

Between the Middle East and the Americas

The Cultural Politics of Diaspora

Edited by
Evelyn Alsultany *and* Ella Shohat

The University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

Copyright © by the University of Michigan 2013
All rights reserved

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publisher.

Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
⊗ Printed on acid-free paper

2016 2015 2014 2013 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Between the Middle East and the Americas : the cultural politics of diaspora /
edited by Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-472-09944-3 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-0-472-06944-6
(pbk. : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-0-472-02877-1 (e-book)

1. Arabs—Ethnic identity. 2. Arabs—Social conditions. 3. Arab
Americans—Ethnic identity. 4. Arab Americans—Social conditions.
5. Arabs—Western countries—Ethnic identity. 6. Arabs—Western
countries—Social conditions. 7. Middle East—Relations—United States.
8. United States—Relations—Middle East. 9. Middle East—Relations—
Western countries. 10. Western countries—Relations—Middle East.
I. Alsultany, Evelyn. II. Shohat, Ella, 1959—

DS36.95.B47 2012

305.892'707—dc23

2012033640

In memory of Edward W. Said

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

INTRODUCTION

1. The Cultural Politics of "the Middle East" in the Americas:
An Introduction 3
Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsultany
2. The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism
and Occidentalism 42
Ella Shohat

NATION, CULTURE, AND REPRESENTATION

3. Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation 65
Jacob Berman
4. *Turcos* in the Mix: Corrupting Arabs in Brazil's
Racial Democracy 80
John Tofik Karam
5. From "*Baisanos*" to Billionaires: Locating Arabs in Mexico 96
Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp
6. Ali Bla Bla's Double-Edged Sword: Argentine President
Carlos Menem and the Negotiation of Identity 108
Christina Civantos
7. They Hate Our Freedom, But We Love Their Belly Dance:
The Spectacle of the Shimmy in Contemporary U.S. Culture 130
Amira Jarmakani
8. From Arab Terrorists to Patriotic Arab Americans:
Representational Strategies in Post-9/11 TV Dramas 153
Evelyn Alsultany

SEVEN

They Hate Our Freedom,
But We Love Their Belly Dance

*The Spectacle of the Shimmy
in Contemporary U.S. Culture*

Amira Jarmakani

The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue.

—Guy Debord

At a nearby Moroccan, Turkish, Lebanese, Greek, or Mediterranean restaurant, belly dancers contribute to the general ambiance of the dining experience. In the local gym, belly dancing classes have been added to the menu of New Age exercise options, guaranteed to tone women's bodies in addition to improving their body image. In the 2001 advertising scheme for Camel cigarettes, a silhouette of a belly dancer was employed to signify the "carnivale" aspect of what Camel called the "7 pleasures of the exotic," while live belly dancers were hired to perform at the 700 parties, which were staged to promote the new line of "exotic" cigarettes. In the bonus features section of comedienne Margaret Cho's 2005 video, *Assassin*, one can find "Margaret Cho's belly dance," a noncomedic segment in which the irreverent, spunky, and controversial comedienne discusses the revolutionary potential of belly dancing as a means through which women can "define [their] own standard of beauty." Taken together, these widely varied examples of how belly dancing is threaded through the U.S. cultural milieu certainly testify to the predominance of belly dance as a popular U.S. cultural form. As such, the figure of the belly dancer in U.S. popular culture lends itself to a consideration of the ways in which this dance form can speak to such a multivalent

group of audiences. The more interesting question, however, emerges out of an exploration of the timeliness of these varied appropriations of the dance form. Representations of the belly dance as a popular new exercise form or cabaret-style performance are usually depoliticized and abstracted from the realities of contemporary U.S. involvement in the Middle East. However, I argue that there is an indirect conceptual link between the renewed interest in and marketing of belly dancing in the United States and the War on Terror claim that the United States is bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East. In fact, the contemporary popularity of belly dancing in the United States reveals the irony of the fact that the commodified Middle Eastern cultural form of the belly dance is appropriated to advocate for female liberation in the United States at the same time that the U.S. state mobilizes the assumption of female oppression in the Middle East to justify military action. Exploring this irony, American belly dancing can serve as a concrete example of the way that "liberty, freedom, and democracy have been turned into powerful rhetorical instruments justifying globalization and empire."¹ The rhetoric of freedom, then, does not only function in the realm of politics; its echoes and reverberations can be heard and felt throughout the cultural fabric of U.S. popular culture.

A Concise History of American Belly Dancing

As is evident from the examples with which I begin this essay, belly dancing has a wide range of manifestations in U.S. popular culture, which speaks to its rich history in the United States. Contrary to various narratives that consistently cast belly dancing as an authentic and unmediated example of Middle Eastern culture, American belly dancing is a "new dance genre"² insofar as it combines a set of folk dances originating from various regions in the Middle East with multiple influences, including Orientalist representations and dance movements from other regions and cultures. While it has been influenced by "native" dancers, for example, both from Middle Eastern immigrant communities in the United States and from Algerian and Syrian dancers brought to perform at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, their performances have also shifted to adapt to U.S. demands, such as in amusement parks and Middle Eastern restaurants, both of which I discuss below.

Popular (and nontechnical) representations of belly dance have influenced the overall genre, both those from Hollywood films³ and those from Egyptian films, which apparently influenced well-known U.S. performers and instructors like Jamila Salimpour and Morocco.⁴ Adding to the mix of elements that characterize American belly dancing are also professional

U.S. and European dancers from the early twentieth century, who created interpretive dances based on inspiration from an imagined East.⁵ As the last example implies, Orientalist notions of the “East” often resulted in a “choreographic pastiche” of “movements and elements from Egypt, Persia, India, Java, Bali, and the Far East.”⁶ This spirit of cultural and stylistic fusion still exists in American belly dancing today, as can be seen in the popularity of forms such as American Tribal Belly Dance⁷ and Gothic Belly Dance.⁸ More recent adaptations of belly dancing have recast it in the mold of the exercise industry, itself an appropriation of some popular feminist interpretations of the dance in the 1960s and 1970s. In this combination of examples, one can notice at least three overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, ideas about belly dancing that have shaped the American interpretation of it. Below, I trace some key sites in the historic formation of belly dancing as a new dance genre, focusing on its presentation as exotic spectacle, on its consumerist successes in the United States, and on its construction as a liberatory, female-centered dance, touted for its contributions to the empowerment of women.

