle-class phenomenon in which the dancers, owing to the mixed audience, are likely to be highly circumspect in their movements (see Deaver 1978; Shay 1999).

A second assumption expressed by De Warren (1973, 30) as well as others, such as La Meri and Rezvani, is that artists, including dancers, were honored personages in pre-Islamic times. No evidence has been presented to substantiate such a statement. Leila Ahmed (1992), in her analysis of gender roles in Islam, and Oleg Grabar, in determining at what point art became "Islamic" rather than something else, note that Muslims, by and large, embraced pre-Islamic concepts, attitudes, and art forms because it took centuries to form specifically "Islamic" attitudes and forms. We argue that pre-Islamic attitudes towards professional dancers may have been equally as ambivalent and negative as those encountered today (see endnote 5).

By hinting at royal patronage, De Warren sidesteps the problematic marginal social position of professional dancers who were so stigmatized that Annemarie Schimmel (1990) said that they were not permitted to testify in Islamic courts. Beza'i (1965) points out that during the Safavid period (1501-1722) zealous Shi'i clergy attempted to drive professional actors and dancers out of certain parts of Isfahan (see note 5).

Self-Exoticized Individual Performances

Private individuals from various areas sometimes present themselves, and by extension their cultures, in self-exotic ways. Shay remembers from his early days in college in the early 1950s that certain individuals from Iran, such as Leila and Shahla (pseudonyms), were not loath to dance on stage in Kismet-style costumes in order to appear glamorous and exotic in the Hollywood environment where they might just possibly be "discovered." Although their costumes were from Hollywood, their dances were very authentic, for it was all that they knew.

Although not plagued to the same degree as belly dancing with romanticism and fantasy, Iranians are not immune to picturing dance in imaginative and fictitious ways to please or amaze gullible foreigners, as the following passage by Najmeh Najafi amply demonstrates:

Another thing I enjoyed very much was dancing. In my country there are traditional dances just as in America there are well-known songs and poems. Many of our dances tell stories: some are survivals from a very ancient time, like the Zoroastrian Dance of Fire. Some came from the Islamic influence. At first I used to dance just as I felt; but later I learned the traditional dances, blending my emotion with the emotion of the dance story. In our dancing the movement of the hands tells special things. There is a language of motion, and people who know this language can interpret the story as well as if it were in spoken words. People in America who have seen me dance say, "Your hands are so graceful!" Hands must be graceful in order to be talking hands.

Often when my mother had guests she would call me in to dance. In Persia one dances for a good cause—what you call in America a “benefit.” It would not be appropriate for me to dance for money, to entertain strangers, to make a career. I know here in America entertainers are well thought of. Professional entertainers in my country are applauded but they do not belong to the upper classes. So I danced for my mother’s guests, but I had not the ambition to be a dancer. (Najafi and Hinkley 1953, 28–29)

Najafi’s colorful attempts at self-exoticism raise a number of questions. One of the questions that non-Iranians most commonly ask after seeing a performance of the solo improvised dance from the Iranian world is, following Sachs, “Do the hand gestures mean anything?” They are, of course, responding to the well-known fact that in certain types of classical dances from the Indian subcontinent, the hands and other parts of the body do have codified meaning (see Ohtani 1988, 9–13; Massey 1989, 1–16), as do some dances of certain Polynesian areas (Kaeppeler 1972). Certainly, among the finest dancers of the Iranian world, professional and amateur, highly elaborate, graceful, and intricate movements are articulated with the hands, arms, and fingers. That might suggest, at first glance, the possibility of such a similarity, which Najafi suggests to make her mendacious account more appealing. But, as al-Faruqi in a more forthright fashion asserts, “there is little or no evidence of an attempt to coordinate steps, formations, movements or gestures with a story or with the description of events or things . . . it is an “abstract” rather than a descriptive or delineative art” (al-Faruqi 1987, 7).

