The Popularization of Belly Dance in Toronto, Canada (1950-1990): Hybridization and Uneven Exchange

by

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ABSTRACT

The Popularization of Belly Dance in Toronto, Canada (1950-1990): Hybridization and Uneven Exchange

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Belly dance was first performed publicly in Toronto during the late nineteenth century. While immigrants to Canada from the Middle East faced discrimination, white audiences could not get enough of stereotypical portrayals of danse du ventre. Hollywood further popularized the Orientalist image of the belly dancer, and beginning in the 1950s, star Middle Eastern dancers like Samia Gamal and Nejla Ateş were making appearances on Toronto stages. By the 1960s, American, Middle Eastern, and Canadian dancers were performing belly dance in Toronto’s hotel nightclubs and restaurants. During belly dance’s peak popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, multiple venues were running two belly dance shows a night, six days a week, and belly dance classes were so popular they were often waitlisted. Why and how did this Middle Eastern dance form become so popular between 1950 and 1990 in the city of Toronto?

Various archival sources and twelve oral history interviews with professional dancers and teachers indicate that belly dance’s popularization in Toronto was partially a result of its widespread stereotypical presentation in North America as something exotic, ancient, and sexual. This contributed to a growing demand for belly dance shows amongst white Canadians, but increasing immigration from the Middle East was an even more essential element in the growth of Middle Eastern entertainment in the city. White and Middle Eastern dancers and teachers who
worked in Toronto hybridized belly dance performances as they circulated transnationally, with some working and performing internationally while also developing personal and professional relationships which bridged ethnic and cultural divides. Dancers and instructors alternately embraced and resisted Orientalist stereotype in their work as they navigated a social and political context in Canada which favoured whiteness. Many also laboured to increase belly dance’s respectability by trying to distance performances from overt sexuality, or by aligning them with regional pride, spirituality, fitness, or feminism. Belly dancers, instructors, and choreographers participated in uneven processes of exchange and hybridization which characterized belly dance’s popularization in Toronto.
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**asaya/asa** (عصا): The Arabic *asaya* or *asa* literally translates to “stick.” *Asa* is Modern Standard Arabic, while *asaya* is an Egyptian colloquial term for stick. Common belly dance performances that include the use of a cane or a stick include stylized presentations of Saidi folkloric dance and *tahtib*. Some belly dance performances referencing Levantine folklore may also utilize a cane or stick.

**almeh** (عالمة): An *almeh* (pl. *awalim*) was the Arabic term given to a reputable singer and dancer who performed in private settings in Egypt, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over the twentieth century, the term has come to be used derogatively to refer to musicians and belly dancers.¹

**baladi** (بلدي): *Baladi* can literally mean my country, but it is also used to describe “a way of life, type of food, and style of dressing, speaking, moving and making gestures.”² It is a lifestyle associated with those who have come to cities in Egypt from rural areas and villages. It evokes ideas like authenticity, nationalism, and has a class association. *Baladi* people are among the lower classes, but they are understood as being very proud, honourable, and are considered by many the possessors of “real” Egyptian culture.³

When referring to dance and music specifically, *baladi* references urban Cairene styles that have been influenced by men and women who have immigrated to the city from more rural regions. *Baladi* dance is “heavier” than typical twentieth-century *raqs sharqi*. It is often more stationary, and is often performed in a *galabeya* as opposed to a two-piece costume.

**cooch dance/hoochy coochy dance**: A North American catch-all term for any style of non-Western dance considered provocative using the abdomen or buttocks. It was applied to African dance, Middle Eastern dance, and any provocative mix of these and other forms during primarily the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

**bedlah** (بدلة): An Arabic term literally meaning “suit,” this term has come to mean the two-piece bra and belt of a belly dance costume paired with various skirt styles.

**bouzouki**: A popular Greek stringed instrument with a pear-shaped body and long neck. The body of the instrument is often inlaid and engraved with elements like mother-of-pearl.

**dabke** (دبكة): This is a folk dance performed across the Levant region and in other parts of the Middle East. It is a line dance or circle dance which typically moves from left to right and includes various configurations of steps and stomping. There are hundreds of regional variations and styles of this social dance which is done by men and women.

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³ Ibid.
**doumbek/darbuka**: Also known as a *tabla* (طبل), this goblet-shaped drum is used widely across the Middle East and North Africa. It is not to be confused with the *tabla* used in classical South Asian music.

**floor work**: Belly dance performance done while the dancer is in a reclined or sitting position on the floor.

**galabeya/jalabeya** (جلابية): A wide cut dress worn in various parts of the Middle East. Designs exist for men and women. Some are also made tighter-fitting and with heavy ornamentation specifically for dance.

**ghawazi**: These public dancers in Egypt peaked in popularity beginning in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their dance performances generally focus on lower body movement which is repetitive and heavy.

**hafla** (حفلة): An Arabic term for party. Belly dancers in North America also use this term for dance-community gatherings that include open-level belly dance performances, food, and drink.

**karşılama**: Literally meaning greeting or face to face in Turkish, this is a social dance popular in weddings, parties, and other celebrations found in a variety of incarnations across Tukey, the Balkans, and Greece. *Karşılama* is also widely known as a Turkish musical rhythm in 9/8.

**nay** (نآي): An end-blown style of flute or reed pipe popular in Middle Eastern music.

**oryantal dans**: A Turkish term meaning “eastern/oriental dance.” It is often directly translated into English as oriental dance or belly dance.

**oud** (عود): A stringed instrument, pear shaped, found in Middle Eastern music. It is similar in construction to a lute.

**qanun** (قانون): A string instrument that is a type of large zither found throughout the Middle East.

**raqs sharqi** (رقص شرقي): An Arabic term meaning “eastern/oriental dance.” It is often directly translated into English as oriental dance or belly dance. This style of Middle Eastern dance developed during the twentieth century primarily in nightclubs and in film.

**saidi** (صعدي): This is an adjective describing anything from the Said region of Egypt, which is widely known in English as Upper Egypt, or the southern portion of Egypt. Folklore performances involving references to *tahtib* draw inspiration from this region.

**shaabi** (شعبي): An Arabic term meaning popular or of the people. It has urban, lower class connotations. Recently it has been used by the international belly dance community to describe modern popular dance in Egypt that is done to songs described as *shaabi*.

**shamadan** (شمعدان): A large candelabra is a *shamadan*. In Egypt dancers began performing with the *shamadan* balanced on their heads at weddings beginning sometime in the nineteenth century. It has since become a popular prop in global belly dance performance.

**tahtib** (تطبيق): A martial arts practice involving the use of long canes originating in the Said region of Egypt.
**taqsim (تقسيم):** Literally meaning dividing or sectioning in Arabic, a *taqsim* in Arabic music, is a solo instrumental improvisation. Dancers must improvise along with live musicians during *taqsim*.

**tsifteteli:** A Greek style of dance often termed belly dance in English.

**zaar (زار):** *Zaar* ritual is the practice of exercising spirits from a possessed individual according to a variety of *zaar* traditions found throughout the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. The movements associated with *zaar* rituals, including dance, have been utilized by belly dancers in performances referencing the ritual movement.

**zeffah (زفة):** An Arabic wedding procession or march which can be found in different forms across the Middle East. The procession can be led by dancers and musicians.
CHAPTER I: Introduction

Academic discussion of transnational belly dance history, Orientalist belly dance stereotype and “Arab Face” was already long in circulation by the time Palestinian-American writer Randa Jarrar published her polemic article, “Why I can’t stand white belly dancers” in 2014.\(^1\) The Salon.com article set off a wave of engagement with the idea of “cultural appropriation” in the international belly dance community. In the article, Jarrar argued that white\(^2\) women who belly dance are cultural appropriators who produce exotic identities for themselves through khol-and-sparkle-induced racial charade. She concluded these white belly dancers harm Arab women by perpetuating damaging exotic and sexualized Middle Eastern stereotypes. Jarrar’s popular article implied belly dance is a cultural production that is rightly

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2 Whiteness is a racial, ethnic, cultural, and social construction. The meaning of whiteness in Canada has not been constant, as it has been performed and defined in a variety of ways. However, ideal Canadian whiteness by the turn of the twentieth century had come to mean being Protestant, having light skin, having British ancestry, and being fluent in English. Some allowances were made for French Canadian Catholics, as Ian McKay states, so long as they were “deferential to the Empire.” This definition of white identity was contested over the following century, but the ideal of British Canadian whiteness has remained relatively consistent. Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People’s Enlightenment in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008), 350–51; Cynthia Levine-Rasky, *Whiteness Fractured*, eBook (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2013); Augie Fleras, *Racisms in a Multicultural Canada: Paradoxes, Politics, and Resistance* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014); Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott, *Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race, Ethnic, and Aboriginal Dynamics in Canada*, Fifth edition (Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2006).
owned by Arab\(^3\) (and perhaps by other Middle Eastern\(^4\)) communities. Jarrar’s articulation of her personal experience of white-belly-dance-as-appropriation was met with understanding by a few, but with vitriol by many others in the international belly dance community. Online specifically, many white dancers did not respond well to Jarrar’s questioning of their participation in belly dance.\(^5\)

Jarrar’s article came out as I was beginning my academic foray into the history of belly dance in Southern Ontario. I read it around the same time I was beginning to conduct interviews with dancers who had been performing in North America during the 1960s and 1970s. As I listened to various dancer voices from a variety of ethnic and identity origin points, Jarrar’s claim of discrete cultural ownership of this dance form by a single ethnic group increasingly perplexed me. As I explored how this Middle Eastern dance form became popular in North America, I witnessed this firsthand in numerous online forums dedicated to the discussion of belly dance.

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\(^3\) The construction of Arab ethnic identity since \textit{al-nahda} (the Arab Renaissance) has included a focus on shared cultural and intellectual traditions, but the strongest unifying factor has often been the shared usage of Modern Standard Arabic. “Arab” as an ethnic identity has had multiple meanings depending on its usage and does not necessarily refer to a uniform cultural or ethnic group. Those identifying as Arab during the mid-twentieth century could come from a variety of nation-states from across the Middle East and North Africa, and could have varying spoken dialects and cultural practices, despite having some elements of shared Arab identity. Thus, Arab is a constructed ethnic and racial concept that has been negotiated differently in different circumstances. It is important to note that not all first-language speakers of Arabic necessarily identify as ethnically Arab. Brian Aboud, “Re-Reading Arab World-New World Immigration History: Beyond the Prewar/postwar Divide,” \textit{Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies} 26, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 658; Michael Bonine, Abbas Amanat, and Michael Gasper, eds., \textit{Is There a Middle East?: The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept} (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 235.

\(^4\) The Middle East is a problematic Eurocentric term stemming from older Western geopolitical terminology, the Near East and the Far East. Clayton R. Koppes argues the term came into popular use at the turn of the twentieth century after its initial use by General Sir Thomas Edward Gordon to refer to the territory between the Mediterranean and England’s prized colony, India. The term has been solidified in English language use over the twentieth century, despite its ambiguity and lack of clear boundaries. It exists and has sustained meaning because Western nations have had the power to make it a globally understood and used term. The use of the term “Middle East” in this work will take advantage of its geographic ambiguity to reference the geographic areas where belly dance developed as culturally embedded social dance, folk dance, entertainment, and performance. Specifically, this will include the present-day nation states of the Maghreb region, Greece, and the regions East within Asia to approximately Iran. Clayton R. Koppes, “Captain Mahan, General Gordon, and the Origins of the Term ‘Middle East,’” \textit{Middle Eastern Studies} 12, no. 1 (1976): 95; Bonine, Amanat, and Gasper, \textit{Is There a Middle East?}, 5, 240.

\(^5\) I witnessed this firsthand in numerous online forums dedicated to the discussion of belly dance.
America, and the reasons so many white women taught and performed it, I discovered the historical narrative was not as simple as Jarrar suggested.

By exploring the circumstances and individuals responsible for belly dance’s introduction and popularization in the Toronto area, a better understanding of how appropriation and hybridity have both been at work in belly dance’s entrenchment into Canadian culture can be achieved. Belly dance’s popularity and hybridization were, in part, the result of immigration to Canada from both the U.S. and the Middle East. It was also the result of the sustained Orientalist integration of belly dance performances and imagery into North American popular culture over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the period after the Second World War, increased international mobility resulted in the increased transnational movement of media and artists, and in the 1960s and 1970s, liberalized Canadian immigration policy allowed large numbers of immigrants from the Middle East to make Canada home.

Both increased transnational movement and immigration affected how belly dance performances were presented and received in postwar Toronto. All this revision of belly dance movement and meaning was done in the context of a city and nation that was negotiating increased equality and multiculturalism in the wake of unprecedented multi-ethnic immigration. While flawed, and utilized to preserve white hegemony, multiculturalism policy and discourse in Canada during the 1970s encouraged Canadians to engage with cultural expressions that they were not born into: including belly dance. Due to stereotypes about belly dance and the privileging of Anglo whiteness in Toronto, despite the ideal of multicultural equality, white dancers were popular in nightclub settings and were often asked to represent Middle Eastern communities in multicultural festivals. However, the decision of various Middle Eastern community groups to hire or invite white dancers to perform belly dance in clubs and at
multicultural celebrations during the 1970s and 1980s was not only because of white privilege in Canada. At times, these interactions were also the result of cultural bridging and meaningful relationships that defy analysis only based on ethnic identity. Thus, belly dance’s popularization in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s cannot simply be characterized as straightforward “cultural appropriation.” Popular blog and media posts, like Jarrar’s articles, oversimplify the complex historical and cultural processes that characterized belly dance’s dissemination in Toronto and throughout North America. Belly dance’s successful contextualization in Toronto during the twentieth century was the result of multifaceted and complex appropriations, hybridizations and experiences of cultural exchange. Men and women from a variety of class backgrounds with origin points and identities from all over the world worked to entrench the dance form into shared Canadian culture—whatever that is.

Immigrants to Canada from the Middle East, the U.S., and Europe shaped the trajectory of belly dance’s transnational popularity in Toronto between approximately 1950 and 1990 alongside resident Canadians from a variety of backgrounds. This study focuses on the emergence of belly dance as a popular cultural form within North America, with specific attention to the city of Toronto, both within and outside of Middle Eastern communities. Twelve oral history interviews were conducted with men and women involved in belly dance instruction or performance in some way between 1960 and 1990 to access this narrative. Newspaper archives, dance archives, and personal collections were also consulted. The interviewees and documentary evidence indicate white dancers, club owners, and audiences were not the only ones shaping belly dance’s performance and meaning in Toronto: men and women who

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7 The sources and methodology used in this study are explored at length in the following chapter.
identified as Middle Eastern had agency and control over the performance and popularization of belly dance in Toronto in the postwar period as well. However, this agency was exercised within the constraints of a Canadian socio-political context that privileged whiteness and racially sexualized belly dance performances.

**Defining Belly Dance**

Belly dance has defied discrete categorization and a universally accepted English nomenclature. The English term ‘belly dance’ refers to movement vocabularies originating in the Middle East, North Africa, and Greece that include the undulation and articulation of the torso, pelvis, and arms. Hip articulation and rotations are also of importance, as are a variety of pelvic tucks and circles.\(^8\) The use of shimmies generated from the rapid movement of the knees and hips are also essential movement elements. Often there is a focus on small complex movements of a dancer’s hips, torso, head, and hands. Arms frame torso movement, while a dancer’s leg movements are often used to generate interest in the torso.\(^9\) Movements in belly dance are applied as visual representations of musical complexities. The dancer’s movement and energy reflect the music.\(^10\) Belly dance styles across the Middle East have long histories of practice at events like henna nights, weddings, and festivals.\(^11\) The form is danced both socially and professionally by men and women. The social and moral meanings belly dance takes on in each context are very different. Social dance among the right insider group (perhaps among only family at a wedding or in a single-sex group environment) is not considered deviant sexual or

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\(^8\) Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, eds., *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 2.

\(^9\) Ibid., 5.


\(^11\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other*. 
seductive behaviour. There are many contexts in which non-professional belly dance is encouraged. The arena of permissible (or encouraged) dance varies from family to family and is usually within spaces defined as private or celebratory. Najwa Adra terms twentieth-century belly dance “an urban folk genre,” that encourages lighthearted play through movement in a variety of social contexts across the Arab World. Depending on the location in the Middle East, men and women have danced together, individually or in gender segregated contexts. Sometimes families have simply danced together for fun. The dance has been done by non-professionals out of enjoyment and pleasure, although it may also be performed out of a sense of duty to the host/hostess of an event. Belly dance has also been used to encourage social cohesion through social, non-professional celebration. It has not been considered a dance of seduction in these social contexts. Social boundaries may be pushed, and sexuality referenced, but this has characteristically been done with a strong sense of humour and satire. Belly dance can take on a variety of meanings which are all dependent on profession, class, race, and gender dynamics in different social settings.

Only in specific contexts is the form considered closely connected to sexuality. Professional belly dance is perceived as the most sexualized in the Middle East. While a female professional dancer is for some families almost a requirement in celebratory contexts, her profession is considered shameful by many. Her public performance is understood as deviant behaviour as she shows her body and its movement for pay. Her dancing is entertainment and not art; professional belly dance has never been widely considered high art in the Middle East,

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13 Ibid., 42.
14 Ibid., 28–30.
15 van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other*, 181–82.
North Africa, and Greece.\textsuperscript{16} Kathleen Fraser’s study on Egyptian-Canadian attitudes towards belly dance indicated the surveyed group found the dance had a legitimate, but not a serious place in culture. The dance form was beloved by Egyptian Canadians, but it was not given high esteem and was generally not considered art.\textsuperscript{17}

It is essential to note that the English term belly dance is greatly disliked within the modern Middle Eastern dance community. Colonial in origin, derived from the French \textit{danse du ventre}, “belly dance” bears no resemblance to the Arabic, Turkish or Greek terminology for these dance forms.\textsuperscript{18} The most common contemporary Arabic term for this general form is \textit{raqs sharqi}, which translates to “eastern/oriental dance.”\textsuperscript{19} The term \textit{baladi} has also been used during the twentieth century to describe popular Arab forms of belly dance. \textit{Baladi} can have a range of meanings, but most often refers to “my people” or “my country.” It evokes a sense of “authenticity” and folk-strength. When referring to dance and music specifically, \textit{baladi} references urban Cairene styles influenced by migrants from more rural regions of Egypt. \textit{Baladi} dance is “heavier” than typical twentieth-century \textit{raqs sharqi}. \textit{Raqs arabi} (Arab dance) and \textit{raqs masri} (Egyptian dance) are also used to describe belly dance in various Arabic twentieth-century sources. The Turkish term for this dance, \textit{oryantal dans}, also literally translates to “eastern/oriental dance.” The Greek term often used for this dance style (when performed in the Greek style) is \textit{tsifteteli}. Greek speakers may also differentiate between “oriental” dance and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Kathleen Wittick Fraser, “The Aesthetics of Belly Dance: Egyptian-Canadians Discuss the Baladi” (MA Thesis, York University, 1991).
\textsuperscript{18} The English term belly dance is a direct translation of \textit{danse du ventre}. “Belly dance” reportedly emerged as a popular term around the beginning of the twentieth century.
\textsuperscript{19} There are numerous popular English transliterations for the Arabic term \textit{شرقي رقص} of which \textit{raqs sharqi} is currently the most common. I have decided to utilize the most common/popular English transliterations of Arabic, Greek, or Turkish terms that are in use within the contemporary international belly dance community. I have done this to make the dissertation useful and accessible to a wide audience.
\end{flushleft}
The term *tsifteteli* is derived from the Turkish word *çiftetelli*, (double-stringed), which refers to instrumentation and music that often accompanies this style of dance. None of the indigenous terms for these dance forms reference the abdomen: this terminology was a result of Western perspectives.