Historically, the power to consume the belly dance, or to render the belly dance into consumerist spectacle, has also been linked to the project of colonialism. Perhaps one of the best examples comes from the Orientalist travel writer Gustave Flaubert, whose famous encounter with Kuchuk Hanem solidified the link between belly dancing and prostitution in the popular European imagination.⁹ Colonialist expectations that the “East” was replete with countless manifestations of erotic sensuality in many ways created the conditions for the very performances that were assumed to be indigenous. The colonial cabarets, which boasted belly dance performances, in the first half of the twentieth century were predicated on such Orientalist expectations and assumptions. These venues were clear displays of colonialist power. They represent the ability of French and British colonial forces to create a bounded space in which colonized women performed for the scopical pleasure of colonizing men. Moreover, it named that performance as natural and indigenous to the region, thereby theoretically eclipsing the impact of colonial power to construct the scene. While the overt power dynamic of the colonial context does not determine contemporary belly dance performances in the United States, the legacy of staging belly dancers’ sexuality for the scopical pleasure of the audience undoubtedly tinges popular perceptions of the dance today. Contemporary restaurant performances, for example, can be understood as an extension of the performances that took place within colonial cabarets in the early 1900s, as can the exhibitions at world’s fairs and amusement parks in the turn-of-the-century United States.

World’s fairs, and particularly the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, are influential sites in the larger history of belly dancing in the United States.¹⁰ While

they are not necessarily the original locations in which the dance was introduced in the United States, the success of belly dance exhibits helped to popularize and disseminate it to mainstream audiences. The general structure of world’s fairs, moreover, replicates that of colonial cabarets in that native performers were staged as a strange and exotic exhibit catering to the expectations of the white U.S. audience that came to watch. What that audience perceived as a shocking, lascivious dance (particularly because it demonstrated freedom of movement in the hips and abdominal region of a woman’s body in an era in which elite U.S. women wore corsets) then made its way into a series of performance styles, including vaudeville, burlesque, and striptease.¹¹ While its eventual incorporation into striptease (during the Jazz Era) certainly explains its lingering association with erotic dance in the contemporary context (an association that most belly dance practitioners reject), it also highlights a particular framing of the dance in the U.S. context, one that casts it as an exotic spectacle. For example, in the transition from burlesque to striptease, Robert Allen argues that the belly dance form played a role in disempowering performers, since it helped to transition the performers into eroticized, nonspeaking objects for scopical consumption.¹² Likewise, cabaret also began in the late nineteenth century as a countercultural form that offered a forum for satirical commentary on the ruling order. However, by the 1920s, also like burlesque, the cabaret form gave way, in some instances, to the strip club genre, an association that has persevered, thanks to films like *Cabaret* and popular representations of the entertainment form.¹³ The perceptions of belly dancing that enabled it to play these kinds of roles persist in many contemporary iterations of it, including in Middle Eastern-themed restaurants, which lure customers with belly dancing performances.

Alongside the history of belly dance as Orientalist spectacle staged for mainstream audiences, and reinforcing patriarchal notions of female sexuality, is its enduring commercial success. The performance of belly dancing in the United States can be consistently tied to its history of cooptation in the interests of consumerism, since the belly dance concessions have been credited with saving the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair from financial demise.¹⁴ Its subsequent adoption into the entertainment amusement parks in the early twentieth century further attests to its framing as a lucrative commodity. Indeed, while many popular histories of belly dancing in the United States (on popular belly dance websites and recent how-to belly dance books) skip from the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair directly to its revival in the 1960s and 1970s, belly dancing was alive and well in U.S. popular culture during the interim years. As mentioned above, in the 1920s and 1930s popular perceptions of it as a lascivious dance were incorporated into the performance of

striptease, an incorporation no doubt aimed at increasing the commercial success of striptease. Moreover, in the realm of representation, and particularly Hollywood films, belly dancing (often combined with harem structures) also sometimes made an appearance¹⁵ and served in this way as a referential marker to earlier appropriations of belly dancing that used it as a means of drawing consumer interest (i.e., at world's fairs and amusement parks). Contemporary iterations of this kind of appropriation manifest in Middle Eastern restaurants that feature belly dancing performances in order to draw customers, and in the marketing of belly dancing as a trendy new exercise.

Despite the best efforts of some belly dance practitioners in the United States, who want to emphasize the cultural and folkloric origins of "oriental dance,"¹⁶ the wider context of belly dancing in the United States is influenced by the legacies of colonialism and consumer exploitation, both of which cannot be extricated from a contemporary understanding of it. At the same time, one cannot ignore interpretations of the dance in the American belly dance community that seek to present it within its own cultural context. In this endeavor, U.S. dancers have benefited from the knowledge and instruction that have come out of immigrant communities in the United States. As Andrea Deagon has pointed out, the search for history and cultural awareness is a "strong thread" among "oriental dancers,"¹⁷ who sometimes utilize trade magazines such as *Habibi* and *Arabesque* to access cultural and historical information. Indeed, one intervention in the colonialist and consumerist framings of belly dance in the United States could come from the acknowledgment that, in the Middle East and elsewhere, belly dancing (*raqs sharqi*) is often performed at informal—"amateur"¹⁸—settings, such as at weddings or at intimate gatherings of family and friends.

The final thread in the history of belly dance in the United States actually reclaims and builds on the notion of it as a form of expression that women perform in community with one another, and frames it as a liberating dance form that celebrates (rather than exploits) female sexuality. This resurgence of popular interest in learning how to belly dance intersected in some ways with the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, insofar as it emphasized belly dancing as a form of empowerment for women and as a vehicle for reclaiming women's inherent power. In this respect, it echoes both essentialist forms of feminism (some narratives even claim that belly dancing is a link to long-lost matriarchal cultures¹⁹) and some aspects of liberal feminism. Much like the critiques of liberal feminism and "second wave" feminism, which note the movement's focus on middle- and upper-class white women's issues, the 1960s and 1970s interest in belly dancing was also largely a white women's movement, centered on universalizing notions of freedom and empowerment.²⁰

In this brief history of belly dancing in the United States, I have focused

on three main orientations toward belly dance—the cabaret style and its intersections with colonialism, its imbrication in consumerist projects, and its appropriation into women's empowerment movements. Though I have separated out these threads for the purposes of clarity, I want to emphasize that they do not operate independently of one another but rather as overlapping discourses that often coexist simultaneously in the same context. For example, many women who learned to belly dance during the 1960s and 1970s resurgence (as well as contemporarily) have earned money by performing "belly grams," short belly dance performances "sent" as a gift to someone, usually on a special occasion. Though most belly dancers would likely reject any association between "belly grams" and individualized strip performances, customers likely do make such associations, highlighting the interweaving of the colonialist cabaret legacy, the commercialization of the belly dancing form, and the seemingly contradictory notion of it as a form of women's empowerment, all in one example.