This is not to say that mime is totally absent from oriental dance. In Iran certain miming gestures exist in women’s domestic theater games and plays, and rural folk dances in Tajikistan depict agricultural movements or animal dances, but they are individual and not codified (Shay 1995). They suggest, for example, the washing of clothes or the winnowing of rice. They are not the elaborate narratives told in *bharata natyam*, for example.

The suggestion of an imaginative “Zoroastrian Dance of Fire” might have been designed to stir the creative juices of individuals like Ruth St. Denis, but it has no grounds in reality. Najafi’s suggestion of the low status of dancers is accurate and clear, although she does not go so far as to openly state that dance is connected with prostitution. In contrast to the account of Najafi’s mother pushing her daughter to dance, several female informants relate how their horrified mothers warned them against dancing in public “as the first step to prostitution” (Haeri 1994; Azad 1995).

We do not wish to suggest that within what we have described as traditional performances, dancers had no imagination. On the contrary, Behzad Beza’i, in his history of Iranian theater, states that comic improvised theater derived from professional dancing and that its movement vocabulary is still the basis for traditional theater. He recounts how, in the sixteenth century, a troupe of dancers in Isfahan had themselves carried into a performance in trunks, like gigantic versions of the dolls or puppets that itinerant performers (*lo’bat-baz*) carry around and make dance, even today. Each dancer was dressed in a different color. They also performed “*qhabr va ashti* (quarrel

and make up), which consisted of dance and pantomime" (Beza'i 1965, 169). One must keep in mind, however, that these were not Western strategies of staging that are largely designed for proscenium arch stages now found in most major Middle Eastern cities.

There are dozens of dance companies in North America devoted to the performance of dances from the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa. These companies range from professional ensembles with dozens of dancers and musicians to small amateur groups. Several of these companies have been influenced by state companies such as the Reda Troupe of Egypt, the Mahalli Dancers of Iran (subsequently banned by the Islamic Republic), the Turkish State Folk Dance Ensemble, and the Bahor Ensemble of Uzbekistan. In following the nationally supported companies in the Middle East, they perpetuate and are complicit in the orientalist images created by the choreographers of these companies.

Conclusion

Orientalism, in its tendency to define the "Other" in ways that privilege the person creating the definition, has more recently been identified as not only a tool of Western imperialism, but also a way of defining self in relationship to the Other that crosses identifiable political and economic boundaries of east-west and north-south (the latter called in some literature first and third world). One aspect of this self-other dichotomy is the source of inspiration, sometimes communicated via artistic or expressive forms, one gains from an other whom you perceive as unlike yourself. Thus, one aspect of orientalism engages a discursive dialogue in which I see you as what I am not and attempt to express myself as you to expand upon my potential experience of self. Images created from this standpoint, however, often become imbued with stereotypical attributes that are consistently replicated. This is particularly true in the realm of the stage and the performing arts. For although transient in time and space, these arts use character, costume, sets and lights to create symbolic summaries of key discursive subjects.

One might inquire, as one of the readers of this essay did:

There are modern myths surrounding the Western belly dance that often make serious dance scholars cringe and want to hide under their seats at some performances. Granted that Western cultures have misread the East but I think it is far more than that. It is a field of endeavor to try to understand just why these orientalized myths continue to be so strong and unyielding to reason. Just what do the myths give Western women who perform them? To me this is the real challenge, not just exposing them.

We would suggest that this issue is not simply resolved, and attempts to read the motives of thousands of women who actively engage with and believe these "myths" constitute an invitation to speculation, as Edward Said observes in the quotation that opens this essay. We suggest, as we have above, that many individuals believe the "myth" that this dance form was performed for a Mother Goddess, a popular New Age

concept, because it is fun in a theatrical way, like dressing up for Halloween. Some believe in this nonhistory in the same way millions still believe in astrology; others have a financial investment. As Barbara Sellers-Young's passage indicates, belly dancing can be a liberating, even spiritual, experience for many individuals, and during the sexual liberation movement it became a vehicle for women to (re)claim their bodies (Sellers-Young 1992, 142). Finally, claims of ancient roots, dances of fertility, and ritual dances for ancient deities lend dignity to a dance genre with obvious erotic and sexual content. It is significant that most of these concepts and interpretations of belly dancing originated in the West; Middle Eastern scholars, until very recently, have remained silent on the topic.