Many dancers and academics have favoured the term oriental dance over belly dance as it is a direct translation of the terms used for the dance found in Arabic and Turkish. Recently, however, the term oriental dance has been criticized because of the racist implications of the term oriental. Oriental, as a term, has taken on an antiquated, even pejorative connotation when used to describe an individual or group of individuals. This is because it was used to classify and homogenize a massive, diverse group of people "East" of Europe.\(^{20}\) In 2009, the term “oriental” was banned from use in American state documents because of its “deep demeaning historical roots.”\(^{21}\) While contemporary movement away from the terms *danse du ventre*, belly dance, and oriental dance may be advisable, it is impossible to avoid their common usage throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Belly dance’s ubiquitous presence in contemporary English usage has precluded its elimination, despite efforts by many to achieve this in English-speaking North America dating back to the 1950s. Belly dance is the most widely used and known term for these styles of dance in English. Thus, in order to reach the widest audience possible (outside of even academic and specialist dance circles) I have decided to utilize this problematic term. It is useful because it is not specific, and can reference a variety of Middle Eastern and global dance stylizations which focus on torso articulation. Much of the resistance to the term belly dance has also been because of its association with Orientalist, sexualized performance in North

America. As this dissertation exposes this history of stereotype and the many contested ways belly dance has been performed in North America, perhaps it will contribute to more nuanced future meaning for this maligned term.

Belly dance can describe a variety of dance styles that have indistinguishable origin points in Middle Eastern, North African, and Central Asian regions and cultures. The exact historical origins of these dance forms are unknown; the movement patterns that would be understood today as “belly dance” have been shifting in and out of areas in the Mediterranean region for at least the past three hundred years. Travel literature from Europeans who visited the Middle East, North Africa, and Greece reported the existence of a form of popular social dance and public entertainment focusing on vibration and torso articulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, long before colonial dominance in the region. Western travel narratives by men like Gustave Flaubert and George William Curtis tied their literary presentations of raqs sharqi with heavily biased descriptions of alleged backward Eastern sexuality. Still, considerable agency and financial power was wielded by successful female dancers in this period, despite their perceived low moral and class status.

22 Images of what some scholars argue was solo improvised dance in the Mediterranean region date back to approximately 3,000 B.C.E, but these Egyptian and Persian images (among others) cannot offer any information on the style of music or movement performed. They simply show that solo dance existed. Another early reference to solo improvised dance in the Middle East is found in a passage entitled “On the Required Qualities of Dancers” from the “Oration of Geographer Ibn Khurdadhiba in front of the Caliph al-Mu’tamid (d. 892)” recorded in The Meadows of Gold by historian Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali al-Mas’udi (d. c. 957). This passage indicates the existence of dance that was possibly related to later styles of belly dance. The passage described the ideal qualities of a dancer at that time in Baghdad, arguing they included “grace and charm, good innate sense of rhythm,” “creativity,” along with “control of breath” and “suppleness of joints, speed of motion during turns [and] suppleness of sides of the body [possibly hips].” But linking these early examples of the existence of solo improvised dance with contemporary practice is tenuous at best. George Sawa, “The Required Qualities of Dancers,” in International Belly Dance Conference of Canada (International Belly Dance Conference of Canada, Toronto, 2008); Shay and Sellers-Young, Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy, 4.

23 Kathleen W. Fraser, Before They Were Belly Dancers: European Accounts of Female Entertainers in Egypt, 1760-1870 (Jefferson: Mcfarland & Co Inc Pub, 2015), 2, 10–11.
During the twentieth century, regional style differences that developed in the Middle East were neither “rules” nor constant, as raqs sharqi, oryantal, and tsifteleli have remained uncoded.\(^{24}\) Facilitated by migration and mass media, belly dance styles have circulated in and out of various ethnic, class, gender, and national boundaries. While the movements and the music of belly dance have not always been strictly linked to physical locations, certain styles have become loosely associated with various national, regional, or group identities. As Stavros Stavrou Karayanni notes, these dances have not only been associated with discrete, modern, geographic nation-states, but also with nationalist or ethnic constructs associated with individuals in diasporic communities.\(^ {25}\)

Egyptian-style belly dance owes its mid-twentieth-century stylization and international popularity to the dancer-actress celebrities of Egypt’s golden age of cinema, like Samia Gamal (1924-1994) and Taheyya Karioka (1915-1999). Many of these stars were not necessarily ethnically Egyptian, and many of them worked in the entertainment industry not only in Egypt, but also in Lebanon. Often these performers circulated throughout the Middle East and internationally over the course of their careers. The stars of Egyptian cinema incorporated a variety of international influences into their movements as they popularized and established ideals for Egyptian raqs sharqi.\(^ {26}\) Dancers incorporated influences from forms as disparate as ballet, jazz, and samba. Mid-twentieth-century Egyptian-style belly dance was also informed by a variety of Egyptian folkloric dance styles, both in their social forms and in their staged forms.\(^ {27}\)

\(^{24}\) Many instructors in North America attempted to codify the form, or set about naming and breaking down movements for instruction.
\(^{25}\) Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, Dancing Fears and Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 122.
\(^{26}\) Samia Gamal appeared in more than fifty movies over her career, the majority of which were Egyptian.
\(^{27}\) Folkloric dances take on unique qualities when moved from homes/informal gatherings onto a stage. See Anthony Shay, Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).
One of the most common folklore elements in Egyptian *raqs sharqi* performances has been references to Saidi (Upper Egyptian) stylization and music. The use of *shamadan* (a candelabra balanced on the head, (see Figure 1.0) is another example of an Egyptian addition to *raqs sharqi*

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28 Saidi folkloric tableaux became increasingly popular in cabaret belly dance sets in Egypt (and subsequently globally) over the twentieth century. The Said region is better known in English as Upper Egypt. The use of *asaya/asa* (a long stick commonly used by men in the area) in *tahtib* has bled into the performance of folkloric Saidi dance, and subsequently, cabaret belly dance shows that reference the area in tableaux.
performance that became popular in shows and weddings in the postwar period. Anecdotal evidence suggests *shamadan* performance is derived from late-nineteenth century wedding procession performance in Egypt, where a dancer would participate in the *zeffah* (wedding processional) while balancing a lit candelabra on her head. Karin van Nieuwkerk’s research suggests a specific dancer, Shafiqá el Qibtiyyá (Shafiqá the Copt) (1851-1926) created the technique, although there is not enough evidence to discredit the possibility of its earlier use in *zeffah* processions.\(^{29}\) The use of the stunning *shamadan* in Egyptian *raqs sharqi* eventually spread to other areas of the Middle East. *Shamadan* has been incorporated into performances across the Middle East and the globe, at weddings, nightclubs, theatres and a variety of other venues. The primacy of Egyptian cinema in the Middle East during the postwar period allowed for Egyptian music and *raqs sharqi* stylizations to become popularized throughout the region.

Lebanese-style *raqs sharqi* during the mid-twentieth century was and remains interconnected with Egyptian style and Turkish style as many dancers circulated through these regions. The entertainment industries of Egypt and Lebanon often intersected. For example, dancer and actress Nadia Gamal (1937-1990), although born in Alexandria to parents of Greek and Italian ancestry, came to epitomize twentieth-century Lebanese-style belly dance.\(^{30}\) Stylistically, Lebanese-style *raqs sharqi* is not as internal as Egyptian-style as the energy of the dancer is directed more consistently towards the audience. Another way Lebanese-style *raqs sharqi* may be distinguishable from other styles of *raqs sharqi* is through the incorporation of specifically Lebanese folk dance elements into performances, for instance, specific kinds of

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\(^{29}\) van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other*, 43.

\(^{30}\) Nadia Gamal’s birth name was Maria Kariadis. She grew up performing with her mother at Cairo’s famous Casino Opera. Randal Grass, *Great Spirits: Portraits of Life Changing World Music Artists* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2009), 207.
Floor work, where the dancer sinks to the floor to dance on her knees, or while reclining, was also popular with Nadia Gamal in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{32}

Turkish belly dance during the mid-twentieth century has also often included extensive floor work.\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Dans oryantal}’s movement style in the postwar period tended to project outward

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Nejla Ateş showcases the more revealing costuming that could be associated with Turkish-style belly dance on the cover of this 1958 Port Said LP cover.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Dabke} is a form of line or circle dancing involving intricate step patterns performed socially and professionally across the Levant and Middle East. It is primarily socially danced and does not carry the same stigma as \textit{raqs sharqi}.
\textsuperscript{32} Grass, \textit{Great Spirits}, 212.
\textsuperscript{33} Brenda E. (Badia Star) Bell, interview by Anne Vermeyden, October 26, 2014, 8.
\end{flushright}
and be very athletic. Deep backbends and sudden athletic drops from standing to the floor were common. Also, mid-twentieth-century Turkish style costumes have generally been more revealing than Egyptian and Lebanese costumes (see Figure 1.1). Turkish dans oryantal often references music and folkloric dance traditions from Turkey including movements and music related to Turkish Rom style dance (the dance of the Roma people of Turkey); Turkish style performances may also include references to Karşılama. Meaning greeting, this is a social dance popular in weddings, parties and other celebrations, which is found in a variety of incarnations across Tukey, the Balkans, and Greece. Dans oryantal is often performed to Arabic music and Turkish music.

Mid-twentieth century Greek-style belly dance, termed tsifeteli, has been informed by the rhythms and folk dance forms of Greece, Anatolia, and the Balkans. It is typically performed alongside Greek music and instruments, although it can also be performed to other styles of Middle Eastern music. 34 Since the mid-twentieth century, bouzouki music (the bouzouki is a Greek plucked, string instrument related to the lute) has commonly been performed alongside Greek-style belly dance. Stavros Stavrou Karayanni indicates that some individuals in Greece have argued that tsifeteli is uniquely Greek and separate from “oriental” style dance (raqs sharqi/oryantal), which has also been performed in Greece. Kayayanni indicates that Greek tsifeteli has unique movement elements that differentiate it from Arabic and Turkish styles. For example, leg-driven shimmy is not as common in performances of tsifeteli as it is in raqs sharqi/oryantal. He concludes, however, that tsifeteli and Turkish and Arabic styles of belly

34 Karayanni, Dancing Fears and Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance, 27.
dance are closely related. The disagreement over what exactly constitutes the differences between these styles and terms is evidence of the uncodified and shifting nature of these dances.

North American cabaret style belly dance developed in various Middle Eastern nightclubs and restaurants that were popular in metropolitan centres like New York, Boston, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver during the 1960s and 1970s. In these clubs, dancers performed for Middle Eastern and North American audiences alongside musicians from across the Middle East and North America. Often American and Canadian belly dancers learned informally how to incorporate multiple styles of belly dance and folklore into their sets. Heterogeneous audiences, musical arrangements, and dance influences in Canada and the U.S. resulted in belly dance performances that hybridized mixtures of Turkish, Greek, and Arabic styles. The famous originator of the Salimpour style, and a major force in the popularization of belly dance on the West coast during the 1960s and 1970s, Jamila Salimpour’s description of how she learned *raqs sharqi* through a mishmash of sources in postwar California displays how this process of hybridization could occur. As a young girl, Salimpour learned some movements from her Sicilian father’s imitation of *ghawazi* (a specific style of public dancers in Egypt) he had seen while stationed there. Later in life, she watched Egyptian films with her Egyptian landlady and tried to recreate the movements of Taheyya

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36 North American cabaret belly dance has been termed American cabaret, American restaurant, or even Turko-American style. Some professional dancers dislike the term cabaret, as it can have a morally negative connotation when used in Arabic. Despite this, the term cabaret is still widely used to describe belly dance that developed in North America for restaurants and nightclubs.
Karioca and Samia Gamal.\textsuperscript{39} During the early 1960s, when she was belly dancing professionally in San Francisco, she also began imitating the performances of other dancers in restaurants, many of whom came from the Middle East to perform in newly opened Middle Eastern clubs. She loved watching and imitating Ayşa from Turkey, Soraya from Morocco, and Fatima Ali from Algeria, among others.\textsuperscript{40} Often, the ethnic makeup of restaurant or club patrons and performers influenced the development of regionally specific style hybridizations. For example, Vancouver’s belly dance scene in the 1970s was heavily influenced by Jamila Salimpour’s early hybridized American West-Coast style, as well as by local Greek and Turkish communities.\textsuperscript{41} Costuming on the West coast during the 1970s also began to reflect an imagined “ethnic” ideal which often incorporated \textit{assuit} and antique jewelry from around the world (See Figure 4.2 on page 156 for an example of this costuming style). Both Middle Eastern ethnic communities and individual dancers shaped and embodied the belly dance hybridization process that led to the emergence of numerous transnational North American cabaret styles. A large Turkish and Greek influence in an area meant there would be a prevalence of hybrid dancer styles reflecting this.\textsuperscript{42}

Dancers also tailored performances to suit American audiences. Active audience participation was central to American-style postwar performance. Dancers often draped their veils over men in the audience, pulled individuals on stage, or wrapped scarves around women’s hips. The use of gymnastic movements and props was also important in the American style, as this was impressive and popular with North American audiences; canes, veils, finger cymbals,


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Bell, interview, 4.

\textsuperscript{42} Turkish influences would remain dominant until approximately the 1980s, when Egyptian style would begin to ascend in popularity, even in North America.
candles, *shamadan*, baskets, swords, and even snakes were props utilized in the postwar period. North American cabaret style also absorbed influences from a variety of international dance forms, including flamenco, Broadway, ballet, and various Latin dance styles.

Regional belly dance variations (Egyptian, Lebanese, Turkish, Greek, and North American cabaret) were not the only styles in existence during the postwar period, although they were the most common. Styles and nuances were constantly shifting and changing over time, even when attempts at standardization or classicization were made.\(^43\) Even when dancers in North America worked to recreate Egyptian and Turkish styles, their work was always affected by its North American context and the dancer’s positionality. There has been no essential “belly dance,” pure and pristine in form, directly connected to one specific cultural group in an unadulterated way void of transnational influence; there have been, instead, unique shared styles that have become intertwined with various groups’ cultural experiences and practices. Canadian dancer Yasmina Ramzy remarked that every time a *raqs sharqi* performer interprets music, he or she cannot help but express his or her worldview and identity.\(^44\) Her comment highlights how belly dance, no matter its geographic styling, can take on a plethora of individual flavours. For example, Samia Gamal and Taheyya Karioka, both Egyptian dance stars from the same period, danced *raqs sharqi* very differently. Thus, these regional styles must be understood as relatively porous and non-rigid.

\(^{43}\) This is with a few noted exceptions. For example, American Tribal Style®, which began developing in the U.S. during the 1970s, was eventually trademarked. Its specific and codified movements were developed under the guidance of Carolena Nericcio-Bohlman. Many artists have attempted to codify belly dance movements through setting up schools and accreditation programs, but none of these are universally recognized, or accepted as standards for the dance form. Many of the belly dance artists interviewed, and the author of this dissertation, express a love of the uncodified nature of this dance form. The improvisational and social nature of belly dance has perhaps influenced this resistance to codification, as has a sense that enforced codification is somehow an imposition on a the “freeness” offered in belly dance.

\(^{44}\) Personal Communication.
**Belly “Dance” and Defining Dance**

The English term dance comes with Western cultural baggage. Consequently, it is necessary to explore the academic use of the word dance. Dance is not the only term available to describe human movement. For example, Adrianne Kaeppler suggests "structured movement systems" as an alternative to the English term dance.\(^4\) Alternatively, Drid Williams suggests terminology like "human movement" or "structured systems of human actions" can be utilized in studies to analyze dance, songs, and rituals (individually and collectively), as in many languages the term for dance can include all of these elements.\(^5\) As the English term “dance” mirrors the meanings of the terms *dans* and *raqs* found in *dans oryantal* and *raqs sharqi*, it is well suited for use in this analysis.

Dance provides unique challenges to historical analysis because it is a fleeting cultural expression. Although technology can record video of movement, the images played back are removed from the original performance experiences.\(^6\) The filming and editing choices made for any recorded performance are a process of creation that distances the final product from the original movements as they were perceived by the dancer and the dancer’s observers. The process of recording and enframing the dance through photography or video cannot perfectly reflect the dance as it existed in the moments of its creation. Belly dance can be especially

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fleeting, as successful performance often relies on directly engaging the audience. The dancer not only conveys emotion to the audience in movement but also receives emotion and energy back. This dynamic is often impossible to effectively capture on camera.

The physical movement of dance is typically the focus of its definition, but the intention of the performer and audience in classifying his or her movement as dance is central to a useful understanding of dance. While belly dance is rhythmic and intentional, so is scrubbing the floor to music. The differentiation between belly dance and floor scrubbing is that one of these acts is recognized as dance by the performer (and usually the audience), and the other is not. Joann Kealiinohomoku's famous definition of dance suggests that both the performer and the audience must recognize the movement as dance for it to be dance.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, belly dance is a fleeting expression of culture and it is characterized by rhythmic movement that is recognized as dance by the performer and the audience.

\textbf{Context: Postwar Toronto}

Toronto is ideal for a historical examination of belly dance’s North American contextualization. As one of Canada’s metropolitan centres throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was consistently a popular destination for new immigrants.\textsuperscript{49} However, until the 1960s, those immigrants were predominantly white, Northern European, or Anglo-Saxon. But this conservative Torontonian identity rooted in Anglo-Saxon Protestantism began to splinter in the 1960s, especially after the deracialization of Canadian immigration policy. The city became more ethnically diverse in the 1970s as newcomers from all over the world began to make it home. In this wave of immigration, Arab, Turkish, and Greek immigrants came to

Toronto in unprecedented numbers. Immigrants from across the Middle East, America, and Europe brought Middle Eastern music and dance traditions with them that they would integrate into the rapidly diversifying city.

During the 1960s, many Anglo Torontonians left the city's downtown core for a life in the suburbs, and many newcomers settled in the neighbourhoods they left. Through this process, neighbourhoods that had previously been populated by predominantly Anglo Torontonians shifted to include new ethnic demographics. It was through this process, for instance, that the Danforth (as seen in Figure 1.2, along Danforth Avenue, in the area today just East of the Don River) became home to a growing Greek population. This demographic shift allowed for the success of many new international restaurants and clubs. Facilitated by shifting demographics, during the 1960s a thriving counter-culture movement also developed in Toronto, with Yorkville at its heart. Groups of white Canadian youth in search of “authenticity” were inspired by the idea of life on the margin. Many young “hippies” engaged in discourse which elevated the Eastern other and many were drawn to Middle Eastern dance and music. The birth of “hip”

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52 Yorkville is loosely found within the bounds of Bloor Street to the south, Davenport Road to the north, Avenue road to the West, and Yonge to the east. Ibid., 6.
53 Ibid., 8–9.
Toronto in the 1960s included the emergence of belly dance performance and its subsequent popularization in the following decade.

Figure 1.2. Toronto Planning Board Atlas (c. 1957-1960), City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 727, Item 123.
A Spike in Belly Dance Interest in America and Toronto

Belly dancing became increasingly popular in America's Middle-Eastern supper clubs, nightclubs, and restaurants during the 1960s and 1970s. Seeing live bands and performers was a common evening entertainment activity. Belly dance also became a popular form of fitness recreation amongst American and Canadian women during this period. Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young both document, for instance, how more than one million American women studied belly dance in recreational settings across the U.S between the 1950s and 1980s. Shay suggests that this recreational and professional popularity of belly dance was a part of a wider and uniquely American fascination with exotic dance forms that was fuelled by a white-American desire to “try on” the exotic.