Dancing to the Goddess Within

The contemporary popularity of belly dancing recombines elements of its historical legacy by marketing it as a way for women to empower themselves. While belly dancing remains popular in the standard venues of restaurant performances and specialized belly dance classes, it has also "emerged as one of the hot new workout trends in recent years, according to the American Council on Exercise."²¹ Indeed, the exercise industry has capitalized on the growing success of belly dance classes, by emphasizing the theme of women's empowerment through "embracing femininity."²² As one fitness belly dance instructor explains, "Women can get together and work on their bodies and it's women supporting women. It lets us appreciate our bodies and ourselves for who we are as women instead of trying to live up to some stereotype."²³ A *Time* magazine article about the phenomenon puts it a bit more bluntly: "To understand why belly dancing is enjoying such popularity today, it's important to set aside certain preconceptions. Banish the image of nubile harem girls undulating under an Arabian moon for the amusement of sheiks. Envision instead women of expanding waistlines and advancing ages finding their inner goddess under fluorescent lights at the local Y."²⁴ From these reports, it would appear that the lingering cabaret and striptease stereotypes of belly dancing as an erotic dance have been replaced with its incorporation into what might be loosely termed a "New Age" movement. In this formulation, the purpose of belly dancing is to help women search within themselves, revalue their femininity, and, in the process, develop a "stronger sense of self; even if that self doesn't look like Shakira."²⁵

In these examples, Orientalist notions about the Middle East (through the belly dance form) uniquely combine with U.S. conceptions of individuality and self-reliance to produce abstract and decontextualized conceptions of spirituality. The perception of belly dancing as essentially feminine and sensual couples with a vague Orientalist notion of the generalized East as inherently more spiritual. For example, a 2001 news article about the popularity of belly dancing quotes a student explaining, "You know, it's ultra-feminine, it's an opportunity to live that goddess that everybody has inside them."²⁶ Here, the invocation of a "goddess that everybody has inside them" both references an abstract notion of spirituality and suggests that one need only look inside herself to find it. In a recent article in the *New York Times*, another belly dance student builds on this point, clarifying the dance's exotic appeal: "It touches the inner goddess of every woman, which is something you don't let out because you're too civilized."²⁷ In a classic Orientalist formulation, the implication here is that belly dancing, as a (Middle) Eastern dance form, can help dancers reconnect with their primordial nature since their own cultures have become too "civilized" to maintain such base connections. Importantly, in the U.S. landscape of belly dancing, these Orientalist notions of spirituality ultimately operate as a vehicle for self-transformation, as related to mainstream body image ideals. As one belly dance practitioner claims on a popular U.S. belly dance website, "We gain a more loving and intimate relationship with our bodies and with our sensuality. And yes, after overcoming social taboos and identifying with a strong female archetype, we gain greater self-esteem."²⁸ Women are encouraged to strive toward a transformation of their own self-esteem, which, they are assured, they can gain by embracing their own femininity.

Like elements of the 1970s feminist reclamation of belly dancing, these constructions of belly dancing borrow from essentialist iterations of feminist thought, which privilege femininity (as naturally connected to womanhood) as a means of speaking back to patriarchy. To combat the popular idea that "belly dance [is] objectifying and exploiting the female body . . . in a part of the world where women's rights [are] held in little regard," one belly dance practitioner claims that belly dancing is, instead, "part of a new feminist revolution which [she calls] the Bellybutton Revolution."²⁹ The potential problem with such a revolution, however, is that it is consistently oriented toward the individual female subject—to bring out the "goddess within." The implicit message is that the problem lies within women themselves, who simply need to reconnect with the power of their own femininity in order to combat patriarchal oppression. Taken to its extreme, this kind of interpretation of feminism can actually undermine the larger project of working toward gender justice by making it seem as if the "revolution" is under way, or even achieved, despite the lack of widespread systemic change.

A (further) watered-down version of this idea of feminism is also readily incorporated into mainstream popular culture. One example is in the popular HBO TV series *Sex and the City*, which capitalized generally on the theme of female empowerment, though its main characters remain thoroughly invested in classic patriarchal structures. Not surprisingly, the show incorporates the "New Age" understanding of belly dancing discussed above, therefore demonstrating its ready appropriation into popular mainstream venues. In the fourth episode ("Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl") of season three, *Sex and the City* characters Carrie and Miranda sign up for a "Goddess Workout" class so that Miranda can find her "inner goddess" and get in touch with her "feminine side." While she ultimately decides it is not for her, the incorporation of this particular iteration of belly dancing into such a popular show illuminates common U.S. engagements with belly dancing that promulgate individualized notions of female empowerment, which are abstracted from larger sociopolitical realities.

In her discussion of "spiritual belly dance," Donnalee Dox describes this type of New Age phenomenon, putting it in the context of goddess imagery and adulation. She explains that, within this genre, "the goddess . . . is conceived as an image of an eternal, universal spirit operating outside a worldview structured by hierarchy, patriarchy, or conflict."³⁰ The transformation advocated within this framework is therefore one that seeks to transcend oppressive realities by simply not addressing them. In this formulation, to be free from systemic oppression (like patriarchal body image ideals) is to operate on a spiritual plane, disconnected from material realities. The goddess framework tends to decontextualize and dehistoricize in an effort to achieve universality, abstracted from the realities of hierarchy and patriarchy. However, universality is an unmarked category already coded by unspoken hierarchies. The appeal to universality, in this context, then, actually reinscribes the power of unmarked hierarchies. Further, it promotes an abstract and ungrounded conception of freedom, which loses its ability to signify something meaningful.

The power of the goddess framework, contributing greatly to its marketability, is its appeal to the exotic; it signals that it offers a completely different way of conceptualizing the body outside of Western traditions. Perhaps this is why various conceptions of "New Age" spirituality are sometimes conflated in belly dancing venues and products. For example, Suhaila Salimpour has produced a "fitness fusion" DVD, in which she combines belly dance and yoga moves in an overall workout.³¹ The justification for a belly dance/yoga "fusion" could easily be attributed to the fact that both strengthen abdominal, "core" muscles and therefore complement one another nicely. However, advocates of such fusion often go one step further, connecting them on a philosophical plane. Z-Helene Christopher, for

example, explains, "In its profoundest sense, to really Belly Dance one has to know oneself. To this extent, Belly Dancing has certain elements in common with the Eastern spiritual practices of Zen Buddhism and Yoga."³² Another belly dance practitioner puts it this way: "Another reason people may be attracted to both Belly dance and Yoga is the release from typical Western thinking. Both Belly dance and Yoga originated in ancient times and on different continents/subcontinents."³³ In both of these statements, the most salient connection between the two traditions seems to be their "Eastern" geography and their association with "ancient" traditions. The desire and struggle to "really . . . know oneself," however, could just as easily be associated with typical American ideals of self-reliance. Dox concludes that "the power of a concept of the Goddess" is that "it provides imagery that can be adapted and shaped to match an individual's own life experience."³⁴ Indeed, such a focus on individuality belies the foundation of U.S. ideals that inform American belly dancing and fitness fusion. Though U.S. appropriations of belly dancing and yoga present themselves as practices that counter Western philosophical traditions by contradicting the notion of a mind/body split and by celebrating the power of the female body, they often participate in the discourses of universality and individuality that are actually embedded in very "American" notions of liberal-democratic freedoms. Along the way, they therefore circumvent the possibility of a committed and contextualized engagement with the political and philosophical concerns undergirding ongoing war and conflict and, ultimately, with the notion of freedom.