Within the arts, this discourse on the Other, often based on misinterpretation and related appropriation, has evolved within cultural areas into entire genres of performance. Examples of this would be the images of Americans in Chinese spoken drama, the Orient of the sex-and-sand films in Hollywood, the exotic Russian ballets, the tango craze, and the early dances of Ruth St. Denis. These orientalist performances or self-other discourses, are historically part of a post-Renaissance expansion of travel and communication fueled by increasingly complex technology. Belly dancing, as a mode of expression and style of performance, is an example of a genre of performance that is an extension of the process of orientalism and a contemporary discourse on power.

Notes

1. We use the term "oriental dance" to include all forms of solo improvised dance in the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia. The term has been used loosely in both popular and scholarly publications to cover a wide variety of genres, from classical Japanese, Cambodian, Indonesian, and Indian dance forms to belly dance and other Middle Eastern forms.

2. As an example, during a recent conference on Middle Eastern dance (Orange Coast College, California) Egyptian oriental dance luminaries Mahmoud Reda, Farida Fahmy, and Nagwa Fouad were among those in attendance. These Egyptians and North Americans embodied and performed orientalism, hybridity, and interculturalism through and between the discursive spaces of the event. Consciously and unconsciously, visually and aurally, as the

participants spoke and performed, they revealed pieces and patches of orientalist exoticism and self-exoticism surrounding a dance genre that evokes issues of globalism and cultural appropriation. The concerts that occurred each evening included solo improvised dance forms from Turkey and Iran, but overwhelmingly, in light of the presence of the Egyptian dance personalities as well as the preference expressed by the attendees, the focus was on Egyptian cabaret dancing.

3. What we call belly dancing is variously termed by both its practitioners and devotees as well as by those who perform the dance as a social movement practice and by other observers and writers. "Nowadays it is more often called the Oriental dance, a label apparently designed to lend modesty by shifting the point of reference from anatomy to geography" (Berger 1966, 43).

Many terms from Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Central Asia, the Iranian plateau, and the Nile Valley have been irretrievably lost as hundreds of ancient languages become extinct. Other nomenclature includes: *raks sharki* (literally oriental dance in Arabic: *ar-raqs asb-sharqi*), *raqs misri* (Egyptian dance), *danse orientale*, *danse du ventre*, *baladi* (dance of the countryside), *cifte telli* (the popular Turkish variant), *majlesi* (literally dance of the social gathering in Persian), and less well-known terms such as *cifte cifte* and *karsi-karsija* (variants of the Turkish *cifte telli* and *karşilama*), in Serbian and Macedonian (Jankovic 1939).

4. For those readers interested in seeing the various movement practices, consult our videography.

5. In fact, there is every reason to suggest that, like other areas of pre-Islamic life and attitudes, negative attitudes toward public dancers, male and female, were continued after the advent of Islam. We need only follow the career of Empress Theodora, who began life as public performer. When she became the wife of Justinian I, the full apparatus of the Byzantine state swung into gear to expunge her shameful past, including a dispensation to name Theodora a noble, since the elite classes were legally barred from marrying entertainers, as they were in Rome (see Bridge 1993, 16-18, 94-95). Annemarie Schimmel indicates that dancers and other performers were barred from giving testimony in Islamic courts (Schimmel 1990, 425-426). Jean Chardin, who traveled in Persia from 1673-77, describes how the dancers were courtesans and were rounded up to perform at the court by an older woman charged with this duty (quoted in Surieu 1967, 150-152); and C. E. Bosworth notes that entertainers were considered part of the criminal underground in the medieval Islamic world (Bosworth 1976, 1). Thus, the elite hired the same dancers as others, but be-

cause they could pay more, they could hire the most skilled of them. We would suggest that there is a widespread notion prevalent in both the East and the West that one night the lights went out and the next morning was Islam. We suggest that readers interested in exploring how Muslims adopted pre-Islamic beliefs, attitudes, and aesthetic values consult Oleg Grabar's outstanding study *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1987).