In comparison to American trends, the popularization of belly dance in Canada has received little analysis. Its popularity in Toronto during the 1970s has not been widely examined in previous academic work. Evidence from all oral history interviews and documentary investigation conducted for this dissertation indicates that belly dance was also becoming increasingly popular in Toronto during the 1970s. The following graph, Table 1.0, illustrates belly dance’s increasing popularity in Toronto between 1950 and 1989 by indicating the number of separately named professional dancers and instructors listed cumulatively in the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail over each decade. The data presents a trend of increased popularity and publicity for belly dance performance that began in the 1960s, spiked in the 1970s, and plateaued

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56 Ibid., 6.
in the 1980s. The data also indicates that belly dance instruction first became popular during the 1970s.\textsuperscript{58}

A detailed breakdown of the data presented reveals that in the period between 1950 and 1959, there were only two separately named professional belly dancers (who performed in Toronto) mentioned in the \textit{Toronto Star} and the \textit{Globe and Mail} (Samia Gamal and Nejla Ateş). During this decade, no belly dance instructors or classes were mentioned in the city. In the period between 1960 and 1969, nine separate belly dancers were named between the \textit{Globe} and the \textit{Star} combined. During this decade, no classes or instructors were mentioned. In the period between 1970 and 1979, there was a large spike in both the number of separately named performers and the number of separately named instructors: 26 dancers and seven instructors were named between 1970 and 1979. Nearly three times the number of dancers’ names appeared in these papers during the 1970s than had during the 1960s. Articles discussing belly dance instructors and ads for classes only began appearing during the 1970s. During the 1980s, the spike in the number of named dancers and instructors plateaued. There was even a small decrease in the number of named instructors and performers during this decade. This data, along with the oral histories collected for this project reveal the sudden popularity of belly dance in Toronto between 1960-1989.

\textsuperscript{58} This data only includes named dancers who were performing or teaching in Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area. References to dancers working outside of this region were excluded from these numbers.
Table 1.0 The Popularity of belly dance in Toronto (1950-1989)

Mapping Out the Thesis

In exploring the socio-political context that allowed belly dance to become popular entertainment and recreation in Toronto, a thorough analysis of the theory, historiography, and methodology that has underpinned this project is offered in Chapter Two, “Critical Approaches to Historical Belly Dance Narratives: Theory, Historiography, and Methodology.” This chapter justifies the use of various postmodern theoretical frameworks including concepts like appropriation, hybridity, embodiment, and Orientalism. The chapter then outlines how this narrative on belly dance in Toronto integrates with existing literature on belly dance history to support a developing historiographic trend which suggests stereotypes about the Middle East.
have been both entrenched and challenged in North America through the popularization of belly dance. Finally, this chapter outlines the methodologies that informed the use of oral and archival sources in the research.

In Chapter Three, “Danse du Ventre’s North American Debut and Orientalist Contextualization in Toronto” we explore how Middle Eastern dance forms involving torso articulation became popular in North America for the first time during the second half of the nineteenth century. The chapter asserts stereotypes depicting the East as exotic, sexual, dangerous, and timeless were prevalent in popular culture in this period. These popular controlling images resulted in discrimination against Middle Eastern newcomers, and a mixed North American response to the danse du ventre (the term used popularly in the press during this period). The chapter then shows how danse du ventre’s popularity meant it was quickly appropriated and hybridized into a variety of North American dance contexts. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how early and mid-twentieth century popular Orientalist portrayals of danse du ventre as sexual and ancient continued to inform dominant ideas about belly dance when it resurfaced as a form of popular live performance in Toronto after the Second World War.

Chapter Four, “Transnational Circulation’s Impact on the Hybridization of Belly Dance Performance in Toronto, 1953-1985,” explores why and how belly dance performances at clubs and restaurants became so popular in Toronto in the postwar period. The chapter begins by showing how increased international mobility and the incremental post-war liberalization of Canada's immigration policy allowed for increased movement and migration from all around the globe to Toronto. Migration from the Middle East to Canada and from the Middle East to Canada via the U.S. was essential in the earliest phase of belly dance’s increased postwar popularity in
Toronto. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, visiting Middle Eastern dancers, immigrants, Canadians, and Americans presented a variety of belly dance styles to Canadian audiences. The chapter unpacks how conflict arose over how dancers and teachers should present belly dance to North American audiences. Dancers and club owners from Canada, the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East profited from belly dance’s established association with Orientalist exotic sexuality. Some dancers attempted to navigate stigmatization by utilizing choreographic strategies and narratives aimed at increasing their belly dance’s respectability, while others embraced infamy and the income it brought. The chapter concludes that immigration from across the Middle East and the U.S. increasingly informed belly dance representational choices in Toronto.

Chapter Five, “Belly Dancing, Whiteness, Multiculturalism, and Identity at Metro Toronto International Caravan, 1969-1989,” examines a uniquely Canadian venue for Torontonian belly dance performance: Canadian multicultural celebrations. This chapter first explores how in 1971, the Canadian government implemented official multiculturalism policy in a bid to reorganize Canadian identity in response to shifting demographics. This chapter then shows how ethnic communities utilized belly dance performances in multicultural celebrations and festivals, like Metro Toronto International Caravan. Belly dance performances at Caravan reveal some of the many ways belly dance was tactfully avoided or used to construct ethnic identity in Canada. The decision of some pavilion organizers to utilize white dancers or choreographers highlights both the systemic privileging of whiteness, but also the development of intercultural relationships and dance hybridization. Performances at Metro Toronto Caravan during the 1970s and 1980s took on political significance as dancers and newcomers presented hybridized and constructed cultural identities to the Canadian public.
During the 1970s, belly dance’s Torontonian popularization did not end in the nightclubs, restaurants, and festivals, as it also shifted into recreational and class settings. Chapter Six, “The Popularization of Recreational Belly Dance in Toronto 1970-1987” examines why and how this shift occurred in Toronto. It reveals how professional dancers spearheaded the opening of classes or dance studios that specialized in belly dance, and popularized their classes by marketing belly dance as a way to keep slender while having some exotic, slightly taboo feminine fun. By the 1970s, belly dance in studios, YMCAs, community centres, and schools was very popular across the Greater Toronto Area. The chapter goes on to explore how instructors and instruction material from this period alternately challenged and reified both heteronormative gender roles and Orientalist stereotypes. It discusses, further, how belly dance’s refashioning for popular Western fitness consumption produced a new social form of recreation that was incorporated into a variety of feminist discourses which sought to challenge its previous status as a dance primarily for men’s enjoyment. The chapter finishes by exploring the growing dissonance between the increasingly white-populated and led “world” of recreational belly dance classes and the “world” of professional dancers (often white) who worked primarily for Middle Eastern audiences in Toronto. This chapter highlights how classes and recreational belly dance taught by Americans, Canadians, and newcomers from the Middle East became spaces that both fostered and challenged Middle Eastern stereotypes and prejudices. Instructors’ complex identities and ethnic backgrounds did not ensure sensitivity to stereotype or even avoidance of it. Instead, instructors utilized and navigated Middle Eastern imagery to achieve financial success and increased respectability for the dance form.

Belly dance performance and belly dance as recreation became embedded in the complex cultural landscape that developed in Toronto during the postwar period. Although Canada’s
social and political landscape in this period was formulated upon entrenched prejudice, it was, in part, the seismic shifts against a variety of prejudices that made space for belly dance to become popular in North America. Immigration liberalization, feminism, and multicultural policy all attempted to address systematic injustice and influenced belly dance’s popularization. Yet, it was also Orientalist stereotype and racism which worked to ensure the dance form’s success. A complex social-political climate that developed over this period allowed for the successful transplantation of belly dance into Toronto as a form of popular entertainment and recreation. The reverberations of this popularity are still felt in the city today: over ten independent studios specializing in belly dance exist in the city where hundreds of women regularly take classes. Toronto’s studios consistently host top-level belly dance instructors, conferences, and events. Both local and visiting artists in the city have worked to produce astounding, internationally recognized dance artistry in the field of belly dance. The city presents a unique case study in the historical contextualization of belly dance in North America.
CHAPTER II: Critical Approaches to Historical Belly Dance Narratives: Theory, Historiography and Methodology

Literature engaging with the history of belly dance performance can be found in a variety of disciplines. Fields including history, anthropology, sociology, dance studies, performance studies, cultural studies, Middle Eastern studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies, leisure studies, religious studies, and many others have provided a variety of useful frameworks in which to study belly dance and its histories.¹ This dissertation’s interdisciplinary engagement with the history of belly dance in North America, and within the Toronto area specifically, makes use of postmodern theoretical concepts including culture, appropriation, hybridity, acculturation, embodiment, and Orientalism. Framing historical analysis through these concepts offers a nuanced and interdisciplinary narrative that details how and why belly dance became popular in Toronto during the twentieth century and highlights the social and political contexts which allowed for its popularization. Postmodern frameworks allow for critical engagement with evidence and help avoid the presentation of a narrow empirical narrative of belly dance’s history in Toronto and its surrounding area. Instead, specific evidence is utilized to construct a narrative and argument informed by a variety of subjectivities, including the aforementioned interdisciplinary theoretical approaches.

Culture

This study draws on the analysis of anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Lila Abu-Lughod to define culture. Both Abu-Lughod and Appadurai present cultures not as fixed entities,
but instead as meaning-systems in motion. Cultures are constantly engaging in borrowing, transference, and conflict as individuals negotiate shared values, beliefs, and practices over time. Artistic expressions like dance, art, and music are cultural productions that are rooted within shared systems of meaning. As mentioned in Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer’s research, audience members produce meaning as the “product of cultural agreement, the result of a systematic use of various choreographic codes and conventions.” Culture is thus defined as a complex and constantly evolving system of shared beliefs, customs, values, and behaviours within any given group. As cultural productions like dance shift in and out of different contexts, individuals negotiate new meanings for them.

Increased global interconnection beginning in the twentieth century has affected the constant process of cultural exchange. Arjun Appadurai suggests that migration and media have resulted in both global cultural homogenization and heterogenization. He also argues the twentieth century has been home to a complex mix of overlapping and interacting cultural flows. In *Modernity at Large*, he describes key factors that have helped shape global exchanges of culture and the formation of global social realities as “-scapes.” Ethnoscapes, Appadurai argues, are imagined shifting landscapes that develop out of the migration of individuals in and out of various nations. He suggests these changing ethnic landscapes which do not correspond to traditional nation-state boundaries have impacted national identities in numerous ways.

Appadurai’s theoretical framework is applicable at many points throughout this dissertation, as

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5 Ibid., 33–35.
immigration from the Middle East to America and Canada profoundly impacted not only the history and development of belly dance forms, but also how Canadians and Americans engaged with belly dance.

Lila Abu-Lughod’s work also stresses culture’s constant shifting and renegotiation. She points out that even within groups, there is always contradiction and disagreement over cultural elements; no cultural group is easily definable and homogenous, and all cultures constantly change over time. Appadurai and Abu-Lughod’s presentations of culture as porous and interactive allow for a better understanding of how belly dance entered popular North American consciousness and became popular over the twentieth century. Cultural exchange, appropriation, and hybridization all helped belly dance become popular in Toronto outside of Middle Eastern communities. With Abu-Lughod and Appadurai’s work in mind, the analysis within this dissertation overturns caricatures and stereotypes of monolithic and unchanging cultures, regions, peoples, and nation-states.

**Appropriation and Cultural Appropriation**

Currently, the concept of cultural appropriation is a popular topic of discussion among belly dancers globally. Many men and women are concerned with social justice as it relates to their form of recreation or professional performance. It is undeniable that in belly dance’s twentieth-century global diaspora, movements have been borrowed, shared, and appropriated. Many dancers have incorporated movements from another’s performance into their own work without the permission of the artist they had seen performing. Certain philosophical and sociological discourses on cultural appropriation argue that this action can be harmful or morally

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problematic. They argue it is not the participation in the movement that is the issue, but rather the power relationships between the individuals involved in the act of participation, appropriation or exchange.

According to scholars utilizing this framework, cultural appropriation occurs when an individual with privilege based on his/her identity uses or misuse the arts, expressions, or ways of knowing of a disadvantaged or oppressed cultural group. For example, while early twentieth century Salome dancer Maud Allan met with great success on stages in Europe for her use of Middle Eastern imagery and dance, her contemporaries from the Middle East were barred access to the same stages and prestige. Anthon Shay suggests Allan’s whiteness and the “white” spaces she performed in made her oriental dance fashionable and lewd, while Middle Eastern performers movements were considered backward and lewd. This can be understood as an example of cultural appropriation because of the discrimination newcomers from the Middle East faced. According to cultural appropriation theory, if a Middle Eastern dancer had hybridized her movement with ballet to achieve increased prestige, this would not be cultural appropriation, but instead, an attempt at assimilation; the dancer in question would be trying to access the dominant culture in order to achieve respectability. Cultural appropriation as a theoretical framework highlights the political and often harmful implications of using elements of cultural expression from groups facing systematic inequality.

The concept of cultural appropriation is only one of many useful ways to describe the way in which dance shifts across cultural, racial, and gender boundaries. This framework has

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7 Erich Hatala Matthes, “Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?,” *Social Theory & Practice* 42, no. 2 (April 2016): 343.
considerable weaknesses and is used with caution only in specific instances. The most problematic element of cultural appropriation theory is its re-enforcement of discrete cultural categories and binaries. For example, using cultural appropriation theory to describe how dance forms move through new spaces can reinforce, for example, East-West binaries, and solidify lines of porous cultural exchange by presenting dance movement as static and ownable. Using the concept of appropriation designates ownership of a dance style or form to a particular group (when numerous groups claim ownership), and it hides the transnational, hybridizing and conversational nature of uncodified dance forms like belly dance. Terming the movement of culture across boundaries as cultural appropriation can easily falsely represent cultural groups and art forms as homogenous, static, and monolithic, when in reality, cultural groups and their artistic expressions are constantly shifting.\(^\text{10}\) Accusations of cultural appropriation in historical narratives can favour dominant understandings of culture, and silence divergent voices. They can also unfairly conflate cultural identity with racial identity, and subsequently, reinforce stereotypes. In *Meaning in Motion*, Jane C. Desmond suggests that applying the concept of cultural appropriation to dance movement obscures the change that occurs as dance shifts in and out of new spaces and bodies.\(^\text{11}\) She agrees that cultural appropriation is a useful concept, and it highlights colonial activity and power imbalances in cultural shifts. However, in many cases, Desmond suggests the concept of hybridity or cultural exchange is more useful, as these terms stress the change in meaning that occurs as dance forms are taken on by new bodies in different geographic and cultural spaces. Hybridity and exchange also allow for multiple and

\(^{10}\) Matthes, “Cultural Appropriation Without Cultural Essentialism?,” 355.

contradictory power relationships, instead of a simplistic presentation of oppressed/oppressor, often focused primarily on one or two categories of analysis (often race and gender).

**Hybridity and Cultural Exchange**

Postmodern and poststructuralist concepts of hybridity and transnational cultural exchange are more useful in an exploration of the popularization of belly dance as performance and recreation in Canada. These frameworks align more with Abu-Lughod and Appadurai’s understanding of culture as being in motion and porous. Homi K. Bhabha’s seminal postcolonial work on hybridity also challenges the simplistic polarization of cultures and suggests interaction between specifically colonial and colonized cultures is not so easily categorized.\(^\text{12}\) He argues hybridization and mixing of cultural expression results from colonial projects, and that this process stems from agency on all levels.\(^\text{13}\) Colonized peoples were able to hybridize cultural elements as an act of resistance to anxious imperial power, and were not simply engaging in assimilation or “being colonized.”\(^\text{14}\) Bhabha’s theoretical work allows for historical narratives which grant agency to all actors. It makes space for the emergence of a variety of power imbalances and for complex cultural identities (national, ethnic, religious, gendered, economic) to be at play.

**Transnationalism**

Transnational movement refers to the circulation of, ideas, and individuals across national borders. It does not describe only linear movement from one nation-state to another, but instead refers to multidirectional circulations, where ideas and individuals shift back and forth and in and


\(^{13}\) Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 5, 10.

out of many different nations. It describes the transgression of borders by individuals and ideas. Through this transnational circulation ideas and cultural productions are exchanged and continuously recontextualized and newcomers to Canada from the Middle East, the U.S., and Europe worked to create new hybridizations and meanings for this form as they presented it in Canadian contexts.

**Acculturation**

Another useful way of understanding changes to belly dance presentation in Canada is through the concept of acculturation. Originally used in the context of anthropological research, acculturation describes the process in which groups and individuals from differing cultural backgrounds meet, and the subsequent changes in behaviour or patterns of culture that emerge in both groups because of this sustained contact.\(^\text{15}\) Acculturation processes are multidirectional, and change of varying degrees is experienced by all parties involved in prolonged intercultural contact. The process of acculturation is also multidimensional, as a newcomer can take on elements of his/her new host culture, without losing his/her original cultural fluency and context.\(^\text{16}\) Assimilation, sometimes used inappropriately as a synonym for acculturation, focuses on single-direction influence over an individual and does not recognize or stress the importance of reciprocal influence and change in places of cultural interaction and meeting. Even the most linear assimilationist experience, at times, has space for resistance and negotiation as an individual navigates entry into a new cultural context.

**Embodiment**

Culture changes, moves, and fuses through the actions of individuals. Each dancer,


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 44.
musician, nightclub owner, or instructor in this dissertation embodied and experienced these appropriations, exchanges, and hybridizations. The body and the lived experiences of dancers have become integral to dance studies. Edward Warburton highlights the centrality of phenomenological approaches to dance studies. He argues that the body is the medium through which humans experience the world and that its movements and modes of perception allow for the construction of meaning. He also highlights the growing importance of cognitive science on the concept of embodiment, which has suggested that the movement of the body can affect the shape of the mind. He suggests that embodiment may be better termed “dance enaction” so that both the phenomenological and cognitive science of dance movement can be more accurately studied. As this study is not addressing cognitive science, and instead engages with dancer’s perceptions and experiences, the use of the term embodiment is appropriate. The embodied experiences of dancers and a variety of other individuals in this study are treated as meaningful historical data, as this study focuses on individual oral histories relating to belly dance in Toronto and its surrounding area. The way in which interviewees perceived their experiences has been considered valid and usable evidence. Each individual’s unique embodied experience of dance and culture has enriched this work.

**Orientalism**

Much of the interdisciplinary academic discussion of belly dance that has emerged since the 1970s has examined belly dance through the theoretical lens of Orientalism. Its original

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19 Ibid., 76.
theoretical meaning was delineated most famously by scholar Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Said argued that Orientalism emerged as a historically pervasive system of Western knowledge about the Orient, in which stereotypes about the East were used to justify Western colonial domination in that region. Orientalists (Westerners who studied the East and its languages) during the eighteenth and nineteenth century used their field to construct a conceptual dichotomy between the West and the East in order to facilitate European epistemological and political control of that region. Since Said’s publication of this work, there have been numerous criticisms of his theoretical concept, and those engaging in studies related to the Middle East and its history have offered modified versions of the concept to suit specific historical analyses. Many were concerned about his use of literary jargon, his lack of care with nuance, and his neglect of historical context in his supporting arguments. Malcolm H. Kerr and Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azm point out that *Orientalism* offers a flat, unfair caricature of all Western scholarship by suggesting all Western studies of the Orient have been involved in stereotyping the East in support of its political domination. Many scholars also indicate Said's theory reinforces a dichotomy between “East” and “West” that is based on generalization and stereotype— the very things Said was trying to overcome. Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azm critiques Said for presenting Orientalism as a timeless, monolithic concept that pervades an essentialized and timeless Western cultural essence. Said’s *Orientalism* also assumes a continuing and unchallenged Western political dominance over the East that remained monolithic, just as it assumed a lack of Eastern agency. Despite the lack of nuance in the theory’s original articulation, Said’s central

22 Ibid., 194.
23 Ibid., 195.
concept that knowledge produced in the West about the “East” is often steeped in stereotype has proven to be very useful. Said’s later publication of *Culture and Imperialism* dealt with some of these criticisms.25

This dissertation engaged with a modified version of Said's concept of Orientalism, which stresses the historical agency of all actors and the Canadian context of this research. The Orientalist perspectives found in Canada during the twentieth century of an imagined exotic, feminine, sensual East have been used not to facilitate colonial control over areas of the Middle East and North Africa, but instead were used to justify racial discrimination within Canada itself. Systematic and casual discrimination against peoples from North Africa and the Middle East has been perpetuated by unfair ethnic stereotyping in popular entertainment in Canada. Discrimination perpetrated by the Canadian government, Canada’s legal systems and policies, and its individual citizens has often been justified through the use of stereotype.26

Beginning in the post-WWII era, the nature of Canadian Orientalism began shifting, as there were increasingly vocal and powerful calls to disband racially discriminatory government policies. The nature of Canadian Orientalism began to shift after movements challenging racism in Canada began to take hold, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.27 Although immigration and legal structures in Canada increasingly had discriminatory elements removed, stereotype and systemic discrimination in daily life for many Canadians of colour endured.28 Even when multiculturalism became official Canadian policy in 1971, and when both multiculturalism and equity for all peoples regardless of race or ethnicity were eventually enshrined in the Canadian

constitution just over a decade later in 1982, white dominance in Canadian identity persisted. While the dichotomy of East vs. West faced a challenge (as all ethnic identities were declared equal in expression of Canadian identity), it was not overcome. In effect, multiculturalism positioned English and, to an extent within certain regions, French whiteness, as real “Canadianness” that was “natural” and “invisible.”