Such an abstract and idealized notion of freedom, moreover, extends to other various expressions of belly dancing, including in a surprise "special feature" of comedienne Margaret Cho's DVD (based on a comic show), entitled *Assassin*. Cho presents an interesting case in that she is an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy, and, further, *Assassin* is unapologetically and critically focused, in part, on exposing the hypocrisies of the War on Terror. Nevertheless, in the extra features section of the DVD, she promulgates a stunningly mainstream and uncritical argument about belly dancing. Posing with her belly dance instructor, Cho sings the praises of the belly dance form because of its presumed ability to help women revalue the female body as necessarily fleshy and curvy. Ironically, Cho credits belly dancing with the ability to help women love and accept their bodies no matter what size they are in a DVD in which she has neglected to comment on her own apparent substantial weight loss. By failing to comment on her weight loss, when in previous performances she had incorporated her body size into the routine, she participates in normalizing a thin body ideal. It becomes a standard to achieve, which can then go unmarked and which therefore deserves no com-

ment. Regardless of this seeming contradiction, Cho sums up her appreciation of belly dancing thusly: "We are allowing ourselves to define our own standard of beauty, which is a revolutionary idea. If we could impress this on other women, we could all be free."³⁵ Like essentializing notions of finding one's inner goddess, Cho means that women could be free from their own negative body image. While she speaks to the "revolutionary" possibility of women "defining [their] own standard of beauty," the visual example she gives actually reinforces mainstream beauty ideals. Immediately after issuing this statement, for example, Cho dons a cabaret-style belly dance outfit (characteristic of colonialist and patriarchal interpretations of the dance) and demonstrates her newfound freedom. In one fell swoop, Cho manages to both unreflexively appropriate another cultural form for her own purposes (an act that is, admittedly, not inconsistent with her style of comedy) and to deploy the concept of freedom in a way that ultimately undermines its potential power and that ironically parallels the rhetoric of the U.S. War on Terror that she opposes.

If the Cho example reveals the ironies of popular engagements with belly dance, it also demonstrates some of its nuances and complexities. The fact is that, to some extent at least, belly dancing does offer a challenge to mainstream body ideals in the United States by requiring a certain amount of flesh and fat in order to maximize some of the key moves of the dance form. In this respect, it certainly does intersect with the feminist goals of questioning and intervening in constricting body-image ideals, and popular belly dance websites are full of women testifying to its success in empowering them. My aim is not to undermine these realities and uses of belly dancing, but rather to complicate them. Consider, for example, Andrea Deagon's explanation of the relationship between belly dancing and feminist thought: "It is my own feeling that belly dance as performance is subversive. It allows women to seem to conform to patriarchal expectations while at the same time challenging them through powerful self-expression. But the problem with subversive intent and seeming conformity is that they play across a dangerous edge."³⁶

In this article, I focus on the dangerous side of the edge to look at the parallels between the rhetoric of freedom in popular articulations of American belly dancing and the deployment of the concept of freedom in the War on Terror. Popular narratives of American belly dancing, I argue, (re)produce an inadvertent echo of the logic used to justify U.S. military action in Iraq and Afghanistan; both focus on individual freedoms (where, in some cases, the "individual" is actually a corporation) at the expense of any sustained consideration of systemic freedoms.

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Dance—
The “Bellydance Superstars”

Perhaps the best example of the inadvertent echo at work is the multimedia and multivenue production of the “Bellydance Superstars,” a group that tours nationally and internationally staging belly dance shows that incorporate a number of different styles. Their performance has had wide popular appeal and crossover into a large range of materials, such as CD compilations of the dancers’ favorite music and a documentary entitled *American Bellydancer: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Dance*. While the Bellydance Superstars do have some overlap with the larger American belly dance community, they are not entirely representative of that community. Instead, they represent a clear, if extreme, example of the consumerist legacy of American belly dancing, a fact evinced by creator Miles Copeland’s statement that he “sees it as a marketing tool to sell things to women.”³⁷ In their advertised goal to “take this ancient art form into the mainstream,” the Bellydance Superstars’ marketing materials demonstrate interesting intersections of classic orientalism with founding U.S. ideologies (i.e., life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness), which parallel official U.S. rhetoric about bringing freedom and democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan through military action.

In fact, such a condescending framework, in which military action is essentially cast as a civilizing mission, reflects Copeland’s own construction of the Bellydance Superstars extravaganza: “As Islamic Fundamentalism came to the U.S. mainland and the Pentagon bombed its way back into Afghanistan and Iraq, Copeland began to see his belly dancers as a healing force, wooing Americans to Arabic culture and exploring a new, feminised version of belly dancing to Islamic cultures that could do with some female emancipation.”³⁸ The implication that American belly dancers could introduce a “new, feminised” version of the dance to the Middle East is laughable in its condescension, not to mention its ignorance about belly dancing itself, but the broader suggestion of the connection between the War on Terror and the popularity of belly dance in the United States lays the groundwork for a comparison between the two. In what follows, I first situate the Bellydance Superstars within the larger history of American belly dancing, tying it to the legacies of consumerist and colonialist orientations, and then examine their deployment of “liberty” and “freedom” in promotional materials, noting the echoes with discursive constructions of the War on Terror.

The Bellydance Superstars show is, in many ways, a quintessential consumerist spectacle, or, as their advertising materials announce, it is “an exciting, exotic, and mysterious spectacle.” The title of the 2006 touring show,

“Raqs Carnivale,” demonstrates the fact that it is situated squarely within a tradition of consumerism in relation to belly dancing in the United States. While the term *raqs* (meaning “dance” in Arabic) is a gesture to the Arabic term (*raqs sharqi*) for belly dance, the word *carnivale* indicates that the dance has historically been incorporated into U.S. venues for its marketability as an exotic or lascivious spectacle to be taken in. Perhaps unknowingly, the name for the Bellydance Superstars 2006 show also echoes the 2001 advertising scheme of Camel cigarettes, entitled “7 pleasures of the exotic,” in which one of the seven “pleasures,” named “carnivale,” was represented by the silhouette of a belly dancer. Finally, it references colonial cabaret performances and contemporary American restaurant performances, which are often loyal to the cabaret style.