6. At the Middle East Dance Conference (see note 2), a well-attended panel of both Egyptians and Westerners that included co-author Barbara Sellers-Young discussed the idea of a standardized dance vocabulary.

7. While we discuss Islam in essentialist terms due to the brevity of our presentation, in fact we might better speak of Islams, since Islam is as highly fragmented as Christianity. Islam is always dynamic and contingent, not static and unchanging, and Muslims and those who are so identified, and their attitudes, range from deeply pious to totally atheistic. Thus, the difficulty of writing about dance in a Muslim context courts the danger of essentialization.

8. A recent magazine article describes the first public performance of solo improvised dance in Iran before an all-female audience held in the summer of 1998. Because of its dangerous and negative meaning, the word dance was not used, but rather the concert was called a "Performance of Harmonious Motions." The performance was held in an abandoned basement that was turned into an ersatz concert space (Entekhabi-Fard 2001).

9. Prior to Said's popular title, "orientalism" and "orientalist" had several more positive meanings. It named a genre of art, but referred to the subject, not the style of a work of art. The term "orientalist," as a noun, used to refer to a student of oriental languages, history, and literature.

10. A recent production of *La Bayadère* at the Orange County Performing Arts Center (April 30, 2001), staged by Rudolf Nureyev for the Paris Opera Ballet, is a case in point.

11. To sample a multitude of orientalist images used by belly dancers, the reader may refer to any issue of *Arabesque* or *Habibi*, the best-known and most professionally produced of the belly dance journals. The articles range widely in scholarship, many are quite serious and useful, while others are redolent of the "mysterious East." The ads are vivid manifestations of orientalism. A discussion of orientalist images in the United States is in Lori Anne Salem (1995).

12. The widespread citations of Buonaventura's works provoked Middle East scholar Sherifa Zuhur to comment, "The field of dance history still awaits a study more verifiable than Buonaventura's" (Zuhur 1998, 18).

13. A typical recent statement: "Interestingly, even the one dance of the *rebetika* repertoire that was essentially a woman's dance, the *tsifte-teli*, was not uncommonly performed by men holding their genitals as they gyrated in a lewd parody of female dancing" (Holst-Warhaft 1998, 121). Why a woman's dance? This is not to say that men do not parody women, and vice versa; we have seen both sexes parody the other, but the *tsifte teli* is danced by men as well as women and without parody (see Shay 1995).

14. In 1975, as a folklorist doing a project for the Smithsonian Institution for the folk-life festival, Shay was sent to Lebanon to investigate folk dancing and music. In the village Mtein, a mixed Druze and Christian settlement, he saw several dances, including the domestic version of the belly dance, performed by most of the men who were present. Lebanese government officials and some Smithsonian folklife staff were most anxious, exhibiting considerable squeamish-

ness, and they insisted that this dance should not be shown performed by men on the mall in Washington, D.C., lest the viewers "get the wrong impression" (or, we might add, the right one).

15. It should be explained that female space can occur in both inside and outside locations; it is off limits (*haram*) to males who do not stand in proper kinship to the females in that space. Male space is also both domestic and public. Female space and male space, while generally fixed in residences, can be temporarily designated in the outdoors, such as picnic and bathing areas. Professional female entertainers were, and are, hired to perform in the women's quarters (Campbell 2002, 691-694). Both male and female professional entertainers (depending on the area) might be hired to entertain in male space.

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