**Historiography and Literature Review**

The literature on belly dance's transnational history indicates that since the late nineteenth-century, Westerners have consistently conceptualized belly dance through the lens of Western imperialism. Subsequently, Western conceptualizations of belly dance have typically perpetuated Arab stereotypes in American popular culture. In *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*, Stavros Stavrou Karayanni makes use of colonial travel narratives, Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, writings on Greek dance, and his own experiences to argue that belly dance has consistently been imagined by Westerners through the lens of Orientalism. European travellers like Gustave Flaubert who sought out Egyptian dancers during the nineteenth century did so, he suggests, from a place of economic privilege and colonial power. Eurocentric writers dominated narratives on belly dance in the West, thus entrenching it as the dance form of the exotic, sexual, and "other." Middle Eastern dance forms

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29 Mackey, *The House of Difference*.
30 Karayanni, *Dancing Fears and Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance*, 34–50.
were enmeshed into Orientalists’ narratives because of the reality of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Western colonial presence and power in the Middle East.

Donna Carlton echoes Karayanni when she argues for Orientalism’s overshadowing of American introductions to belly dance in her work, *Looking for Little Egypt*. As Carlton seeks the origins of the dancer Little Egypt, she explores how in the U.S., dances performed by women from North Africa and the Middle East at the Chicago World's Fair were often presented as exotic and other. Her detailed examination of Middle Eastern dance forms at the Chicago World’s Fair Midway Plaisance highlights popular attitudes of the time about the dance form as dangerous and exotic.

Barbara Sellers-Young argues that belly dance performances and meanings changed, in large part because of Orientalism, as it resurfaced in America after the Second World War. In “Raks El Sharki: Transculturation of a Folk Form she explores how *raqs sharqi* was appropriated and changed by Americans and newcomers as it entered American contexts. The dance form was thus presented in ways that did not reflect the manners in which the dance style was performed in its origin cultures. She argues that usually, new dance forms arrived in America with immigrants, but belly dance in America did not grow as a direct result of only immigration, because American performers so quickly and intensely appropriated the form. Belly dance shifted into American classrooms, *Reader’s Digest*, and the YMCA, as well as into Arab, Greek, and Turkish American nightclubs. American women quickly became the primary teachers of the form during this 1970s as its popularity boomed in America. New American "modes of presentation" focused on everything from eroticism to childbirth: elements that were not present in the Near Eastern

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performance of this dance form previously. Her work indicates how belly dance’s American popularity was in part because of its newly assigned, Orientalist American meanings.

Some scholars have gone beyond examining how belly dance was presented and understood in the West through the lens of Orientalism to argue that Westerners’ participation in the form can also perpetuate stereotype and imperial/neocolonial activity. American military activity in the Middle East during the twentieth and twenty-first century is central in Amira Jarmakani’s exposition on how American women’s practice of belly dance perpetuates Orientalism and Arab stereotype in her chapter, "They Hate Our Freedom, But We Love Their Belly Dance: The Spectacle of the Shimmy in Contemporary U.S Culture." She argues that as American women pursue their own freedom in Middle Eastern belly dance, they ignore their complicity in the American invasion and occupation of areas of the Middle East during the so-called War on Terror declared by George W. Bush in 2001. They also ignore their complicity in displaying dominance over areas of the Middle East by appropriating Middle Eastern dance forms for their own use. She posits that belly dance has been central in Orientalist displays of colonial power in the West since the nineteenth century and that in the U.S., displays of belly dance have been popular in part because of American political and military involvement in the Middle East. While not a discussion of belly dance, Melani McAlister in Epic Encounters: Culture, Media & U.S Interests in the Middle East since 1945 makes a similar argument, suggesting that in the U.S. cultural products focused on the Middle East, especially films, for instance The Ten Commandments (1956), helped make the region an acceptable area for the

34 Ibid., 131–32.
exercise of American power. As media allowed Americans to construct identities intertwined with the Middle East (she focuses, for example, on religious identity in connection to Israel/Palestine as the Holy Land), it created interest, even support for American political and military involvement in the region.\textsuperscript{35} When Americans intertwine identity with the Middle East through media, it creates space for the justification of American activity in these regions.

Jarmakani argues further in \textit{Imagining Arab Womanhood} that modern belly dance imagery which parodies Arab womanhood, as it developed in the West, or amongst Western audiences, is a direct product of Western colonial history and U.S neo-colonialism in the Middle East. She explores how Arab Americans are consistently represented in American advertising and popular culture as either as niqab-wearing helpless women or licentious, sexy belly dancers.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, American entertainment in the form of belly dance reinforces the stereotypical belief that this is what Arab women truly are. She suggests costuming changes in American belly dance were a part of the continual sexual objectification of imagined Arab women’s bodies, with the shift from more covered earlier costuming to sheer skirts and bare midriffs by the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{37} Her work is activist and combats these Orientalist stereotypes that have underpinned American belly dance’s development.

Similarly, Sunaina Maira's "Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire” argues belly dance in the U.S. from 2001 onward has been unavoidably racist and responsible for ongoing negative stereotypes about Arab women. She bases her description of belly dancing’s growing resonance with white American women on the relationship with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Melani McAlister, \textit{Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Amira Jarmakani, \textit{Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 83–84.
\end{itemize}
American neo-colonial activity in the Middle East, arguing that belly dancing in the U.S. has been a form of Arab-face in which white American women dancers "detach Orientalised femininity from the bodies of Arab women themselves so that it becomes a form of racial masquerade, complete with Arabic names." Maira makes a strong case for a classical Orientalist power relationship in the American belly dance scene post-2001, in which white belly dancers discuss the "rescue" of belly dance as an art and the "rescue" of Arab and Muslim women, while the U.S. participates in neo-colonial military and political intervention in the Middle East. In this process of military domination and racial masquerade, Arab and Arab-American women are continuously stereotyped and othered within their own country.

Donna Carlton, Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, Amira Jarmakani, and Sunaina Maira argue that belly dance was transplanted into an American context already saturated with Orientalist stereotypes. While Carlton and Sellers-Young examine belly dance and stereotypes as it was presented in America, Stavrou Karaanni examines how Westerners conceptualized belly dance after experiencing it in the Middle East. Amira Jarmakani and Sunaina Maira are activist in their analysis of belly dance in late twentieth-century and twenty-first century America, suggesting belly dance activity there is part of a pernicious style of Orientalism which perpetuates American neo-colonial interference in the Middle East. While the work of Carlton, Sellers-Young, and Karayanni explore the history of these Orientalist contextualizations of belly dance, Maira and Jarmakani’s later work is more activist in its tone. All works, though, suggest belly dance performances often reinforced already existing stereotypes about men and women from the Middle East.

Speaking Back to Orientalism

While all scholars engaging with belly dance's history in America agree that Orientalist stereotypes have impacted American contextualization of the dance form, recent work has also highlighted cases in which belly dance has been used to "speak back to" dominant Orientalist stereotypes at different points in the twentieth century. Other scholars have sought to complicate the dominant narrative of "white women appropriated belly dance" by exploring cultural exchange and more complex power relationships in belly dance’s popularization in North America. Scholars have also sought to complicate the relationship of Orientalism to belly dance’s development in America by examining histories of self-exoticism in dance presentations amongst Arab and Middle Eastern immigrants, or their use of belly dance as a place to challenge Orientalist stereotypes.

For example, according to Lynette Harper's work, Arab women in British Columbia have been using belly dance as a site to challenge stereotypes about Arabness in Canada. In "Performing Identities/Diasporic Encounters," Harper argues, based on a series of interviews with Arab Canadian belly dance artists from the early twenty-first century, that "Orientalist expectations" and the domination of the belly dance community by white, middle-class dancers, obscures the role of Arab women in the dance form globally. In this context, she asserts that while the performance of belly dance can distort perceptions of Arab women, it also can be a site for Arab women to participate in challenging stereotypes about Arab womanhood in Canada.39 In the chapter, various dancers in Vancouver explain what belly dance has meant to them as Middle Eastern women. One woman argues her performance of belly dance in Canada allows her to

subvert stereotypes because she feels and appears powerful while dancing on her own terms. As she chooses when and who she will perform for, she finds a sense of control and strength in performance.\(^{40}\) Another participant suggests belly dance can help subvert popular racism against Arabs in Canada. She argues that when belly dancers present the best dance possible, non-Arab audiences enjoy it, and perhaps this enjoyment of Arabic culture will help them realize the conflicts in the Middle East are not because “the people are bad.”\(^ {41}\) Harper's emic analysis is sympathetic, yet critical, of dancer's relationships to Orientalism in the current Canadian belly dance scene. She and other dancers who share varying forms of Arab identity have used their participation in belly dance to speak back to the white domination of the dance form, and to shape their own identities despite common belly dancer stereotypes.

While Sunaina Maira asserts the taking-on of Arabic stage names by American belly dancers is a form of Orientalist Arab-face, Andrea Deagon contends that these stage names also stem from experiences of meaningful cultural sharing and exchange. Andrea Deagon argues in “‘The Beautiful, The Exotic…’ Emic and Etic in The Stage Names of Belly Dancers,” that the taking of Arabic performance names by American dancers is a result of the "variability of the Western subject in the dynamic of Orientalism."\(^ {42}\) She suggests that etically, taking Arabic names is a "use" of the Orient, and by using the Orient, the dancer creates an Eastern persona which allows for actions that would otherwise be transgressive for a Western woman. But, she suggests, emically, since the 1950s, a white dancer taking on an Arabic or Middle Eastern stage name has been a dancer's rite of passage. The process of achieving a stage name symbolic of her individual

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 53.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 57.
\(^{42}\) Andrea Deagon, “‘The Beautiful, The Exotic…’ Emic and Etic in The Stage Names of Belly Dancers” (Continuing Dance Culture Dialogues: Southwest Borders and Beyond, Tempe, Arizona: Congress on Research in Dance, 2006).
relationship with the Middle East: both real and imagined. Deagon relates how often American dancers were given Arabic stage names by a member (or members) of the Arab community, and how this gift of a name symbolized acceptance and support. Deagon's work complicates the argument that American belly dance, at its heart, is Arab face as Maira describes it, or as only exploitive use of Orientalist tropes. Deagon asserts belly dance has brought together people from all over the globe and has, in certain cases, been a site for the building of intercultural friendships.

Lori Anne Salem argues in her chapter “Far-Off and Fascinating Things: Wadeeha Atiyeh and Images of Arabs in the American Popular Theatre, 1930-1950” in Michael Suleiman’s *Arabs in America* that Arab-American performer Wadeeha Atiyeh’s career challenges the typical Orientalist-analysis of Arab performance in North America. She argues that Arab Americans presented themselves, or have been presented by Americans in a variety of ways, and these have not only been as negative or sexually deviant. She suggests that even when they have been presented this way, audiences reactions have not always been to simply internalize this representation. Salem concludes further that while shows may have reflected or contributed to racism, theatrical presentations resulted in no demonstrable causal relationship with American foreign policy, unlike what has been suggested by Maira and Jarmakani.

Salem’s work presents a sympathetic analysis of the life and work of Atiyeh in a call for a more nuanced consideration of the impact of stereotype. Salem concludes that Atiyeh’s self-exoticizing use of what is typically classified as Orientalist is not necessarily problematic. She

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43 Ibid.
explores how her warm, rosy, stereotypical presentation of her “timeless” and community-focused Arab heritage was beloved by white middle class women and Arab audiences alike in resistance to individualistic Western modernity.

Anne Rasmussen, Barbara Sellers-Young, and Anthony Shay have also further complicated the narrative of belly dance’s post-Second World War popularization in the U.S. by exploring the role of acculturation and self-exoticism in its stereotypical presentation. Anne Rasmussen argues that many immigrants from the Middle East utilized Orientalist stereotypes in their American restaurants and clubs (including harem imagery and a belly dancer draped in veils) in an attempt to connect with Americans. In her chapter “An Evening in the Orient,” in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy*, she argues that musicians of Middle Eastern heritage adopted the prevalent Orientalist images of their culture in America to try and achieve success in the U.S. market. They found that presenting themselves as exotic sold well to American audiences in their clubs and restaurants.  By participating in self-exoticising representations, new immigrants from the Middle East, Greece, and North Africa tried to make their dance, music and food accessible to American audiences.

Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young also assert that artists from the Middle East have collaborated with Western artists in belly dance to create new cross-cultural aesthetics that sometimes hinge on stereotype. Shay and Sellers-Young indicate there are many instances in which dance artists from the Middle East make use of Orientalist imagery in Western contexts. By using these Western themes, they can come to embody stereotypical presentations of culture and identify with them.

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46 Shay and Sellers-Young, “Belly Dance,” 18–19.
Lynette Harper, Andrea Deagon, Anne Rasmussen, Barbara Sellers-Young, and Anthony Shay all offer studies that complicate Orientalism through specific historical, anthropological, and sociological contextualization. While Orientalism has been a dominant force in North American understandings of belly dance, over the twentieth century there has been evidence of resistance to it. Deagon and Harper argue that dancer experiences can contest Orientalism, while Shay, Sellers-Young, and Rasmussen explore how stereotype was utilized by certain immigrants from the Middle East to construct and present identity.

**Belly Dance and Feminism**

Scholars have also explored how and why belly dance was incorporated into feminist discourses during the 1960s and 1970s as it became popularized in North America. The broadly established narrative is that many Western women began to engage in belly dance as a feminist activity in an attempt to overcome patriarchy and the objectification of women during the 1970s. The goal was to reclaim an ancient and pure feminine dance form (often connected with concepts of a primal feminine or goddess) that had been corrupted by patriarchal exploitation of female bodies. This feminist and feminist-spiritual appropriation of belly dance as a tool of feminist activism has also been presented in the literature as thoroughly Orientalist. Donnalee Dox, for example, argues in “Dancing around Orientalism,” that Western belly dancers in the 1970s engaged in Orientalist discourses on belly dance's inherent and ancient femininity in order to challenge Western patriarchy, at the cost of exoticizing Middle Eastern cultures. While the traditional male, white colonial gaze saw the East as a place of feminine oppression and

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47 Caitlin E McDonald and Barbara Sellers-Young, *Belly Dance around the World: New Communities, Performance and Identity*, 2013, 34, 76, 162.
backwardness, white belly dancers imagined it as a source of ancient wisdom and an area for self-expression.

Virginia Keft-Kennedy reveals in her work that belly dance’s utilization within feminist discourse was not uniform, and could not escape the capitalist and patriarchal context of belly dance’s rapid popularization in the U.S. during the 1970s. In her chapter entitled “1970s Belly Dance and the ‘How-To’ Phenomenon: Feminism, Fitness, and Orientalism,” she argues that belly dance was commodified to be sold as both fitness and feminism in America in the 1970s. Thus, authors of popular belly dance how-to manuals called for belly dancers to embrace Orientalist Eastern femininity and become “passive sexual commodities,” fit and attractive for men, while at the same time advocating for women’s liberation. The feminine power and strength of belly dance was portrayed stereotypically, with (academically unfounded) appeals to belly dance’s ancient linkage to ancient and universal goddess worship. Keft-Kennedy’s argument makes use of wonderful primary source material in the form of a variety of how-to belly dance publications from the 1970s. She deftly weaves together the importance of Orientalism, eco-feminism, feminist spirituality, the commodification of dance, and dominant patriarchal objectification of women in the period to explain the popularity of belly dance how-to guides.

Amira Jarmakani in "Belly Dancing for Liberation: A critical Interpretation of Reclamation Rhetoric in the American Belly Dance Community" in Arabs in the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora, also suggests many American belly dancers during the 1970s wanted to perform “authentic” belly dance to connect with what they perceived

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50 Ibid., 70.
as its essential, timeless, even spiritual femininity. She also explores how American dancers sought to reclaim the ‘real’ belly dance that existed before patriarchy and its Middle Eastern historical context in order to align it with a universal divine feminine. The clear majority of scholarship does not present belly dance as inherently feminine and instead explores how women in North America during the 1970s constructed meanings for belly dance within ideas of femininity and feminism.

Jarmakani, Sellers-Young, McDonald, Dox, Moe, and Keft-Kennedy all established that during the 1970s, and up until the present, belly dance has been imagined, constructed, and performed as feminine within Western feminist movements because of Orientalist perceptions of the dance form. While all agree that gender is constructed and performed, the ways in which they explore Orientalism's impact on this gender performance differs. Dox argues white women during the 1970s successfully made Orientalism work for them to challenge Western patriarchy by presenting belly dance as inherently feminine and feminist. Jarmakani and Keft-Kennedy both suggest the presentation of belly dance as a universally ancient and feminine tool of feminist empowerment came at the cost of stereotyping the Middle East. Keft-Kennedy also concludes that this feminist use of belly dance was often contradictory, as how-to literature encouraged women to dance free from patriarchal control, while at the same time reinforcing heteronormative standards for women’s relationships and physical bodies. This complexity and nuance in her work shows how these feminist-Orientalist and spiritual narratives popularized belly dance as a form of recreation in Toronto.

Belly dance’s feminist and feminist-spiritual alignment has resulted in many American women forging identities in relationship to belly dance. While Amira Jarmakani and Sunaina Maira suggest this process can often be racist and appropriative, others argue this identity
formation is a broader American cultural process which seeks to embrace the exotic and the different. In "Belly Dancing for Liberation" Jarmakani argues that in the 1970s American belly dancers' interests in authenticity were fuelled by a desire to add "ethnic spice" to their lives. White belly dancers were consuming otherness to try and liven up dominant white culture. They searched for authenticity to consume it. Furthermore, she argues their search for belly dance authenticity was superficial, as it was measured by white misconceptions about Middle Eastern culture. By trying to seek out new ethnic, authentic, liberating identities, they were perpetuating Orientalism and even racism in America through belly dance.

Anthony Shay in Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms echoes Jarmakani's assertion that American women during the 1970s began seeking out "authentic" belly dance to try and enliven their identities, but he does not implicate American women in Orientalism so harshly. Shay argues belly dancers were a part of a larger trend in American culture in which many women were seeking new exotic identities through dance in the period between 1950 and 1980. When belly dance flourished, so did Tango, Balkan dances, and a variety of other "ethnic" dance forms. He argues that American women were in search of ethnic roots during this period, which led them to take on the identities of others or to construct new identities through dance. So, belly dancers have constructed new exotic identities through their taking on of a Middle Eastern dance form because of a uniquely American need to establish ethnic roots, or an ethnic identity/connection, in a nation of immigrants. This pattern, however, has also been evident in Canada.

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51 Shay, Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms, 7.
Donnalee Dox in “Spirit from the Body: Belly Dance as a Spiritual Practice,” examines how spiritual identity, or spiritual practice, has been discovered by many American women who participated in belly dance, from the 1970s until the present. In American contexts, belly dance has become an effective mind-body practice focused on the female body for many Western dancers. She argues women in the West have developed symbol and theory in line with their bodily experiences of belly dance, and that they have constructed belly dance as spiritual through assigning myth, image, symbol, and history to the movements. Goddess, priestess, birth, and meditation dancing, she explains, are all examples of this relocation of belly dance by many Western women. While this can be primitivist, and Orientalist, she states, it has intense real meaning for those who practice belly dance as spirituality.