Despite its clear relationship to the commodified legacy of Little Egypt and her moneymaking prowess at the amusement parks and fairs since the 1893 Exposition, however, advertisements for the Bellydance Superstars stress their sensual (but, they qualify, not sexual) revaluing of the “feminine spirit.” A promotion sent to women’s studies professors asking them to send their students to the show proclaims that “bellydancing was created for women by women, and is very empowering” and that the “feminine and sensual dance art celebrates all women and has helped elevate bellydancing as a new fitness craze.” Here, the promoters borrow from contemporary belly dance discourses, which seek to capitalize on the notion that the belly dance, as a particularly female dance form, can empower women and combat negative body image.³⁹

However, this appeal is easily revealed as simply one more selling point for that “exotic” and “mysterious” spectacle, which works to conceal the economic goal that fuels its production. While belly dancing is often marketed in the United States as a means of reconnecting with a natural and sensual femininity, unmediated by modern forms of alienation from one’s own body, its presentation as spectacle achieves just the opposite. As Guy Debord argues, “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an intense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”⁴⁰ The belly dance performance is the perfect example of an entertainment form that produces a sense of distance and alienation in the audience while presenting itself as immediately accessible and lived. It achieves this, in part, through its manipulation of spatial and temporal realities. Advertisements for it highlight its status as an “ancient” dance form that hails from distant and exotic lands, while inviting the audience to directly experience that which is imagined to be distant, both spatially and temporally, from contemporary U.S. society.

Underlying the capitalist form of production that determines the U.S.

belly dance performance is a notion of time as linear, continuous, and consumable, able to be broken down into discrete units of labor and production. Conversely, the popular U.S. narrative about this “ancient” dance form depends on a notion of time as frozen and/or cyclical, in which only “natural” rhythms prevail (e.g., the rhythms of the seasons, or of childbirth, as belly dance is sometimes lauded as an ancient childbirth ritual). In fact, the ability of belly dance to deliver this lost conception of time is one of its primary selling points; the advertisement for the Bellydance Superstars promises that the performers “exhibit an intoxicating spectacle that transports the audience to a distant time and place.” Time here is effectively transformed into both a place that one might visit and a good for sale. Such a notion of an ancient temporality could only be commodified in a world that has, as Debord insists, “oriented itself toward the sale of . . . blocks of time.”⁴¹ The real commodity, then, is not necessarily an escape to the exoticized Middle East but rather an escape from the demands and concerns of contemporary capitalist society.

The Superstars promotion collapses geographical space by conflating disparate cultures and by incorporating multiple distinct genres and styles into one, undifferentiated performance. “Raqs Carnivale” is advertised as a “great cultural show—incorporating everything from Arab and Turkish cultures to African, Egyptian, Hispanic, Caribbean, and American cultures!” (In this construction, Egypt is somehow neither Arab nor African, perhaps because of the spectacular legacy that ancient Egypt enjoys in the U.S. popular imagination.) Indeed, one discovers that such wide geographical expanses collapse in on themselves because of the liberal appropriation of disassociated, and often stereotypical, cultural elements. Again, the promotion proclaims, “Not only do they incorporate Yoga into every move they make, but the show also incorporates backflips, dreadlocks, stilts, hula skirts, feathered headpieces, big chunky jewelry and tattoos; Samba, contemporary rap, hip-hop, flamenco, tribal and Middle Eastern music.” The incommensurability of this dizzying list of items and styles notwithstanding, the cornucopia of popular multicultural markers demonstrates the perception of belly dancing as representative of generalized notions of exoticism and culture, which can be combined with or exchanged for other generalized and decontextualized markers, like “hula skirts,” “yoga,” or “dreadlocks,” all of which are “aestheticized . . . as if they could be separated from history.”⁴² In this way, cultural differences are, as Lisa Lowe says, “aestheticized” in their increased commodification, but they are also anesthetized since their abstraction from temporal and spatial realities flattens them into common goods for sale rather than elements of living cultures.

As consumerist spectacle, then, the belly dance performance in this context is demonstrative of a neocolonial capitalist formation. It has reduced lived cultures to commodified symbolic elements of these cultures (e.g., “feathered headpieces” and “big chunky jewelry”), and it has collapsed any notion of the historical and geographical distance that separates these elements in their contextualized form. The radical collapse and erasure of geographical distance that is enacted by such cultural appropriations and substitutions, however, is recovered in the mechanics of spectacle itself, which enacts an alienating distance while proclaiming its unmediated accessibility. It reconstructs collapsed distance in the space between the audience viewers and the performance as a “spectacular separation.”⁴³ It therefore demonstrates a particular kind of alienation—if not from one’s own labor, then from lived culture—perpetuated by capitalist modes of production. The spatial and temporal modalities of people in particular historical and geographical contexts are transformed, in the belly dance spectacle, into the spatiotemporality of things (hula skirts, dreadlocks) in abstraction.

The brilliant trick of this form of alienation is, of course, the illusion it presents of offering unmediated access to lived culture. In the case of belly dance appropriations and performances in the United States, they are often packaged and sold in terms of a particular rhetoric of freedom. Belly dance in this form claims to represent a freedom to travel through time and space, and to sample any number of exotic cultures, or, for U.S. women, it is marketed as a means through which to gain freedom from negative body image. In the “pursuit of dance” represented by the Bellydance Superstars, these freedoms actually resemble U.S. political discourses about freedom, a fact that is especially highlighted in their DVD *American Bellydancer*.

Belly Dancing as a “Mascot” of Freedom

The Bellydance Superstars package, complete with a traveling show, a CD of performers’ favorite dance songs, instructional DVDs, and a documentary DVD about the formation of the troupe, is the creation of mastermind Miles Copeland. Copeland, who is perhaps best known for devising the collaboration between Sting and Cheb Mami that resulted in the hit song “Desert Rose,” sees belly dancing as the perfect vehicle for diversifying marketing opportunities at a moment in which CD sales are undeniably on the decline. While he is clearly interested in expanding on the wild success that Sting enjoyed when he incorporated North African Arabic music into his song (the name of the first troupe Copeland assembled was the Desert

Roses), Copeland sees belly dancing as a way of creatively responding to market forces and shifting into a different phase of music production and marketing. His idea, based on the success of *Riverdance*, is to produce a set of materials (mostly CDs and DVDs) that are, in essence, promoted and sold by a set of performers (the Desert Roses and the Bellydance Superstars) who market materials by performing in multiple venues both nationally and internationally.

One of the most interesting products in the Bellydance Superstars package is the documentary *American Bellydancer: The Pursuit of Life, Liberty, and Dance*, which offers a “behind the scenes” exposé of the inception of the troupe. The documentary chronicles the search for the Bellydance Superstars performers, follows them on their first unofficial tour performing at Lollapalooza, and features interviews with prominent members of the American belly dance community, such as Tamalyn Dallal, Morocco, and Suhaila Salimpour (daughter of Jamila Salimpour). Perhaps the most revealing detail in the entire film, however, is in the subtitle itself. The film is clearly interested in demonstrating the American-ness of this particular iteration of belly dancing, and in associating the dance with widely recognizable icons of U.S. culture. The front cover of the DVD, for example, features an image of a belly dancer superimposed over the image of the Statue of Liberty. The subtitle cements such associations by proclaiming American belly dancing as “the pursuit of life, liberty, and dance,” thereby tying the film to some of the founding ideals of the nation. Such heavy-handed references to freedom and liberty, however, go farther to demonstrate the imbrication of the Bellydance Superstars project in neoliberal ideals of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and the principles of free trade.

In fact, the grounding of the film and the Bellydance Superstars project in the rhetoric of freedom connects it also to universalized claims to freedoms, individualism, and objective and rational truths. The invocation of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” enacted by the subtitle of the *American Bellydancer* DVD situates the film within a discourse of rights that emphasizes neutrality and universality as supreme goals. Presumably, one is meant to understand belly dancing—or the Bellydance Superstars—as purveyors of these rights and freedoms through the “pursuit of life, liberty, and dance.” The framework of classical liberalism, which serves as the paradigm for the founding U.S. ideals of freedom and liberty, situates the notions of equality and rights as universal and neutral terms. They are presented as abstract concepts that apply to all citizens regardless of distinctions such as race, class, sex, and gender. In other words, the discourse of rights does not claim to register human differences according to which people of color and white women have historically been denied the “inalienable rights” of “life,

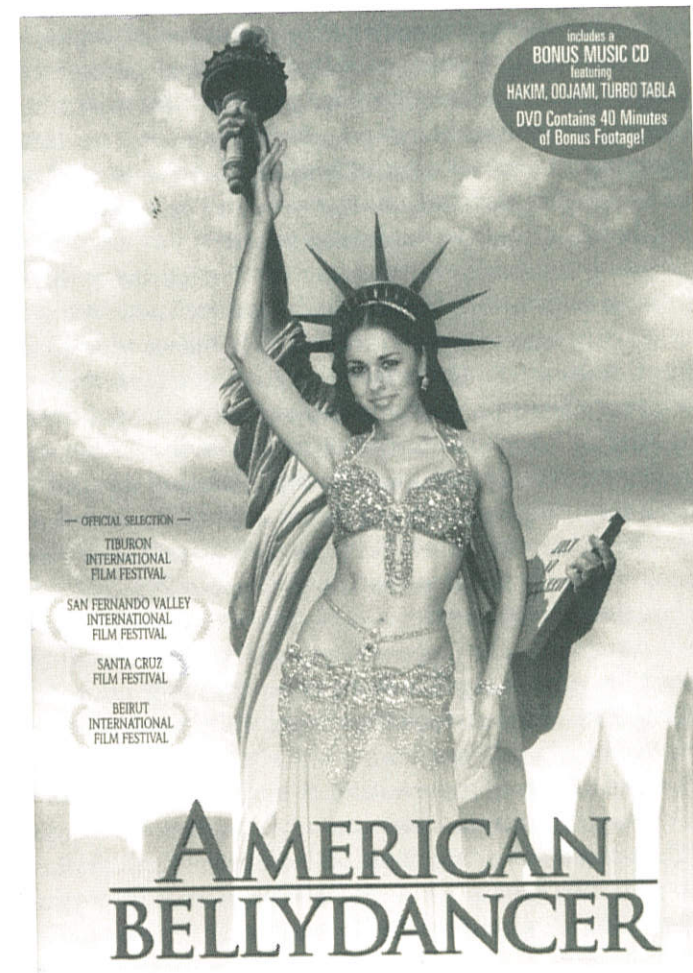


Fig. 7.1. DVD cover, *American Bellydancer*, Ark 21, 2005.

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Scholars in the fields of ethnic studies, queer studies, and women’s and gender studies have demonstrated, following this contradiction, that the category of the universal, neutral citizen has actually functioned as an unmarked white, male, propertied, heterosexual citizen. Since this discourse of rights has grounded itself in a universal claim while simultaneously functioning in exclusionary ways, it has led Shannon Winnubst to describe it as a dehistoricizing and disembodied type of discourse.⁴⁴ In other words, it presents itself as a principle that is utterly transcendent of the particularities of historical contexts or the materiality of the body. Returning to the tension that propels my argument here: How, then, has belly dancing—an undeniably bodily dance form that is associated with ethnicized and exoticized different bodies—come to be so closely associated with the universalized ideals of freedom and liberty?

An analysis of the *American Bellydancer* DVD offers two possible rationales for the marriage of belly dancing and freedom. The first is quite particular to the Bellydance Superstars project itself and its benevolent patriarch, Miles Copeland. The DVD claims to give voice to the belly dancers themselves, even those who display differing views of the dance form than those Copeland espouses; one example is the famous instructor and dancer Morocco, who has critiqued Orientalist interpretations of the dance form.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the entire project is contained within the framework of white, hegemonic masculinity, which sees the potential for profit in marketing the performance of scantily clad hypersexualized women. Copeland casts himself as sympathetic and benevolent in his apparent respect for the dance form, and in the fact that he supposedly capitulates to the expertise of belly dance instructors in choosing dancers for the troupe. This suggestion of his respect, however, is not corroborated by the discrepancy in the footage of the Bellydance Superstars auditions, during which Copeland chooses a dancer because he quite insistently approves of her “look,” despite the fact that the lead dancer complains that she clearly has no formal dance training.

It is quite possible, then, that Copeland’s unmarked, universalized status helps to usher in the “American Bellydancer” as a tokenized, sexualized, and scopophilic symbol. Despite Copeland’s claims that he does not “consider [belly dancing] erotic at all,”⁴⁶ his presentation of the Bellydance Superstars suggests otherwise. His protestations about the eroticism of the dance actually function to locate the Bellydance Superstars squarely within an already existing lucrative market among female consumers. He says, “Well, I mean, if you think a beautiful woman is erotic then it’s erotic . . . but I think what it is more is women being comfortable with themselves and their own sexuality, as opposed to being there to show off their tits to a man.”⁴⁷ Here, he taps directly into the rhetoric of mainstream consumerist discourses used to

sell belly dancing to women. The fact that Copeland spent part of his childhood in the Middle East because his father was a member of the OSS (the progenitor of the CIA) only solidifies the surface claim of his benevolent patriarchy (the film implies that living in the Middle East engendered a sympathetic interest in it), while demonstrating an underlying relationship of domination and surveillance with the region. Given these details, the dance is revealed here as a vehicle for the exercise of white, male, heterosexual, American freedom (e.g., the freedom to enjoy the scopophilic pleasure of belly dance performances), or, again, an abstract freedom for women to find their inner feminine selves, rather than a means to freedom in and of itself.