In “Belly Dance: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism and U.S. Empire,” Sunaina Maira points out this American style of spirituality and identity formation through belly dance perpetuates images of the Middle East as backward and primitive and argues these attitudes are the result of a form of Orientalism that has been aligned with imperialist feminism. This is a form of feminism in which white women are in control, and images of Arab women are used to meet the needs of white dancers.

American belly dancers since the 1960s have been engaged in identity formation through belly dance, but scholars disagree over the implications of this. Is it a racist consumption of the other, as Jarmakani and Maira suggest, or a part of a larger American trend that seeks to engage with a variety of cultures, as Shay articulates? Perhaps it has been all of these things at the same

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53 Ibid., 304.
time. Within the context of an American trend in which women sought ethnic roots, or "spice" through dance, women sometimes consumed, and sometimes meaningfully interacted with men and women from the Middle East and North Africa.

Conclusion

Many scholars have argued that belly dance performance in America over the twentieth-century has served to perpetuate stereotypes about Arab and Middle Eastern women, while others suggest belly dance has also been used to respond to Orientalism. Narratives on belly dance history in America also argue that beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s American feminists (often white) began appropriating belly dance into narratives advocating for universal female liberation.

The literature's focus has consistently been on Orientalist stereotype as perpetuated by belly dance: there appears to be a scholarly consensus which suggests that when belly dance was transferred into American contexts, it took on Orientalist meanings. There is less consensus over what exactly Orientalism means, and over who has been primarily responsible for this contextualization. Many studies simply reference Edward Said and move on, while others engage meaningfully with some of the critiques of his work, and position their own definitions for the term within specific historical contexts (Jarmakani and Keft-Kennedy, for example). While scholars like Maira and Jarmakani explore belly dance in relationship to white dancers’ racism, the majority of work has attempted to balance dancer intentions and experience with the broader political impact of their performances in American contexts. Little historical work has been done to engage with how and why belly dance became popular as a form of entertainment in Canada, and the important role Canadian policies and histories of immigration and multiculturalism have had on this popularization. Describing the social and political context that allowed for belly
dance’s popularization in Toronto will historically contextualize the operation of Orientalism in twentieth-century Canada. While Orientalist stereotypes played an important role in belly dance’s North American popularization, many men and women also contested stereotypes and built meaningful intercultural relationships and hybridized expressions of art through participation in belly dance, as Lynette Harper, Andrea Deagon, Anne Rasmussen, Barbara Sellers-Young, and Anthony Shay have indicated occurred in other contexts.

**Methodologies**

**Microhistory**

This study will engage with the methodology of microhistory, in addition to ethnographic and sociological methods and theories. This study focuses on actions and agency of a small number of individuals, within the micro-terrain of one city and its surrounding area. It provides the opportunity to "see a world in a grain of sand." Toronto's belly dance boom in the 1960s and 1970s sheds light on Ontario's wider experience with belly dance. This microhistorical look at how belly dance became popularized within a Canadian city will also be useful for future comparisons with other transnational histories of this dance form. Documentary records and oral histories collected from a variety of dancers and musicians have helped this dissertation capture the interactions that shaped belly dance’s popularity in Toronto. The dissertation also traces certain dance “lineages,” and pinpoints some of Toronto’s earliest belly dance performers and schools. The very narrow geographic focus point allows for a nuanced and rich treatment of evidence.

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Narrative

Part of the purpose of this dissertation is to craft a narrative that presents how and why belly dance became so popular in nightclubs, and in schools, books, and classes as a form of recreation in Toronto during the 1960s and 1970s. This dissertation engages in "narrative" and uses story to shape history. It draws on the conceptual framework of David Carr, who argues that narratives are an important way in which humans fashion order out of their lives and memories. As narrative is a part of human existence, and how humans deal with time, it emerged in the oral interviews conducted for this study. Utilizing narrative to understand how and why belly dance became popular in Toronto is not an imposition on a non-narrative world, and does not conceal reality, as Hayden White suggests. This is not a claim to objectivity, or to a single "true" narrative of belly dance’s popularization in Toronto. On the contrary, the stories within this dissertation comprise only one of many possible meaningful historical narratives. This dissertation’s narrative, then, is a product not only of my own worldview, and my choice in theory and evidence, but also a result of my cultural context and how I have been socialized to conceive “history.”

Oral History

The oral interviews conducted allowed access to narratives about belly dance’s history in Ontario that would otherwise be inaccessible. While newspaper articles made belly dance's existence clear, the use of stage names for performers and the absence of dancers’ control over their representation in these articles provided a challenge. Lynn Abrams points out that oral history is especially useful for engaging with hidden histories, or histories of groups which have

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been traditionally overlooked by academia.\textsuperscript{57} The belly dance scene in Toronto is accessible mainly through oral history. Interviews revealed personal opinions and narratives that would otherwise be lost and completely inaccessible.\textsuperscript{58} The personal and professional connections of those interviewed in this dissertation helped shaped the focus and search for archival references to belly dance. This exercise in oral history reclaims the voices of dancers and teachers of this form and allows them to narrate elements of their own experience of this dance's development in the Torontonian context.

**Snowball Methodology**

Snowball sampling methodology was used to reach into the oral and written history of belly dance performance in the Toronto area. Initial dance contacts I had (through my own work as a dancer) in turn, placed me in contact with wider dance networks. I also tried to contact individuals mentioned by name in archival sources. These initial contacts not only granted access to their knowledge of the past in the form of oral history, but also to collections of primary source material (dance ads, magazines, books, pamphlets, etc. all held privately).

The snowball sampling method was most appropriate for engaging with the oral historical record of belly dance because it was the method that allowed me to best locate and gain rapport with individual dancers. Personal relationships and interactions in combination with archival research provided me with initial contacts who, in turn, put me in contact with additional participants.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} Layson, “Historical Perspectives in the Study of Dance,” 24.
Snowball methodology’s main limitation was the possibility that initial contacts would gain control of the quantity and quality of subsequent participants, as I was primarily reliant on interviewees to widen my contact in the belly dance community. This built a sort of bias into the networks of dancers I was able to connect with in the study. To try and mitigate this, I attempted to contact dancers who were professionally unrelated by locating them through archival research.

I was unable to secure an official interview with anyone who was performing in Toronto during the 1960s. Records in the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* indicate dancers Afet, Sylvia Sands, Marina Gretta, Tara, Amira Nasser, Stella Bella, Lori Lane, Lili Cziesla, and Soroya were all performing belly dance in the city during that period. I was able to speak briefly and unofficially with Tara, and I was also able to speak with some American dancers unofficially who had worked during this period throughout America.

Others from this early period declined to participate in the research, and some have proven to be unreachable. However, informal conversations with American performers who were dancing in both the U.S. and Canada during the 1960s and 1970s (often undertaken spur-of-the-moment at Middle Eastern dance conferences and workshops) have shed much light on this period, and have guided my analysis of the archival evidence used in this project. I was able to access their stories in part through newspaper articles from the 1960s, through the recollections of the dancers who worked in the 1970s.

**The Interviews**

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60 Ibid., 175.
61 Cassandra Shore, Leila Gamal, Sahra C. Kent (Sahra Saeeda), Garnet Kepler, Julie A. Elliot (Shira), and many others have my great thanks for conversations which have shed light on this period in belly dance development in both Canada and the U.S.
The interviews conducted were focused on the interviewee’s relationship to belly dance and were designed to have them narrate their experiences of the dance form from a variety of angles.62 A total of twelve interviews were conducted with men and women who were involved with performing belly dancer or teaching belly dancers in Toronto at any point between 1960 and 1990. Ten dancers and/or dance instructors, one nightclub owner/musician, and one musician/academic were interviewed. Interviews were performed in participant’s homes, or at local coffee shops in Toronto between 2014 and 2015.

One of the ten dancers interviewed began dancing in the 1960s, seven began dancing during the 1970s, and one began during the 1990s. The two musicians interviewed came to Canada from Egypt during the 1970s. During the 1970s, the Globe and Mail and Toronto Star mentions twenty different professional belly dancers by name, either in articles or advertisements. In the Star and the Globe sixteen individual professional belly dancers are named during the 1980s (five of these were also mentioned during the 1970s). Of these total thirty-one dancers named in these papers in this period, I officially interviewed eight.

This dissertation engages with an interesting cross-section of some of the men and women who were professionally involved with belly dance performance and instruction in Toronto during the period between 1950 and 1990. Out of twelve interviewees, three were male, and nine were female. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 51 at the youngest to 80 at the oldest (although two participants declined to disclose their ages). The interviewees had a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Five identified ethnic origins from North Africa and the Middle East (one of these five also identified as Canadian), the other seven indicated ethnic origins in Europe (five of these seven also identified as Canadian or American). Five interviewees were born in the

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Middle East or North Africa, three were born in the United Kingdom, and four were born in North America.
Table 2.0. Ages of interviewees

Table 2.1. Ethnic identities of interviewees
The sample of those involved in the belly dance world of Toronto during the 1970s, the peak of the form's popularity, is thus varied and includes a variety of perspectives. Those of varied ethnic origin, age, and gender have contributed their experiences to this study.

This study is unique in that permission was achieved to make use of the names of the oral history interviewees. The following individuals participated in this research by providing oral history narratives in interviews conducted between 2014 and 2015: Anne Kokot (Aziza), Brenda Bell (Badia Star), Dahlia Obadia, Diana Calenti, Eddy Manneh, George Sawa, Maria Morca, Victoria Lammers (Jamila), Roula Said, Susan Karima (Susan Evans), Wagdi Bechara, and Yasmina Ramzy. I am beyond grateful to all of these interviewees who have supplied the
majority of the evidence underpinning this analysis of the history of belly dance in the Toronto area.

**Interview Questions**

The design of the questions has been modelled to encourage reflection on narratives about belly dance-related experience by interviewees. I entered each interview with a set of general questions, which I have included in the appendices of this dissertation, but for individual interviews, I also crafted specific questions both before and during the interviews to explore elements unique to each individual’s experience. Although I had a set of questions and topics to structure the interviews, I did not always allow these to dictate the conversation. In all interviews, I did my best to allow the interviewee to guide the flow of the conversation. By offering the interviewee the authority to shift topics at times, I achieved a level of shared authority.

**Transcription**

Once the oral interviews were completed, the transcription of interview data was yet another layer of analysis and interpretation of the original interview. Writing down the words, imposing written grammatical conventions, and removing the layer of body language and inflection, shifts their meaning, if only slightly.\(^6\) Again, this part of the research removes authority from the knowledge-holders and places it in the hands of the researcher, who decides how the conversations will be formatted for the page. In the process of transcribing, written grammatical conventions have been imposed only when necessary to prevent confusion.

Furthermore, where possible, in the transcriptions there are indications of pauses, laughter, and other elements of body language that are easily lost in the transcription process.

**Member Check, Validity, and Credibility**

To give participants in this study control over their narratives, and more of an equitable partnership in this analysis, I attempted to make use of member check methodology, which I have drawn on from both the fields of history and anthropology. After transcribing the interview, when possible, I submitted the transcription back to the participant to ask if there was anything that he/she wanted altered, added, or removed. Some participants were pleased with the transcription, and gave me permission to use it as it was, while others opted for editing. I encountered many negative responses to the transcribed interviews, as participants were not used to seeing how messy spoken English looks when transcribed. The editing done by participants to remove grammatical errors, the deletion of certain “filler” (um) or “encourager” words (uh-huh, yeah), did not detract from the validity of the transcripts I finalized. Some transcripts were majorly revised, and sections were removed when interviewees felt uncomfortable with sharing certain pieces of information. Elements deleted from original interviews have not been presented in this dissertation. It is important to note that some participants declined to respond to me after I submitted the transcript to them, for unknown reasons.

This member-check process not only helped achieve factual accuracy (for example, the correct spellings of numerous proper nouns), but it also helped achieve an element of fairness in self-representation for the participants. It also achieves accuracy in the representation of the

65 Ibid., 170.
participant’s voice.\textsuperscript{68} Without this step, the oral history I had collected, is not only more accurate, but it is also more just. Self-censure is evident in these oral interviews as well as in the various written documents used in this dissertation.

This study benefits from the advantage of the participants agreeing to the publication of their real names. Confidentiality has purposefully not been offered in this study for the sake of advancing both the historical record on belly dance and for the sake of respecting shared authority. Although confidentiality may encourage an interviewee to be more transparent, keeping identities secret leaves the information gathered useless when it comes to tracing out historical narrative (which is the purpose of this study).\textsuperscript{69} Obfuscation of oral history data can also easily hide exaggerated or falsified interviews.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, keeping identities confidential denies interviewees recognition for their places in the narrative. It also denies them recognition and respect as shared authorities on this topic.

**Oral History as an Act of Creation**

The reminiscing each interviewee went through during the interviews were acts of creation. The oral history evidence they offered was mediated through both perception and memory. The recorded interviews obtained in this study are not pure recordings of "history."\textsuperscript{71} Jan Vansina points out that even eye witness accounts are mediated by perception and emotional states in both the past and present.\textsuperscript{72} The recollections include a mix of remembering, eyewitness accounts, and hearsay, both "real" and created. Even events interviewees experienced, when remembered, have been filtered through the cloudy lens of memory, and by shifts in perception

\textsuperscript{68} Forbat and Henderson, “Theoretical and Practical Reflections on Sharing Transcripts with Participants,” 1118.
\textsuperscript{69} Leonardo, “Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter,” 5.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 5.
and emotional state over time. Also, interviewees as they remembered, shaped an image of themselves in the present. Interviewees revealed just as much about their own current, and past, historical contexts as they did historical data.

Professional relationships with individual interviewees, or with friends of these interviewees provided a solid base for meaningful conversations. These friendships and acquaintances and my own status as a belly dance student had methodological impacts. Lisa Tillmann-Healy has argued that friendship itself can be a methodology in fieldwork. She suggests that within research, a stance of "hope, caring, justice, even love" can help build research that is morally grounded and truly shared. Although I cannot claim close friendship with all the interviewees involved, I approached my interviews with this same ethic Tillmann-Healy suggests for fieldwork in the social sciences. Respect and humility are two elements I suggest adding to her "Friendship as Method" approach. Recognizing the authority of the interviewees on their respective experiences allows for connection that can, in some ways, undercut problematic of power imbalance in the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

Shared authority in the interview process, where the knowledge holder is given recognition for their contributions to the study, allows for the collaborative creation of oral history. The question of power is central to an ethical, methodological approach to oral history. Thus, a collaborative approach, where the interviewee is recognized as the knowledge holder, where the interviewer is unafraid to "lose control," is where some of the strongest research is possible. If the interviewees desire recognition for their contribution to a piece of research

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73 Ibid., 8.
74 Perks and Thomson, The Oral History Reader, 48.
75 Lisa Tillmann-Healy, “Friendship as Method,” Qualitative Inquiry 9, no. 5 (October 1, 2003): 735.
predicated on their interview, it is essential to give them recognition for their intellectual input. Thus, in this study, interviewees have been listed by name in the acknowledgements, and have been directly quoted throughout the dissertation. This dissertation would not have been possible without the generosity and candour of these participants.

**Positionality and Locating the Researcher**

Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki note that historians making use of oral history are subjective in their research process and analysis. They argue that effective oral history must undertake "bracketed" analysis, where the researcher attempts to stop personal viewpoints from inappropriately influencing interviews and their subsequent analysis. According to Valerie Yow, the researcher can recognize his/her subjectivities, and from this point, bracket them where achievable, to try and work as objectivity as possible. Feminist analysis of oral historical methodology, however, has highlighted that pure objectivity in oral historical research is a dream. However, I suggest this dream of empiricism can be useful in achieving strong research.

While perfect bracketing is unachievable, this self-reflexive analysis that results from attempts to bracket render awareness and recognition of any interview shortcomings and inherent biases. Alan Wong indicates self-reflexivity’s importance in his reflections on oral history experiences as both an interviewer and as an interviewee. He suggests historians can approach shared authority with those interviewed when careful reflection on their own impact on the oral history process is recognized. To be self-reflexive and to offer shared authority and

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transparency regarding my own bias I disclose elements of my identity and ideology in relationship to this subject studied.

While writing this dissertation, I have been a PhD candidate at the University of Guelph. I am Canadian and was raised in Ontario. My grandparents on my father's side were post-Second World War Saxon immigrants from Transylvania, and on my mother's side, my heritage is Scottish. I identify as a white Canadian. Ever since I was small, I have been interested in global travel and culture. I was attracted to the image of the East from a young age. Two of my favourite films were Aladdin (1992) and Road to Morocco (1942). In high school, I loved the idea of belly dance and its music, but never went beyond dancing along to music videos like Akon’s Bananza (2004) and Truth Hurts ft. Rakim’s Addictive (2002). My friends and I (from a variety of ethnic backgrounds) danced our hearts out to this stuff in our bedrooms and sometimes at school dances. Until my mid-twenties, I remained blissfully unaware that almost all my early media exposure to belly dance objectified stereotypically nondescript sexualized “eastern” costuming and movement.

It was not until 2011, during my Master’s degree, that I took my first belly dance class because my doctor informed me I needed to find a healthful hobby. After I began studying at Kitchener’s Haft Vadi Studio in 2011, I quickly came to realize that Aladdin, Addictive, and the other Western media “belly dance” inspirations of my youth were bound up in some deeply problematic and difficult stereotypes. I started to read on the topic voraciously, as I also started taking multiple belly dance classes a week. It was not long before I also started going to workshops and lectures. I began performing first recreationally, and then professionally in 2011. I have since developed as a professional performer, taking professionalization courses at a variety of studios in Toronto, and subsequently dancing at a variety of private events, weddings,
festivals, fundraisers, and restaurants. This shift in my interests and my development of a professional dance life spilled into my academic work. The realization that the history of this dance form in the very area I was living had not been examined was too tempting to pass up. I began the process of switching my PhD focus to the history of belly dance in Ontario in late 2013, after two years of dancing.

I disclose this personal information to highlight my own positionality as a white female raised in and inculcated with deeply stereotypical imagery about femininity and the East that I have only begun to challenge in my own life. Thus, my place in recent moves to decolonize history is fraught. Have I been participating in, or perpetuating the Arab Face Sunaina discusses in her analysis? As far as my professional performance, I have worked to avoid this, and to engage humbly with teachers and audiences. In my own dance and performance, I constantly strive to respect the variety of cultural contexts that have been responsible for belly dance's development. I hope that through my involvement in this dance form, and in writing this dissertation, I can encourage movement away from the exploitative use of racial tropes and stereotypes in belly dance performance globally.

Some scholarship in reaction to racism, prejudice, and the hegemonic Orientalism that has informed belly dance's transplantation into American contexts has stressed the importance of separating the researcher from the researched, and believe a solution lies in only legitimizing the research of those from oppressed positions. This, however, cannot be the only solution. Suggesting that people should only engage in research if they are connected to a specific community is untenable and unsustainable. Production of knowledge should be shared across communities globally, and all researchers, no matter their background, are called upon to approach history with respect, humility, and a critical lens on his/her own assumptions, beliefs,
and goals. Insiders and outsiders, emic and etic positions, build some element of bias into research. All groups, racial, sexual, emic, etic, or otherwise must learn to bracket assumptions and goals in attempts to analyze the past. 81 While objectivity is impossible, trying to pursue it strengthens research. Post-modern perspectives allow for this ability to step away from an essentialist connection of a researcher to his/her race, gender, or other identity elements. Certainly, researchers who have faced marginalization should be given significant support and encouragement to complete their work, but the voices of all other researchers should not be silenced. A researcher, like myself, who is in a position of power and privilege relative to some of her informants is ethically required to be self-critical and hold herself accountable to her representation of this dance form. I hope my description of positionality in this chapter has achieved this.

But, no amount of bracketing or recognizing positionality can diminish how my research was directly affected by elements of identity and, even, my physical body. Issues of perceived power, through markers such as age, weight, gender, class, and ethnicity have impacted how the interviews played out. 82 My role as a white, blonde, cisgender female, normative body mass index dancer has impacted each of the interviews conducted. Perhaps my positionality has been beneficial in some instances, or a hindrance in others. My comfort with "insider" language, basic (limited) Arabic language proficiency, as well as personal and professional connections within the community also impacted the research.