Miles Copeland and the Bellydance Superstars are only one example of a U.S. engagement with belly dancing; the American belly dance movement is full of women who reject the benevolent patriarch model and are drawn to the dance precisely for its women-centered qualities. In addition, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, the concept of liberation is quite central to the project of American belly dancing, especially since the codification of the movement in the 1970s.⁴⁸ As evidenced by the seamless incorporation of belly dancing into the self-help genre in the United States, the emphasis here is on individualism; members of the American belly dance movement applaud the capacity of belly dance to help women cultivate a sense of inner freedom. Instructor Tamalyn Dallal demonstrates such a position when she explains on the *American Bellydancer* DVD that “so much of our oppression comes from ourselves,”⁴⁹ following her comment about the detriment of plastic surgery and body image ideals to women’s sense of self in the United States. In this way, she advances an understanding of liberation that is incapable of accounting for the way in which individual rights and freedoms can be impacted or curtailed by larger social systems, such as patriarchy or racism. Further, the idea of belly dancing as a tool that U.S. American women can use to shed the trappings of their own civilization and reconnect with their primordial, “goddess” selves mimics a liberal multiculturalist stance, in which “multiculturalism” means appropriating and commodifying ethnic difference. Conceiving of difference in this way offers a paradigm for understanding how belly dancing, which is tied in the U.S. popular imagination to the baseness of the body and associated with categories of ethnic difference that are clearly marked, can be so easily appropriated as a symbol of freedom. Whether it is the American belly dancer oriented toward its self-help qualities or the white male entrepreneur of the belly dancing industry, the abstract and universalized individual commodifies belly dancing as difference and simultaneously disavows the social, political, and historical contexts in which it has functioned.

The most alarming implication of such co-optation of belly-dance-as-

difference is the way in which belly dancing seems to have become, in the words of prominent member of the American belly dance community Suhaila Salimpour, a “mascot for freedom.”⁵⁰ Both the liberal feminist appropriation of the dance in the 1970s as a way of celebrating the supposed universal origins of matriarchy and the contemporary iteration of the dance as a vehicle for liberating women from negative body image work to advance notions of freedom that fail to recognize, much less advocate for, a notion of freedom beyond individualism, commodification, and entrepreneurial opportunities. In other words, belly dance seems to have become a symbol of freedom insofar as it is aligned with the ideals of universal (read white, male, elite) rights, the co-optation of difference, and the championing of free trade as a greater global good. Like Copeland’s suggestion that American belly dancing could function as a “healing force,” in part by bringing a “new feminised” version of the dance to “Islamic cultures that could do with some female emancipation,” this conception of belly dancing reconfigures it as a U.S. American product, which can be sold back to the culture(s) from which it was taken under the guise of helping those cultures become more liberated.

The suggestion of belly dancing as the mascot for a revised version of a civilizing mission skates along a thin edge of converging with U.S. political discourse about the War on Terror. The concepts of freedom and liberty, as circulated in the political rhetoric of the Bush administration, assumed an abstract idealism, presented as the grand and benevolent goal of U.S. military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the freedoms actually brought to the region have been those benefiting goods, trade, and multinational corporations, rather than people. Indeed, the Bush administration measured the delivery of freedom to Iraqi people with announcements such as the one Paul Bremer gave on September 19, 2003, when he ordered the elimination of trade barriers, privatization of public services, and an open door for foreign companies to benefit from the rebuilding effort in Iraq.⁵¹ Despite this grand, idealistic claim, as is clear from ongoing reports of death and strife, Iraqi people are hardly enjoying the rights and privileges that go along with freedom, even several years later.

Such a Janus-faced deployment of freedom is not limited to U.S. involvement in Iraq; rather it has become, in the words of David Harvey, “hegemonic as a mode of discourse . . . to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.”⁵² The concept of freedom is here revealed to mean the freedom to co-opt exoticized cultural elements for profit; to mean the freedom to appropriate a Middle Eastern cultural dance form to perpetuate U.S. liberal feminist goals; and to mean the freedom to co-opt these same liberal feminist goals (i.e., the promise to introduce “women’s rights” in Iraq

and Afghanistan) to justify U.S. military action. Here, the popularity of belly dancing enables U.S. audiences to engage with the rhetoric of freedom while sublimating the painful realities of ongoing war.

In the wake of 9/11, belly dancing came to more explicitly form part of an imperialism-through-freedom discourse, which represented the events of September 11 as a symbol of shock, surprise, and rupture rather than a tragic continuation of hostilities that are coterminous with a tense political relationship between the United States and the Middle East since at least the 1970s. In the logic of imperialism-through-freedom, the Arab and Muslim world is home to a set of oppressive, fundamentalist, and irrational regimes and organizations who “hate freedom,” one is led to believe, simply because they “hate our way of life.” Such a tautological argument both erases the historical context out of which the events of September 11, 2001, emerged and also occludes a historicized and contextualized understanding of the concept of freedom. In the middle of the *American Bellydancer* DVD, the image of the destroyed Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City is deployed in order to make an argument about the alignment of American belly dancing with freedom. Lest viewers feel concern that belly dancing would be associated with the negative press heaped on all things Middle Eastern, the World Trade Center image is followed by a reassuring statement from Suhaila Salimpour that her classes “tripled” in size immediately following 9/11. Despite the somewhat overbearing message promulgated by the producers of the DVD that American belly dancing is on the right side of freedom, the underlying capitalist lesson is hard to miss. Belly dancing as a symbol of individualistic liberation (inner freedom) and free market enterprise (the right to appropriate cultural difference for one’s own capital gain) is indeed a “mascot” of freedom, whereby freedom is understood as the rhetorical device through which a late capitalist version of imperialism is deployed.

From the Bellydance Superstars to Margaret Cho’s belly dance, belly dancing as a consumer product has also been used as a vehicle for achieving individualized freedom, illustrating the way in which the concepts of freedom and liberation gleam with the manufactured veneer of consumerism. Though they present themselves discursively as abstract, universalized ideals, they function within a framework of neoliberal imperialism that gives them the unmistakable glint of commodification. In the midst of a historicopolitical context that seems to have swallowed the narrative of Manichaean inevitabilities, such as good/evil, with us / against us, and terrorism/democracy, offered up by the Bush administration at the inception of the War on Terror, the very notions of freedom and liberation seem to have fallen prey to the same kind of either/or logic. They simultaneously inhabit a space of

abstract idealism while functioning within the specific contexts of neoliberalism and militarism. As deployed in the commodification of belly dance in the United States, these concepts are clearly in conversation with the political realities of the U.S. relationship to the Middle East. The deafening narrative of terrorism, as an irrational, premodern, and indigenous aspect of Arab and Muslim cultures and regions, produces an inadvertent echo, demonstrated by the belly dance as liberation narrative, in which the abstracted concepts of freedom and liberation turn back on themselves to promote the freedom of goods in the midst of increasingly restrictive and limiting realities for people.

NOTES

1. Stephen John Hartnett and Laura Ann Stengrim, *Globalization and Empire: The U.S. Invasion of Iraq, Free Markets, and the Twilight of Democracy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 5.
2. Anthony Shay, *Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 128.
3. For more on this, see Ella Shohat, "Gender and the Culture of Empire," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 131 (Spring 1991): 1–2, republished in her *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 48–50.
4. *Ibid.*, 141–42.
5. An example of the latter is Ruth St. Denis, whom I discuss in *Imagining Arab Womanhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also Amy Koritz, "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan's *The Vision of Salome*," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance*, ed. Jane Desmond (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and Nancy Lee Ruyter, "La Meri and Middle Eastern Dance," *Belly Dance*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: 2005), 207–20.
6. Shay, 129.
7. Barbara Sellers-Young, "Body, Image, Identity: American Tribal Belly Dance," *Belly Dance*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005), 277–303.
8. <http://www.gothicbellydance.com>.
9. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 186–87.
10. Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
11. Ella Shohat, "American Orientalism," *Suitcase* 2, no. 1–2 (1997).
12. Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
13. Lisa Apignanesi, *The Cabaret* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
14. Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (Bloomington, IN: IDD Books, 1994).
24. Curtis Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and*

- Politics*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 344–65.
15. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
 16. The term *oriental dance*, or the French *danse orientale*, is the preferred term of many American belly dancers, since it is a translation of the Arabic term *raqs sharqi*. The term *belly dance* likely is an English translation of the French *danse du ventre*, which was the name given the belly dance exhibitions at the 1889 (Paris) and 1893 (Chicago) World's Fairs.
 17. Andrea Deagon, "Dance of the Seven Veils: The Revision of Revelation in the Oriental Dance Community," *Belly Dance*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005), 269.
 18. Najwa Adra, "Belly Dance: An Urban Folk Genre," *Belly Dance*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005), 29.
 19. Zarifa Aradoon, *Origins and Philosophy of Danse Orientale* (Stanford, CA: Dream Place Publications, 1979); Rosina-Fawzia al-Rawi, *Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals and Healing Power of Belly Dancing*, trans. by Monique Arav (New York: Interlink, 1999).
 20. Amira Jarmakani, "Belly Dancing for Liberation," *Arabs in the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora*, ed. Darcy Zabel (New York: Peter Lang Press, 2006), 145–68.
 21. Stephanie Smith, "Belly Dancing: Swivel Your Way to Fitness," CNN.com, June 13, 2003. www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/diet.fitness/06/13/bellydancing/index.html (accessed December 15, 2009).
 22. Mike Camunas, "Belly Dance Workout," *St. Petersburg Times*, July 19, 2009. www.lexisnexis.com/ (accessed December 15, 2009).
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. Michele Orecklin, "Shakin' All Over," *Time*, October 20, 2002. www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,366315,00.html (accessed December 15, 2009).
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Frank Gardner, "Belly Dancing Goes Global," *BBC News*, June 6, 2001. news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/middle_east/1373029.stm (accessed December 15, 2009).
 27. Joseph Berger, "Inner Goddesses, Come Out and Dance," *New York Times*, August 3, 2008. www.lexisnexis.com/ (accessed December 15, 2009).
 28. Yasmina Ramzy, "Where Is the Goddess in a Vertical Drop and a Shimmie? Or How Can the Practice of Bellydance Lead the Dancer to a State of Grace or Enlightenment?" April 1, 2009. www.gildedserpent.com/cms/2009/04/01/yasgoddessinshimmie/ (accessed December 8, 2009).
 29. Yasmina Ramzy, "Feminism and Bellydance," October 19, 2009. www.gildedserpent.com/cms/2009/10/19/yasminarspeech/ (accessed December 8, 2009).
 30. Donnalee Dox, "Spiritual Belly Dance," *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism and Harem Fantasy*, ed. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005), 310.
 31. *Bellydance for Beginners with Suhaila: Fitness Fusion—4 volume gift set (Buns, Jazz, Pilates, Yoga)*, DVD. San Francisco: Cerebellum Corporation, 2005.
 32. Z-Helene Christopher, "Zen, Yoga, and the Art of Belly Dance." www.zhelene.com/Zen.html (accessed December 15, 2009).

33. Narah, "Connections: Yoga and Belly Dance," www.gildedserpent.com/art46/narahyogabd.htm (accessed December 8, 2009).
34. Dox, "Spiritual Belly Dance," 317.
35. *Assassin*, produced by Paul Colichman and Eric Feldman and directed by Kerry Asmussem and Konda Mason. 90 min. Koch Vision, 2005. DVD.
36. Andrea Deagon, "Feminism and Belly Dance." www.tribalbellydance.org/articles/feminism.html (accessed December 15, 2009).
37. Andrew Billen, "My New Tool for World Domination: Riverdance . . . with Bare Midriiffs," June 21, 2005. www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article535451.ece. (accessed December 15, 2009).
38. Ibid.
39. See my article "Belly Dancing for Liberation" for a critique of such a notion of empowerment, which, I argue, keeps women focused on liberation from their own negative body image rather than larger patriarchal structures.
40. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), 1.
41. Ibid., 152.
42. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 9.
43. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 167.
44. Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 9–10.
45. <http://www.casbahdance.org/DANCECOMMUNITY.htm>.
46. Billen, "My New Tool for World Domination."
47. Ibid.
48. Again, see "Belly Dancing for Liberation" for my development of this argument.
49. *American Bellydancer*, produced by Miles Copeland and directed by Jonathan Brandeis, 100 min. Ark 21, 2005, DVD.
50. Ibid.
51. David Harvey, *A Short History of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.
52. Ibid., 3.

EIGHT

From Arab Terrorists to Patriotic Arab Americans

Representational Strategies in Post-9/11 TV Dramas

Evelyn Alsultany

In 2004, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) accused the TV drama *24* of perpetuating stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims.¹ CAIR objected to the persistent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the context of terrorism, stating that "repeated association of acts of terrorism with Islam will only serve to increase anti-Muslim prejudice."² CAIR's critics have retorted that programs like *24* are cutting edge, reflecting one of the most pressing social and political issues of the moment, the War on Terror. Some critics further contend that CAIR is trying to deflect the reality of Muslim terrorism by confining television writers to politically correct themes.³

The writers and producers of *24* have responded to CAIR's concerns in a number of ways. For one, the show often includes sympathetic portrayals of Arabs and Muslims, in which they are the "good guys" or in some way on the side of the United States. Representatives of *24* state that the show has "made a concerted effort to show ethnic, religious and political groups as multidimensional, and political issues are debated from multiple viewpoints."⁴ The villains on the eight seasons of *24* are Russians, Germans, Latinos, Arabs/Muslims, Euro-Americans, Africans, and even the fictional president of the United States. Rotating the identity of the "bad guy" is one of the many strategies used by TV dramas to avoid reproducing the Arab/Muslim terrorist stereotype.⁵ The show's responsiveness to such criticism even extended to creating a public service announcement (PSA) that was broadcast in February 2005, during one of the program's commercial breaks. The PSA featured the lead actor, Kiefer Sutherland, staring