**Embodied Research**

My attempt to embody elements of this research project have also impacted the

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81 Gregory, “The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion.”
positionality of the research. I have studied and engaged with belly dance extensively throughout the tenure of this research. I have had the chance to reflect on my own movement, and its connection to Toronto's dance history, and the development of dancers' unique styles here. I have had the chance to dance with research participants, and in some cases, to take extensive classes from them, in order to bodily experience their choreographies and knowledge. Although the thrust of my argument and analysis does not centre on the physicality of the movements of various belly dance styles in Toronto's history, my chance to closely study the movement, and to bring it into my own kinesthetic experience, serves to deepen my understanding of, and connection to, this topic. Deirdre Sklar’s suggestion in her foundational article “On Dance Ethnography” indicates that dance is a form of cultural knowledge. Thus, by participating in it I am acting as a participant observer, and taking on knowledge that is emotional and interconnected to the beliefs, values, and feelings that shaped that form of dance’s development. In my time as a Canadian performer, I have been experiencing and contributing to how belly dance has been shaped to reflect its new North American cultural contexts.

Archival Sources

My own experiences as a dancer and the oral history interviews conducted for this dissertation were essential in helping me locate archival materials on the history of belly dance. Some important materials (both primary and secondary sources) utilized throughout the following chapters were located in dancer-oriented belly dance trade publications and

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84 I have not necessarily sought out historical reconstruction of these dancer’s performances, but instead, have tried to interpret the movements and be inspired by the history within my own body. Ibid., 13.
literature. How-to books, coffee table interest books that discuss the "history" of belly dance, and personal dance narratives were useful as primary sources. Magazines and trade journals geared at both hobbyist and professional dancers were also utilized. Two of the oldest, largest and best known of these trade journals (which are no longer in print) were Habibi and Arabesque magazines. Habibi was published out of Palo Alto California, in newspaper format from 1974-1992, and in a journal or magazine format from 1992-2002, out of Santa Barbara California. Arabesque, founded in 1975 in New York, was published until 1997. Both magazines contained assortments of both academic and popular articles and were directed at dancers who were interested in the practices, cultures, histories, and controversies of Middle Eastern dance forms. Still in print, with a very large readership is The Gilded Serpent, an online trade magazine founded in 1999, which also regularly publishes opinion pieces, how-to information, and historical information (some academic, some not) on belly dance. These published books and articles have helped contextualize this dissertation, and have provided a variety of corroborating evidence for some of the discussion found in the oral history interviews.

Newspaper archives provided evidence for early performances of Middle Eastern dance in Toronto at the turn of the century. To discuss this early period, the dissertation relied heavily on newspaper archives. In the following chapters, newspaper evidence is utilized to corroborate and enrich oral history narratives. The Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail, papers with the largest circulation in Toronto over the twentieth century, were very useful. These papers were

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86 Keft-Kennedy, “1970s Belly Dance and the ‘How-To’ Phenomenon: Feminism, Fitness and Orientalism.”
87 I put history in quotation marks as many of these popular books are not well researched and uncritically rely on Orientalist imagery and stereotype. A key example of this sort of literature, which unfortunately is sometimes cited as a reliable secondary source in academic research, is the work of Wendy Buonaventura. Wendy Buonaventura, Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World (New York: Interlink Pub Group, 2010).
accessible online and were searchable. While the search function certainly assisted research efforts, often the OCR (Optical Character Recognition) technology which allowed for searching of scanned paper documents was unreliable due to inconsistencies in how the words in the images were scanned. Thus, traditional method research methods including reading large sections of papers were also employed to locate relevant material.

These newspaper articles, magazine publications, books, and other ephemera were engaged with critically. Each was not unbiased and inherently reliable descriptions of historical fact. Presentations of belly dancers and belly dance performance were shaped by self-censure, ideology, and even ignorance. Thus, for information obtained in newspaper publications from before 1950, secondary source analysis is used to corroborate evidence. After 1950, where possible, oral history narratives were corroborated with newspaper data and secondary source information. Secondary source analysis and oral history have also helped in wading through sensationalism in newspaper articles, or clear ignorance of Middle Eastern dance forms.

Literature that describes dance, particularly in newspapers, can appear accurate, or authoritative, at first glance, but this is not always necessarily the case. Often journalists engaged with dance forms they had no connection to or background in. This was especially pronounced in journalistic treatments of belly dance. Those viewing the dance and recording the movement were often unfamiliar with the movement patterns and the original cultural contexts that had created the dance form. Orientalist stereotype and ignorance often resulted in skewed description and treatment of belly dance. Dancers were often eroticized or exotified. The Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail consistently published articles on belly dance during the second

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90 Keith C. Barton, “Primary Sources in History: Breaking Through the Myths,” Phi Delta Kappan 86, no. 10 (June 1, 2005): 746.
91 Layson, “Historical Perspectives in the Study of Dance,” 22.
half of the twentieth century that evidenced superficial understandings of belly dance. A particularly problematic example was a piece in *The Star*, where the journalist witnessed a performance of folklore from the Festival of the Nile, associated with Cairo based Samer Theatre of the Folk Arts, starring dancer Mahassen Hilal. The *Star* article’s author was unaware of the role of *shamadan* in Egyptian folkloric dance and mocks it in his description. He also sexualizes this performance of folklore, which is surprising considering Egyptian choreographers had worked very hard to distance folkloric dance performance from both *raqs sharqi* and its associated sexuality. The article describes Hilal’s “quivering derriere” and offers objectifying, trite Orientalist comments including, “there was no need of nudity to turn a man’s thoughts toward images of tented oases.” This article is an example of how dance performances can easily be misunderstood in cross-cultural situations. Newspaper sources, and descriptions of Middle Eastern, North African, and Greek dance forms, thus, were compared, when possible, with oral interview data, or secondary source material.

This dissertation also makes use of a variety of photos, ephemera, and other printed material from the private collections of the participants in this study. Critical awareness of the context, purpose, and background of the primary sources used was achieved through private communications, or through the oral interviews for appropriate historical analysis and use of these materials. Most of the images serve to flesh out descriptions offered in the oral interviews. Ephemera including show descriptions, class handouts, or advertisement flyers for workshops were useful in stimulating participants’ memories in some of the interviews. These pieces of

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92 During the 1950s and 1960s in Egypt, the State’s folkloric dance companies purposefully separated themselves from professional *raqs sharqi* (which was seen as problematically connected to female sexuality). Shay, *Choreographic Politics*, 148–50.


personal history were both instigators in retrieving memory for oral history, and then, useful as corroborating evidence for past events. In some cases, newspaper articles further corroborate certain events, personalities, or recollections as well.
CHAPTER III: *Danse du Ventre’s North American Debut and Orientalist Contextualization in Toronto*

Analysis of postwar belly dance’s popularisation in Toronto requires an examination of earlier North American responses to belly dance. These initial contextualizations had a significant impact on how the form would continue to be presented and understood over the twentieth century. In the late Victorian period, newcomers to North America from the Middle East faced constant stereotype and racial discrimination, while at the same time, their various traditional and social dance forms became elements of popular Western fascination. Performances in Toronto became common features at fairs, circuses, burlesques, variety shows and theatres. In North American showcases of oriental dance, the movements were understood by most Westerners as sexual, transgressive and exotic. Oriental dance performance was very lucrative because of this, and its popularity sparked appropriation in a variety of entertainment contexts. Oriental dance’s late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century popularity and its incorporation into fair, variety show, and burlesque performances helped solidify it as a recognizable dance form within North American and Torontonian popular culture. This reformulating of the exotic was a central factor in the dance form’s popularization. However, even in this early period, there was division over what oriental dance meant, and over what ‘proper’ performance should look like amongst practitioners. Dancers, producers, and audiences participated in discourses that alternately challenged and reified varying Orientalist depictions of the Middle East through belly dance performance. In the end, early performances tended to embed imagery of racialized sexuality or spirituality. These long-lasting stereotypes and new hybridizations that were established at the turn of the century informed many North Americans’ understandings of Middle Eastern dance during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s when it resurfaced in Toronto as popular live entertainment.
Turn of the Century Terminology

Danse du ventre, (literally dance of the stomach) was a French term made famous in English usage thanks to its prevalence at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris as a term for the dances imported to the fair from North Africa and the Middle East for exhibit in ethnographic tableaux.¹ It was a phrase born out of fascination with certain North African and Middle Eastern dances’ torso articulation. As noted in the introduction, this popular term did not reflect the Arabic expressions for many of these dances. The French term danse du ventre was used in English at the end of the nineteenth century to describe all of these dance styles (Arabic, Turkish and Greek) and many others.²

Oriental dance, the direct English translation of the Arabic and Turkish terms raqs sharqi and dans oryantal, was also used popularly in this period to describe dances from the Middle East, North Africa, and/or Greece. Oriental dance and danse du ventre were terms used to describe both regional dances and imagined movement by Westerners that had only a tenuous connection to the dances of the Middle East and North Africa. These terms were often simply shorthand for dance from "over there."

Orientalism, Discrimination and Middle Eastern Immigration to North America

Presentations of danse du ventre in North America were consistently folded into the already established Orientalist concept of a sexual, timeless, and dangerous East that was in essential opposition to an advanced and rational West. In twentieth-century North American media (newspapers, magazines, art, and later, film), Arabs and other Middle Easterners-

¹ Jarmakani, Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S., 200.
² Carlton, Looking for Little Egypt, 40–45.
including “the oriental dancer” were dirty, wily, duplicitous, and sexually overcharged. These common stereotypes were used to popularize the dance and to facilitate systematic and casual discrimination against peoples from North Africa and the Middle East in Canada and the United States.

The first substantial move of Middle Eastern immigrants to the U.S and Canada began at the end of the nineteenth century, and lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century, with the wave ending approximately around the time of the First World War. Before 1899 in the U.S., all Arab, Greek, Armenian, and Turkish newcomers were lumped together as one group and recorded as coming from "Turkey in Asia." Newcomers under this heading identified primarily as Syrian, Lebanese, or Armenian, and not necessarily as Arab. Very few of these newcomers identified as Turkish or Ottoman, although they were coming from areas in the Ottoman empire. In this first major wave of immigration, approximately 86,000 Syrians entered the U.S. between 1899 and 1914. In Canada, there was a similar spike in immigration from this region at this time. Abraham Bounadere is often cited as the first Arabic-speaking immigrant to Canada. He came from the area that is now Lebanon to Montreal in 1882. Many other Lebanese and Syrian

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6 The use of Arab, or Arab American in this period is a bit anachronistic. While English speakers may have used the term Arab to denote certain newcomers from the Middle East, the majority of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants and others from across the Middle East who were not from the Arabian Peninsula did not primarily self-identify as “Arabs” before the Second World War. This way of self-identifying gained traction amongst Arabic speaking peoples in Canada and the U.S. slowly over the twentieth century. Aboud, “Re-Reading Arab World-New World Immigration History,” 658.
7 Most were from the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Empire and the majority were Christian; only a small minority were Muslim. Ahmet Akgündüz, “Migration to and from Turkey, 1783–1960: Types, Numbers and Ethno-Religious Dimensions,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 104–5.
Christians followed in his footsteps by immigrating at the turn of the century. Those who left Syria/Lebanon for Canada came to settle primarily in Quebec, although many also made Ontario home. The first major settlement spot in a metropolitan area was Montreal, but quickly communities were established in Ottawa, Toronto, London, Leamington, Sault Saint Marie and North Bay. By 1911, approximately 7,000 Syrians had immigrated to Canada. In both Canada and the U.S., many ended up working as peddlers, or in building railway lines. Before 1906's Canada Immigration Act, when legislation was implemented to quell fears about unchecked immigration and the potential altering of Canada's primarily Northern-European heritage, many of these immigrants were able to become naturalized Canadians.

Orientalist stereotypes informed white North American unease about Syrian, Lebanese, and Turkish immigration at this time. An American study on immigration from 1909 described Syrian and Armenian immigrants as "generally of a most undesirable class; and while not vicious, their intellectual level is low." White Canadian officials described Syrians and other Ottoman immigrants as carrying "loathsome diseases," and as a general health threat to Canada. This assumption of backwardness and dirtiness surfaced in reference to the performance of oriental dance in the Toronto Exposition of 1905, where a letter to the editor published in the Toronto Star compared oriental dance to a form of disease. Various newspaper publications in

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10 The majority of Syrian/Lebanese immigrants to Canada during this period were Christian (from a variety of denominations), but there were also a small percentage of Muslim immigrants as well. In 1901, Canada was home to approximately 300-400 Muslim immigrants (Turkish and Syrian in origin), and by 1911, the population had grown to between 1,000-1,500. Earl Waugh and Baha Abu-Laban, eds., The Muslim Community in North America (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), 76.
12 Ibid., 83.
13 Ibid.
14 “A Widowed Mother Writes Again of the Exhibition: An Interesting Letter for the Directors to Ponder Over- Prune Not Abolish, the Midway,” The Toronto Daily Star, 1905, 9.
the U.S. would refer to the dance style as primitive, dirty and disgusting at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{15} Negative descriptors of oriental dance mirrored those used of Arabs, Turks, Armenians, Persians, and a variety of other groups from the Middle East at the time. Both the dance form and the people were presented in the media as fundamentally inferior.\textsuperscript{16} Middle Eastern groups were also commonly described by officials as inherent liars and cheats: an unfortunate result of their "Oriental subjugation."\textsuperscript{17} Baha Abu-Laban asserts that the pattern of stereotyping and assuming that people of Arab, Turkish, Syrian, and Persian descent were a homogenous and dangerous group was relatively consistent amongst white North American officials and immigration professionals during this period. The Canadian and American government and legal systems openly discriminated against non-Western European racial and religious "others" in a bid to centralize Western-European power.\textsuperscript{18}

As the early twentieth century wore on, fears concerning increasing non-white immigration were widespread. The Canadian government classified Syrian, Lebanese and Turkish newcomers as "Asiatic" and increasingly excluded them from entering Canada. Anti-Asian sentiment in Canada was rising, especially on the West Coast. Chinese, Japanese, and Indian newcomers were primary targets for violence. In 1907, Deputy Minister of Labour William Lyon McKenzie recommended additional restriction be placed on “Asiatic” and specifically Indian immigration. Acting on his advice, and the sentiments of various anti-Asiatic movements in the country, to discourage Asian immigration to Canada, the Canadian government passed Order-in-Council P.C. 926 on January 8, 1908, stipulating that immigrants must enter

\footnote{15}{Leigh Eric Schmidt, 	extit{Heaven’s Bride: The Unprintable Life of Ida C. Craddock, American Mystic, Scholar, Sexologist, Martyr, and Madwoman} (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 12.}
\footnote{16}{Ibid.}
\footnote{17}{Abu-Laban, 	extit{An Olive Branch on the Family Tree}, 1980, 83.}
\footnote{18}{Backhouse, 	extit{Colour-Coded}, 7–15.}
Canada on a continuous journey from their home nation. That meant they must take a non-stop trip from the nation of their birth or citizenship to Canada. This legislation was used to prevent many Asian newcomers from entering Canada. The additional $200 landing fee levied on immigrants from Asia was also a major barrier to immigration. These discriminatory policies and attitudes slowed Syrian, Lebanese, and other Middle Eastern immigration to Canada to a small trickle after 1908.19

The immediate response by the established Syrian community in Canada to the 1908 legislation was to lobby the government to classify their identity as white, as opposed to Asiatic. Following 1920, when the Levant came under British and French control, certain members of the Syrian community argued further that they should not only be considered white, but also European.20 Ottawa declined requests that Syrians be classified as white, and argued that Syrians, Arabs, Turks, and Persians were just as undesirable as "Hindoos."21 Due to the maintenance of these racist immigration restrictions, by 1921, the number of Syrians in Canada had only increased to 8,000 from the 1911 population of approximately 7,000.22 Between 1910 and 1950, records indicate that only 3,085 Arab immigrants entered Canada.23 After the initial wave of Syrian-Lebanese immigration between the 1880s and 1910s, Arab immigration virtually halted in Canada until the 1950s. The Great Depression and the World Wars also worked to slow immigration, but racialized groups faced specific discrimination. While during this period in the

21 Ibid., 86.
22 Chad Gaffield, Census of Population, 1921 [Canada]: Selected Tables for Census Subdivisions and Census Divisions, 1921.
23 Hayani, “Arabs in Canada: Assimilation or Integration?,” 385; Jenna Hennebry and Zainab Amery, “‘Arab’ Migration to Canada: Far from Monolithic,” in Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians, ed. Bessma Momani and Jenna Hennebry (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 17.
U.S., many Syrians were eventually successful in lobbying for whiteness in order to achieve naturalization, Arab and Syrian immigrants in Canada continued to be considered Asian.\textsuperscript{24}

In America, Syrian groups lobbied for official recognition as white in naturalization hearings beginning in 1909.\textsuperscript{25} Conflict over legal Syrian racial identity in the U.S. came to a head in 1914, when a Syrian immigrant, George Dow, was denied U.S. citizenship because the presiding district judge ruled he was not white. After two appeals, the courts reversed this decision the following year. The final appeal succeeded because Dow was able to use evidence from contemporary anthropology to indicate Syrian "Semitic" character. Despite this precedent, Syrian immigrants to the U.S. continued to face race-based challenges to naturalization. Other Arabic-speaking newcomers faced outright denial of naturalization based on their skin colour or a perceived inability to integrate. Many judges continued to turn down Middle Eastern applications for naturalization based on "scientific" and "common" ideas about race.\textsuperscript{26}

Despite these issues, America’s Arab population grew to approximately 130,000 men and women by the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{27} Through a mix of immigration and natural increase, by the 1940s, approximately 350,000 men and women of Arab descent had made the U.S. home. Greek, Turkish, and Armenian newcomers also migrated to America in growing numbers in this period. Most of these newcomers from the Middle East sought to assimilate rapidly, as discrimination was widespread. Settled Middle Eastern newcomers in the U.S. and Canada faced consistent

\textsuperscript{26} Suleiman, Arabs in America, 7.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 2.
discrimination in daily life. In Birmingham Alabama, for example, during the 1920s, a candidate for local office distributed flyers reading:

They have disqualified the Negro, an American citizen, from voting in the white primary. The Greek and the Syrian should also be disqualified. I DON'T WANT THEIR VOTE. If I can't be elected by white men, I don't want the office.\(^{28}\)

Meanwhile, in Georgia, in 1923, members of the Klu Klux Klan allegedly dynamited a Syrian family's home in Marietta. In 1929, Pennsylvanian Senator David A. Reed publicly described Syrians as "the trash of the Mediterranean."\(^{29}\) Thanks to attitudes like this, many Middle Eastern communities in the U.S. advocated assimilation in an attempt to avoid unfair treatment by their host society. Physical and systemic violence characterized the "welcome" many newcomers received in America. This affected how white producers and fair organizers positioned and advertised early Middle Eastern dance performance. The initial North American introduction to various style of oriental dance was done so in this toxic discriminatory context.

Race, class, gender, and religious based discrimination was not only occurring in North America during this period. In order to understand how danse du ventre was presented within Orientalist stereotype, and sometimes used to support discrimination in North America, it is necessary to understand some of the plurality of meanings the forms had in their Middle Eastern contexts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the Middle East, where forms like raqs sharqi first developed, intersectional identity elements also affected how different styles were presented and understood.

For example, in Egypt, entertainers during the nineteenth century who performed mainly in private, typically all-female settings, were termed awalim (s. almeh). Their most respected


performances were of music and poetry, while the awalim performers often also danced.\textsuperscript{30} Ghawazi, who performed dance in public, and were considered a racialized outsider group, were afforded less respect, and had a lower social status.\textsuperscript{31} Almost all public performers, no matter their race or religion, faced discrimination based on their class status as entertainers. While fantastic success and fame could mitigate this, it did not remove it entirely. Over the nineteenth century, increasingly European presence and pressure in Egypt resulted in a shifting landscape for public performers. As European demands for dancers’ services spiked, many ghawazi performers claimed to be awalim. Westerners also conflated the two groups. Thus, by the 1850s, awalim were often understood as dancer-prostitutes by Europeans.\textsuperscript{32} The term, in Egyptian usage, has come to be a derogatory word used to describe a low-class and sexualized performer.

Over the early twentieth century, the link between oriental dance performance in clubs with prostitution became stronger in Egypt.\textsuperscript{33} Many of these Egyptian dancers, or dancers who circulated through Egypt, were among those who first performed in North America. Oriental dance in North America was consistently presented as racialized sexual display and their performances were consistently racially othered in a way unique to North America, informed by white settlerism and the continent’s history of slavery.\textsuperscript{34} Any translation of Middle Eastern entertainment into North America was influenced by this context, and oriental dance was not the only form of entertainment associated with the Middle East which became popular at the turn of the century. Since the \textit{One Thousand and One Nights} had been translated into French and English in the eighteenth century, these stories became very popular in Western entertainment.

\textsuperscript{30} Shay and Sellers-Young, \textit{Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism & Harem Fantasy}, x.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Karayanni, \textit{Dancing Fears and Desire: Race, Sexuality and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance}, 29.
\textsuperscript{33} van Nieuwkerk, \textit{A Trade Like Any Other}, 47–49.
Lori Anne Salem indicates that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that plays and operas containing Arab and Middle Eastern characters like Cleopatra, Aladdin, and Salome were very popular in theatres, while “Arab” acrobats, dervishes, contortionists, sword-eaters, and giants were popular in circuses, curiosity shows, and variety theatres. She notes that in all of these cases, these performers were typically performed by “Americans costumed as Arabs,” who “had only the most tenuous connections to Arab theatre or culture.”

**Danse du Ventre's Rise to Fame in North America**

The first widely publicized North American debut of oriental dance occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. During this time, while many members of the Canadian and American public considered Middle Eastern immigrants a threat, there was also a mild obsession with Eastern aesthetics and arts in popular culture, which made the dance popular. Some of the earliest recorded instances of public oriental dance performance occurred at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 in a Turkish Coffee House pavilion which was constructed for the event. At end of the nineteenth century, these sorts of Eastern-locales, arts, and dances were in vogue. This love for Eastern aesthetics and fantasy amongst white North Americans allowed oriental dancer Omene to gain notoriety as early as 1889 for her performances of *danse du ventre* on a variety of American stages. While Omene’s performances were popular and well publicized in the U.S., the major pan-North American debut

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37 Burnam, “Bellydance in America,” 63; cited in Monty, 14, 18.
and widespread popularizations of live oriental dance performances occurred at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893. The massive Colombian Exposition in Chicago commemorated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' exploration of America. During its run in the summer and fall of 1893, it drew 27 million attendees.  

In the Midway, the technological marvels of the rest of the fair, which were meant to highlight America's civilization and success, were contrasted with ethnological exhibits which showcased the "less developed” areas of the globe. The organizers at the Chicago World's Fair created anthropological tableaux-vivants, similar to those made of colonized populations at various French expositions and fairs earlier in the century. Both male and female artists performed in the exhibits of Egypt, Algeria, Turkey, and Persia, among many others, in settings presented as timeless and ethnographic.

Many dancers came to North America from the Middle East, at the invitation of Exposition organizers, specifically to showcase dance and culture in these ethnological exhibits. The Midway Plaisance's most popular exhibit portrayed Egypt and was named "The Streets of Cairo." The Streets of Cairo boasted "real natives," a replica of Luxor's famous temple, camel rides, donkey herds, dancers, and musicians. The women who performed at the Egyptian exhibit came from Egypt, and possibly other areas of what was then the Ottoman Empire. They dressed and performed in the style of ghawazi, Egyptian street dancers of the nineteenth-century. Images and descriptions of their costuming and movements reflected contemporary and earlier European traveler accounts of ghawazi dance in Egypt. During the late nineteenth century and

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41 *Ghawazi* dance contained shimmy, hip articulation, and other elements. Often ghawazi would perform in loose group formation and almost always with finger cymbals. It is important to note that the style of ghawazi dancers was
beginning of the twentieth century in Egypt, ghawazi often performed at Saints' Day festivals, weddings, and private events. Between 1800 and 1930, increased prohibitions limited dancing in the streets and markets, which had been normal for ghawazi performers in Egypt. British colonial officials, who had occupied and taken effective control over the Ottoman province of Egypt in 1882, sought to regulate street entertainers and encouraged ghawazi and other dancers in Egypt to perform in theatrical settings, clubs, and music halls. While the British sought to house and control dancers in Egypt, in the imagined Egypt of the World's Fair, street dancers were part of the charm. They were showcased as timeless, a snippet of Egypt that may have dated back to the Pharaohs.

Many contemporary Egyptian intellectuals did not appreciate this form of representation in Western World’s Fairs. Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (1868-1930), a pioneer in Arabic fiction, criticized colonial representations of Egypt at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, a later World’s Fair. The characters in his 1927 publication of Hadith Isa ibn Hisham, which included the section entitled The Second Journey, illustrated negative Egyptian reactions to the showcasing of Egyptian dance/ghawazi performance in this setting, which was originally published at the turn of the century in the Egyptian newspaper Misbah al-Sharq. The protagonist of the novel, Isa, visited the fair's Egyptian quarter and was at first pleased with how well Egypt was represented. However, after he and his friends witnessed the Egyptian dance performance by two women at the theatre, they felt a strong sense of embarrassment. They left the show ashamed and vowed very different from rags sharqi of the same period, specifically cabaret rags sharqi, which was gaining popularity in Egypt at the turn of the century. Shay, Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms, 137; Carlton, Looking for Little Egypt, 40; Edward William Lane, The Manners & Customs of the Modern Egyptians (London: McFarland & Company Inc., 2008), 372–77.

42 van Nieuwkerk, A Trade Like Any Other, 38.
not to return.\footnote{Zeynep Çelik, \textit{Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World’s Fairs} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 49; citing Anouar Louca, \textit{Voyageurs et écrivains égyptiens en France au XIXe siècle} (Paris: Didier, 1970), 232.} Zeynep Çelik, in her analysis of this fictional encounter, suggests the characters’ shame stemmed from disappointment over Egypt's representation as a backward place—as the land of the Arabian nights and dancing girls, and not as a modern society. Muhammad Sharif Salim, another late nineteenth-century Egyptian writer, commented in 1889 that, "encapsulating Egypt in a cafe, [in] stables with animal drives and dancing girls meant deforming it."\footnote{Çelik, \textit{Displaying the Orient}, 48; citing Anouar Louca, \textit{Voyageurs et écrivains égyptiens en France au XIXe siècle}, 106.} These men were disappointed that their culture was misrepresented in these pavilions and villages that completely left out modern Egyptian industry, innovation, and intellectual life.\footnote{Timothy Mitchell, \textit{Colonising Egypt} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).} They resented the presentation of their nation as a place where women were "useful for not much more than bedding or belly dancing."\footnote{Rasheed El-Enany, \textit{Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction} (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 66.} These stereotypical representations fed into European and American narratives about an exotic and backward East and its dances that needed rescuing. These ethnographic exhibits were used to justify paternalistic action to save and civilize or modernize (Westernize) these areas. Dance performances and their interpretations by Western audiences as deviant and sexual served to justify colonial attitudes and actions. This context also influenced Ottoman decisions about how to represent the Empire in their official exhibit and pavilion at the Chicago World’s Fair.\footnote{Gültekin Yıldız, “Ottoman Participation in World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago-1893),” \textit{Türklük Araştırmaları Dergisi} 9 (2001): 150.} Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s official Ottoman pavilion, located outside of the Midway Plaisance, purposefully included no belly dance, and instead highlighted Ottoman technological, commodity, and military innovations.\footnote{Ibid., 151; Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 107, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 790.} Performers in the Plaisance that were
presented in Ottoman settings were generally from minority groups, as public dance in the Empire had a long history of stigmatization. Perin Gurel notes that Ottoman elites positioned themselves as the protectors and controllers of these backward individuals. Ussama Makdisi notes that Ottoman Orientalism during this period designated Arabs and other minority groups in the Empire as in need of guidance and civilizing by Turkish elites. The Ottoman elite’s intent at the Chicago World’s Fair was to distance the Empire from the backwardness that belly dance shows had come to signify in the West, and increasingly, amongst the Ottoman and Egyptian elite. Even in the context of World’s Fairs, which were designed to highlight Western progress against the foil of the othered East, the Ottoman state contributors were able to exercise some degree of control over how their Empire was represented.

Performances in these different pavilions and sections of the fairs were affected by who was negotiating these dance and performance representations. Showcases of culture and dance were often very different depending on who was in control of the representation. For example, while Egyptian dancers who performed in the Streets of Cairo (considered lower class in Egypt, and often from minority groups) may have enjoyed the fame and financial success their

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51 Ottoman elites Orientalized their own “Arab periphery” as a way to resist Western accusations of Ottoman backwardness. Ottoman campaigns to pacify, “civilize” and control Arab populations reflected a belief that the Empire was part of the East, but more civilized than the majority of groups that inhabited it. Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 787, 790.
performance brought and felt supportive of their own representation of Egypt, upper-class

Figure 3.0 This cover image of the May 20th, 1883 issue of the National Police Gazette is subtitled “ Beauties at the World’s Fair: How some of the imported fairies frolicked when President Cleveland wasn’t looking”
Egyptian intellectual elites expressed distaste at their portrayal of Egyptian identity. There was tension within groups over how dance should be used in self-representation in this period, as there would continue to be in North America throughout the twentieth-century.

The above cover page of the May 20th, 1893 issue of *The National Police Gazette*, indicated in Figure 3.0, showcases how Middle Eastern dance was generally portrayed as salacious and backward in America at this time. *The National Police Gazette* was a combination of a men’s interest magazines, a tabloid, and a “girlie” magazine which frequently covered oriental dance and scandal, if only to showcase images of female dancers.52 The real point of its coverage for Middle Eastern dance was showcasing the dancers’ sensationalized costuming and movement. The dancers themselves were often objectified, as in Figure 3.0, where they are referred to as literally “imported.”53

Eastern dance as a concept was immensely popular, and thus Western performers began to imitate it, and fair operators hoped to harness it. Donna Carlton points out that the Moorish Palace at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair was "Oriental in name only," being instead, a conjecture of imagined Eastern elements including a wax harem, complete with women in "bizarre costumes lacking yardage or authenticity."54 The fair's Persian Palace, which had originally employed a company of Persians to demonstrate athletics, carpet weaving, and other Persian skills, was outshone by the addition of a Parisian dance troupe who performed to American popular music in vaguely Eastern costume—while corseted. This is an example of the widespread appropriation of Eastern aesthetics for profit. Many exhibitors, like some of those

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controlling the Persian Palace, sought to pander to the desire for an Orientalist vision for profit. According to Carlton's research, in one instance, a Persian man, Abadallah Edglar, was so frustrated with the Palace's depiction of Persia that he attempted to set it on fire. He was deported. Although the fair's organizers had high ethnographic hopes, the presence of already established American Orientalism dictated presentations of Middle Eastern cultures that reflected American imagination. This representation of the East justified narratives of American superiority while denying Middle Easterners like Abdallah Edglar control over their own representation.

But danse du ventre did not achieve unopposed popularity, as public morality was a major concern for public policy at the turn of the century. Many conservatives railed hard against shifting gender norms. American women's lives were becoming more public, and female sexuality was becoming an important marketing tool in new popular media. Theatre, cinema, and print media were all capitalizing on femininity and sexuality. The cult of domesticity was becoming a thing of the past, as new norms for young girls arose. Gibson Girls, Vamps, and oriental dancers were a few of the many new images women could emulate. At the same time, all manner of social ills were understood by many religious-minded reformers to have roots in this sort of perceived societal immorality. Privately established morality squads popped up across Canada and the U.S., with the goal of guarding public decency. Often funded by wealthy

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55 Ibid., 20–21.
56 Ibid., 23.
58 Ibid.
conservative members of the elite, organizations like the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice effected legal change through lobbying activity.\textsuperscript{59}

Condemnation for oriental dance at the World’s Fair was quick amongst moral reformers of this period; oriental dance and its hybrid affiliates were prime targets for public policing. Progressive-era moral reformers classified \textit{danse du ventre} as a degenerate form of entertainment that needed to be curtailed.\textsuperscript{60} However, this moralistic condemnation solidified oriental dance's enduring popularity in North America. At the Fair, oriental dance’s apparent immorality drew crowds. Sol Bloom, who ended up overseeing the 1893 Columbian Exposition’s Midway Plaisance, actively worked to popularize \textit{danse du ventre}. In his autobiography, he wrote, “When the public learned that the literal translation was “belly dance” they delightedly concluded that it must be salacious and immoral. The crowds poured in. I had a gold mine.”\textsuperscript{61} Despite reformers’ moral condemnation, many North Americans cited performances as charming, enjoyable, and even impressive.\textsuperscript{62} Anecdotally, the popularity of the Midway and the oriental dance scandals financially saved the entire Exposition.\textsuperscript{63} These presentations of oriental dance used markers of racial otherness to safely challenge dominant Victorian moral and sexual norms and made it attractive for many white North Americans.

This dynamic was abundantly evident at the Chicago World’s Fair. In 1893, the various oriental dances of the World’s Fair Midway Plaisance drew the attention of the New York

\textsuperscript{60} Alison Marie Parker, \textit{Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 129.
\textsuperscript{63} Virginia Keft-Kennedy, “‘How Does She Do That?’ Belly Dancing and the Horror of a Flexible Woman,” \textit{Women’s Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal} 34, no. 3–4 (April 1, 2005): 279–300.
Society for the Suppression of Vice’s most famous crusader, Anthony Comstock, who demanded publicly that the shows of the Plaisance clean up their acts. After seeing the show, he called the performances “disgustingly obscene” and set about pressuring The World's Fair's Board of Lady Managers to shut down the shows. The Lady Managers, set as the moral guardians of the exhibition, were headed by Berthe Palmer, who echoed Comstock’s concern about the shows and added that the dancers of the Midway should be "uplifted" through education, as their poor, debased dancing was only due to their foreign ignorance and lack of manners. But the Board did not end the shows. In the end, despite heavy criticism and the railing of these reformers, with the exception of the Parisian-fusion show at the Persian Palace, none of the Middle Eastern dance performances were shut down at the Chicago World's Fair. Appeals citing the innocent intention of the dancers (published in newspapers by even clergymen), and to the ethnographic merit of the shows (by the fair’s organizers) prevailed, as did continuing controversy. Likely the financial success of the performances also buttressed arguments for allowing the shows to continue.

Publications like *New York World* mocked Comstock’s self-righteous indignation at the performances, and offered a platform for debate on the topic, thereby fuelling the fire of controversy, and increasing public interest in the form. When *New York World* published Ida Craddock’s (1857-1902) sympathetic interpretations of oriental dance on Sunday, August 13th, 1893, controversy peaked. In her piece, Craddock argued that the dance was a wonderful ancient

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64 The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was an institution dedicated to the supervision and control of public morality. It pushed for policing of established morality laws and further legislation of public morality according to primarily Anglo-Protestant standards. Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt*, 49.
67 The Persian Palace show was shut down, but the dancers were not Persian, nor were they performing Persian dance. Ibid., 50.
form of religious worship that focused on sexual self-control. The perceived lewdness, she argued, was entirely the fault of American audiences, and not the fault of the performers from Egypt. Craddock presented an alternate Orientalist reading of the dance that focused on imagined inherent Eastern spirituality. She stated in her *New York World* publication:

> It is our American men and women and not the Oriental women, who are responsible for the atmosphere of indecent suggestions surrounding the very mention of the Danse du Ventre in the Midway Plaisance at the World’s Fair.... Let the real significance of this dance as a religious memorial of purity and self-control be broadcast so that Anthony Comstock and his helpers may be enlightened…”\(^68\)

Craddock’s public defense of *danse du ventre* against Comstock’s rallying continued in her self-publication of an essay entitled “The Danse du Ventre (Dance of the Abdomen) as performed in the Cairo Street Theatre, Midway Plaisance, Chicago: Its Value as an Educator in Marital Duties (1893).” Craddock cited an Archbishop Corrigan’s response to these dances as national dances that were performed with no intention of evil or vice, and Loïe Fuller, who indicated that people offended by these dances would also be offended by a “stately minuet.”\(^69\)

Craddock further explained her earlier argument that the dance was actually an ancient religious ritual that offered sexual training for a wife.\(^70\) Her conjectures did not stem from conversation with the dancers themselves, but instead from her own thoughts on the history of religion and sexuality. Craddock defended oriental dance’s dignity in the American context by connecting it to her pseudo-historical understanding of ancient sexuality and religion.\(^71\) She sought to defend women’s sexual expression and restraint in oriental dance, but did so using quasi-academic research and stereotype. Her defenses for the Midway dancers were Orientalist, as they trapped

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69 Ida Craddock, “The Danse du Ventre (Dance of the Abdomen) as performed in the Cairo Street Theatre, Midway Plaisance, Chicago: Its Value as an Educator in Marital Duties (1893),” 2; cited in ibid., 8.
70 Schmidt, *Heaven’s Bride*, 18.
71 Ibid.
the dance’s meaning in an imagined past, and applied a religious meaning to the movement that did not come from the dancers, but instead her own sex-history research. Craddock’s defense was sensational to be sure, and her radical freethinking landed her in court more than once during her lifetime.\(^{72}\) Defenses for oriental dance mirroring Craddock’s would often be taken up by white dancers who began performing belly dancing in the 1960s and 1970s, who, like Craddock, would attempt to intersect the performance of oriental dance with both quasi-academic associations with sexual education, women’s rights, and ancient spirituality.\(^{73}\)

The appropriation and hybridization of oriental dance movement and costuming style was widespread thanks to its infamy. Many performances were designed to highlight Eastern difference, while still being accessible to Western audiences. The focus of many American performances of oriental dance was transgressive movement, which included articulation of the hips and torso, and exoticism. The representation of the Middle East on American stages was primarily a presentation of what white men and women wanted to believe about the Middle East.\(^{74}\) North American dancers with tenuous connections to the Middle East and its dances were hybridizing and altering Eastern dance movements to suit popular demand. As movements and dance styles with origin points in the Middle East were melded into burlesque acts, a new, hybrid fusion of dance performance emerged in the American context. Robert C. Allen, drawing on the terminology of the time, called this style “cooch dancing.”\(^{75}\) Cooch-style performances emerged

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 32.

\(^{73}\) Other early Western defenses for the respectability of oriental dance included arguments claiming it should be understood as national dance and the suggestion that it did not carry shame in its origin contexts. Despite this, Western moral condemnation of oriental dance persisted, especially amongst religious groups that condemned all forms of dance in North America. Active policing of performances varied from area to area and over time.


as an appropriated mix of fantasy movements based on a variety of Middle Eastern and African dance forms.

There were dissenting voices in this early period against the perceived improper or “inauthentic” representation of oriental dance. Omene, who had achieved fame as an oriental dancer before the popularization of the form through the Chicago World’s Fair, and who claimed Turkish origin, criticized what she called the “abortion which the dancers of the Midway presented.” Omene’s full comments appeared in an interview with the National Police Gazette in 1894:

I saw the abortion which the dancers of the Midway presented to the public, and it filled me with heartache and loathing . . . Their dance was but a low-bred copy, designed to excite coarse men. She found the focus many American dancers began placing on sexual excitement distasteful and limiting. Her cutting statement also reflected discomfort with how Midway performers had managed to overshadow her centrality in the performance of danse du ventre in America. Omene's assessment reflected the reality of sexuality's growing prominence in American performances. It was also an indication of dissent over what constituted correct performance.

Omene took issue with a growing trend at the World’s Fair, which she believed was an increased focus on sexuality. This pattern she witnessed only continued in the form’s popularization in Vaudeville and Burlesque.

Vaudeville and Burlesque stages became some of the dance’s most popular performance venues. Vaudeville shows, popular in the late nineteenth century until approximately 1920, were

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76 Omene was likely born in America. Police reports indicate her legal name was possibly Madge Hargreaves, or Nadine Osborne. This does not exclude the possibility of Turkish origins, but, in this period, it was very common for performers to take on imagined identities to further professional goals. Burgess Abramovich, “Forgotten Scandal.”


78 Ibid.
variety shows that contained a mixture of elements, for instance, strong-man acts, live animal acts, short plays and skits, dance, and music. While originally shows were considered taboo for middle-class audiences and women in the 1870s, bans on liquor and immodest behaviour in many theatres at the end of the century, and a campaign to attract women and families resulted in the form’s gentrification. It developed in part out of earlier minstrel shows, and thus was a performance space beset with racialized hierarchy. Black performers were consistently stereotyped, or presented in blackface, and black audiences were segregated.\textsuperscript{79} Burlesque shows, which also developed in part from the minstrelry tradition, were among Vaudeville’s main competition and were another performance space that became popular for \textit{danse du ventre} performances. Burlesque by the turn of the century also included a series of skits, dance, and music performances in the format of early minstrel shows, and often focused on the exhibition of the female body.

In many burlesque-style presentations of \textit{danse du ventre}, the central purpose was increasingly to excite men. This sold well, and \textit{danse du ventre} shows proliferated. Increasing numbers of oriental dance performances focusing on racialized sexual display emerged after the Chicago World’s Fair as independent operators incorporated the infamous \textit{danse du ventre} into their travelling carnival, vaudeville, and burlesque shows.\textsuperscript{80} The shows spread across the continent. Live performance of oriental dance arrived in Toronto less than a year after the

Chicago World’s Fair with the appearance of the Egyptian dancer Fatima who performed oriental dance as a part of Sam T. Jack’s Creole Company.

Sam T. Jack, a white burlesque impresario, started his Creole burlesque company after he claimed to have had a vision of the River Nile in 1890. He wanted to begin a new company that would be an “Oriental sensation.” He declared he would recruit young women directly from Egypt to come and perform in the show. In the end, he settled on naming this new company the Creole Burlesque Company, and asserted that the fifty-person troupe was comprised of thirty “Louisiana Creoles,” and twenty “young Egyptian women.” It was the first troupe of its kind, as it was comprised of people of colour. Jack claimed that these Egyptian women had been brought to America specifically to perform in the company. Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, who examined the company in detail, suggest this assertion was likely partly, if not entirely fabrication, as the *New York City Clipper* stated this company was made up of many “New York City girls.” The company’s shows, which contained “purely Egyptian burlesque” and doses of “Oriental magnificence” were very popular all across the United States.

Sam T. Jack’s oriental show played during the Chicago World’s Fair, and claimed to have picked up one of the Midway Plaisance *danse du ventre* performers in the wake of its success. This was a woman named Fatima, who first appears in connection with the Creole Company in a December 9th *New York City Clipper* article. Fatima joined the show in its tour across America and Southern Ontario, performing in Pontiac, London, Brantford, St. Catherines, and Toronto.

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81 “Music and the Drama: Next Week’s Plays,” 12.
83 Ibid., 154.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 164.
According to *The Globe*, Fatima was a star attraction for the shows to be given in Toronto, as she was “the Egyptian dancing beauty, better known as the original Cairo street girl, who created a sensation on the Midway Plaisance during the recent World’s Fair.” This Fatima’s exact identity is unknown, as so many dancers took on stage names in this period. Perhaps she was not Fatima, but Fatma Houri, or Fatma Husaria, who were recorded as Egyptian Cairo street dancers at the Chicago World's Fair. She also could have been Fahreda Mazar Spyropoulos, of Greek ancestry and originally from Syria, who also performed at the World’s Fair and used the stage name, Fatima. She may also have been Fatima Djemille, who also appeared at the Chicago World’s Fair performing oriental dance. It is impossible to know if this performer was one of these Fatmas/Fatimas, or if she was another dancer who had simply taken on the popular performance name. As Sam T. Jack’s claims about the ethnic and cultural identities of his performers were often spurious, no conclusion can be made. Although, considering the ethnic makeup of the Creole Company, it is likely she would not have been perceived as white.

If she was from the Middle East, Fatima’s oriental dance performances were transnational and were hybridized in meaning and presentation because of their context in a burlesque show. It is possible that Fatima's performance could have been part of one of the show's acts, entitled, *The Beauty of the Nile, or Doomed by Fire*. Dancing in a set named *Beauty of the Nile* in a primarily non-white burlesque company on a North American stage gave her movement unique racialized meaning to audience members. It was burlesque clearly related

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86 “Music and the Drama.”
88 Ibid., 65–66.
in its presentation to vaudeville and minstrel entertainment. The Creole shows in Toronto, a reviewer noted, has the arrangement of a minstrel show, and song and dance items that were specialties of minstrel-style performance.\textsuperscript{90} Fatima and the other women in the show were presented not just as beauties, but as racially-othered “exotic” beauties. Men attended to objectify racialized beauty not common in predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant Toronto at that time.\textsuperscript{91}

In her sets, Fatima was not only seen as breaking Western normative movements by undulating her uncorsetted torso, she was also cast as the exotic, sexualized other while doing so. While she could have been associated with sex work in Egypt (depending on the context and style of performance), and certainly racialized depending on her origin point (most dancers were from minority groups), the context in this burlesque company was different, and the history of power relations and oppressions different.\textsuperscript{92} In Toronto, Fatima was simply Eastern, other, an exotic “Egyptian,” in a burlesque lineup featuring women of colour. She was assumed sexual, beautiful and mysterious on account of her race by a primarily Anglo-European, male Toronto audience.\textsuperscript{93} Her presence in a burlesque show that evoked comments on its relationship to minstrelsy reveals a further racialization of the performances. The movements and the perceived racialized identity of the dancer were both deviant. In Egypt, these movements themselves were not deviant— they were performed by families at weddings. The movements were certainly not evidence of “oriental splendour” in an Egyptian context.

\textsuperscript{90} “Music and the Drama: The Three Opera Houses Draw Large Audiences--General Musical and Entertainment,” \textit{The Globe (1844-1936)}, April 17, 1894, 10.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Noha Roushdy, \textit{Femininity and Dance in Egypt: Embodiment and Meaning in Al-Raqs Al-Baladi} (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 32.
Ads for oriental dance performances in Toronto from the early twentieth century also indicate exoticized sexuality and female beauty were common themes in the burlesque presentation of oriental dance. Fatima was praised for being pretty and a beautiful dancer. The Creole Company’s main selling point was its showcasing of the “fairest daughters of the Nile.” In Toronto, a performance termed *danse du ventre* at the Gayety Theater in 1916 was a part of a famous "beauty show" in a burlesque act, where the focus was on the presentation of the dancer’s body. Another burlesque show at the Empire Theatre from 1926, entitled "Models and Thrills" had a Miss Dale performing *danse du ventre*. In reviews of these sorts of shows, men were said to go to admire female beauty. In these shows, the beautiful female body was just as essential as the dance.

This exoticized sexuality was stressed in many early North American presentations of *danse du ventre*, especially as strip tease became incorporated into shows. Allen credits the advent of stripping in burlesque shows with its earlier development in the cooch-style shows of North America. In 1894, Milwaukee residents could witness a dancer calling herself Habeebe perform the *danse du ventre* “in all its oriental splendour,” appearing fully naked. In 1896, at the St. Louis World's Fair, a dancer named Omeena took off "almost all of her clothing" while she danced the "couchee couchee." Incidents like this were increasingly common, and cooch became one of the immediate precursors to striptease in burlesque performance. Increasingly,

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94 “Music and the Drama: Next Week’s Plays,” 12.
98 “Danse du Ventre” *Yenowine’s Illustrated News*, (Milwaukee WI), Sept. 29, 1894, 2; quoted in Schmidt, *Heaven’s Bride*, 24.
dances of the Middle East were linked primarily to sexual exhibition. These public stripping performances were both popular and condemned.

Moral condemnation for oriental dance arose in Canada after its performance at Toronto’s National Exposition in 1905. The performances offended one woman to the point that she felt the need to write a letter to the editor of the Toronto Daily Star calling the danse du ventre “lewd pantomime.” Her letter reveals that danse du ventre was performed in not just one, but many tents that year. She felt it had “baneful effects” on the whole Midway. She called for the organizers to remove the oriental dance performances from the Midway for the next year so that the “nasty, diseased appendix-like adjunct [would not be] permitted to flourish.” At the Toronto Exposition in 1912, Staff Inspector George Kennedy of the Morality Department and Assistant Crown Attorney Hughes policed the shows on the Midway. While the morality department demanded two shows alter their contents, the inspectors made a special comment on the need to police "an Egyptian dance...with a real touch of Oriental splendor." The show was not shut down but was altered to appeal to what George Kennedy and Hughes felt was proper. The paper did not indicate the changes made to achieve propriety. Later, in 1926, "Egyptian dance" surfaced in a Canadian New Year's party scandal. Police were in the process of investigating men and women involved in a variety of liquor-fuelled parties that showcased the

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100 At the turn of the century, strip-tease performance, can-can, belly dance, and other shows focusing on the female body were increasingly popular at European-styled music halls in Cairo. It is inappropriate to argue that there was no oriental dance in the Middle East that focused on the public display of sexuality. However, this was not the most common manner in which Egyptians experienced raqs sharqi and baladi. Primarily, belly dance signalled joy at weddings and other celebrations. In North America at the turn of the century, on the other hand, oriental dance performance signalled seduction and racialized sexuality in popular culture. Roushdy, Femininity and Dance in Egypt, 34.

101 “A Widowed Mother Writes Again of the Exhibition: An Interesting Letter for the Directors to Ponder Over-Prune Not Abolish, the Midway,” 9.

102 Ibid.

performances of Egyptian dance by women who were nude or partially clothed. This event indicated that popular fascination with these dances did not disappear because of policing earlier in the century. If anything, these news articles headlining Egyptian dance as immoral and scandalous only served to popularize it. Periodic bans or legal attacks led by morality police never amounted to any serious control over these forms of dance. Oriental dance also became a popular avenue for white Canadians to play with restrictive sexual norms in dance performance. Its perceived immorality—or at least its tenuous position on the edge of propriety endured in popular culture.

Theatrical performers also increasingly borrowed or appropriated Eastern costuming and movement in their performances to challenge Western performance norms. Theatrical and balletic interpretations of "Eastern" dances were by no means faithful reflections of any specific dance style from the Middle East. In 1927, the ballet Mordink's Dancers in Exotic Settings included an Egyptian dance scene at the Alexandra theatre in Toronto. A reviewer in the Toronto Daily Star described it:

The Egyptian dance finale was a libidinous carousal; a plain orgy opulently designed and colored and worked up into a series of convulsions that were meant for climaxes but became only a fury of senseless erotic pantomime that rather spoiled the effect of many of the beautiful things in the program.

The reviewer found this presentation to be sexually deviant to the point that it had lost any artistic merit. By using adjectives such as carousal, orgy, convulsion, climax, and erotic, the reviewer expressed that the performance of Egyptian movement was only sexual. These descriptions do not provide an explanation of the style of movement on which the ballet

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106 “Mordink’s Dancers in Exotic Settings: Advertisements Better Half of Impressive and Beautiful Program.”
predicated its choreography. However, the reviewer’s response to the movement, and its title as “Egyptian,” demonstrate its contextualization within an Orientalist stereotype.

North American theatre stars employed oriental imagery to play with identity. Maud Allan, Toronto's famous Salome, and Ruth St. Denis, whose work was foundational in the development of modern dance, took on exotic identities in their theatrical dance performances. They were inspired by how they envisioned the East as they portrayed imagined oriental identities in dance. While not performers specifically of danse du ventre, St. Denis and Allan performed oriental-styled dances.\textsuperscript{107} Maud Allan, the Canadian dancer who famously performed the role of Salome in dance productions based on Oscar Wilde's play, \textit{Salome}, was born in Toronto in 1873. She enjoyed great success in Europe early in the century for her Salome dances. She wore elaborate costuming that bared her midriff and performed in a way meant to highlight the supposed contrast of Eastern beauty and barbarity. Allan performed her act for the first time in Toronto, which included the "Dance of the Seven Veils," in 1910.\textsuperscript{108} Her “Dance of the Seven Veils,” continues to be associated with Middle Eastern dance, but, the scene of Salome stripping veils while dancing stemmed from Oscar Wilde’s 1891 play. “The Dance of the Seven Veils” was Wilde’s interpretation of mythology surrounding the Babylonian goddess Ishtar’s descent into the underworld as she sought Tammuz. It did not reflect any specific Middle Eastern dance or any Biblical reference.\textsuperscript{109} Similarly, St. Denis' famous performances \textit{Radha}, the \textit{Cobras}, \textit{Incense}, and \textit{Egypt} evoked images of the racial, the Eastern, the other, and mythology.\textsuperscript{110} By putting on a mask of mythological racial otherness in performances, many white women felt could both

\textsuperscript{107} Shay and Sellers-Young, “Belly Dance,” 17.
\textsuperscript{108} Rieger and Williamson, \textit{Toronto Dancing Then and Now}, 7.
embody and distance themselves from "forbidden sensuality." Virginia Keft-Kennedy argues that Western artists found empowerment through using the exotic other in performance; The powerful Eastern femininity of Salome and the erotic repulsive movements of the danse du ventre performer, were spaces where Western dancers like Maud Allen found temporary feminine empowerment. Her looks and whiteness mitigated the unfamiliarity of the movements for Western audiences. These white women who utilized Eastern imagery and movement during this period found a space for their own self-exploration, and for pushing societal engagement with previously censured sexuality through the utilization of Eastern movement in the context of Orientalist stereotype. Anthony Shay argues that the whiteness of these performers, and the melding of Eastern fantasy into firmly white-controlled spaces (like the Opera, or theatre), served to elevate their oriental dance performance from the "lewdness" of the common danse du ventre fair performer. The class element of these performances also served to elevate the respectability of shows performed for upper class audiences.

Live oriental dance performances at fairs, exhibitions, and theatres slipped out of popularity with the rise of cinema. An article published in the Star in 1936 declared "Hoochie Coochie Dancers Extinct." In the article, a service club organizer in Detroit found it was impossible to hire an "old fashioned cooch or muscle dancer of the tradition of Little Egypt" because he had contacted twelve agents in Detroit to find one, without success. The article concluded that the "sinuous sirens of the naughty nineties are as extinct as moustache cups or

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112 Keft-Kennedy, ‘’How Does She Do That?,” 289.
113 Ibid., 291.
114 Shay, Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms, 10, 42–43.
116 Ibid.
Although the cooch dancer of the burlesque theatre and Midway of earlier in the century had faded in popularity, interest in what was increasingly being termed "belly dance," continued in popular culture through film. The understanding of the dancing body as racialized, sexualized, and transgressively spiritual endured. The belly dancer became an iconic element of Hollywood films as shorthand for ancient Egypt, Arabian nights, and harem adventures.

**Film**

Just like in earlier fair, burlesque and theatre shows, in the imaginary "Arabland" of early Hollywood films, as Jack Shaheen terms it, Middle Eastern men (Arab men in particular) were swarthy, barbaric, and plotting, while Middle Eastern women were either veiled and powerless, or sexy and dangerous, but in both portrayals, they were always eroticized. Like in the fairs and burlesques, in Hollywood film oriental dance was consistently tied into racialized eroticism. In the popular film *The Sheik* (1921), the Middle East was portrayed as a land of romantic mystery and harems. The plot began with a look into the marriage markets of this imagined land of Araby, which reminded the civilized heroine of the "slave mart of the barbarous past." It is in this stereotypical timeless and backward setting that oriental dance was presented to audiences, as a backdrop for the buying and selling of women.

The dancer at the marriage market early in the film performed in a style that referenced the movements of American vaudeville dancer Ella Lola, who was born in Boston in 1883. Lola performed a similar "Oriental dance" on film at Thomas Edison's Black Maria studio in West

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117 Ibid.
119 Ibid., 26.
Orange, New Jersey in 1898.\textsuperscript{121} Movements and style of the dancer pictured in \textit{The Sheik} also reflected American vaudeville dancer Princess Rajah's performance at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, as captured by the Edison company. Rajah danced and played finger cymbals before balancing a chair in her teeth, performing floor work with it, and finally whirling with it.\textsuperscript{122} Princess Rajah began performing as a "cooch" dancer at Coney Island in the 1890s after the rise of \textit{danse du ventre}'s popularity. She later performed in vaudeville where she started showcasing "Oriental dances" with snakes.\textsuperscript{123} The usage of American style "cooch" performance in \textit{The Sheik} reflects how cooch performance and oriental dance both migrated from stages to film.

\textit{The Sheikh} was not unique in its presentation of oriental dance. It was one boulder in a landslide of "Arabland" films featuring oriental dance that would become very popular throughout the twentieth century. In 1938, the Three Stooges danced around as harem girls in \textit{Wee Wee Monsieur}, contributing to the comedic idea in North America that this belly dance, as the form was increasingly called into the nineteenth century, was not much more than wiggling and jumping about in gauzy costumes. Abbot and Costello's 1944 \textit{Lost in a Harem} featured barbaric, inept Arab men, and two-piece wearing, veil swirling dancing girls. Similar dancer depictions and tropes surface in \textit{Arabian Nights} (1942) and \textit{Kismet} (1944). Many of these American and European films from the first half of the twentieth century primarily featured American \textit{danse du ventre} or cooch performance, or featured scantily-clad women performing modified ballet or other Western dances.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{121} Thomas A. Edison Inc., \textit{Turkish Dance, Ella Lola}, Reel of black and white 35 mm film (West Orange New Jersey: Black Maria, 1898).
\textsuperscript{122} The American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, \textit{Princess Rajah Dance}, Reel of black and white 35 mm film (St. Louis, 1904).
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
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The Lasting Impacts of Orientalist Contextualization

The early integration of oriental dance into the popular cultural landscape of North America influenced the perception of women who performed or encountered belly dance in Toronto during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The dance’s Western contextualization and incorporation into burlesque and cabaret, its portrayal in various renditions of Salome, its place in the dance expressions of Ruth St. Denis, and its showcasing in films all informed the form’s postwar popularization. Canadian dancers who began performing in the 1960s and 1970s indicated that Orientalist imagery popularized in this first half of the twentieth century influenced their choreographic strategies. Newspaper articles and ephemera from shows during this period also indicate this. The harem adventure theme surfaced consistently in live belly dance performance, just as it had at early cooch shows, and in Hollywood film. Brenda Bell, under that stage name Badia Star, began dancing in 1976, and related that:

There was a lot of fantasy going on many years ago. We didn’t have many Middle Eastern people to teach us the authentic details. As time went on more women started to travel and start[ed] discovering the reality within the dance world. This is what I did, I wanted to know the reality of the dance, not the fantasy.

The legacy of Orientalist imagery and Western contextualization continued. Western dancers, to this day, cannot escape how popular culture in North America tends to portray this dance. Star indicated that films like The Sheikh (1921) impacted how many have imagined the "world" of belly dance. Anne Kokot, who began dancing under the name Aziza in 1972 at the Blue Orchid in Toronto, based her early movement on feeling and imagination informed by popular

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125 Bell, interview, 19.
126 My earliest memory of recognizing something as “belly dance” was in the heavily Orientalist Disney film Aladdin back in 1994.
127 Bell, interview, 19.
cultural references to belly dance.\footnote{Anne (Aziza) Kokot, interview by Anne Vermeyden, March 3, 2015, 8.} Kokot explained that when she was performing she sometimes hoped to channel Salome's dance before Herod.\footnote{“You know, Salome, which again, would be theatrical, not being a real contemporary dancer, just the fictional character and the historical character. That sort of, again, it’s just sort of part of my imagination and that’s who I, I figure if I were Salome dancing in front of King Herod.” Ibid., 6.} The ongoing power of this early twentieth-century Oriental dance imagery as popularized in the Salome theatrical performances continued to reverberate in Kokot's work in the clubs and restaurants of Toronto where Aziza performed during the 1970s. Kokot also cited the Golden Calf scene in \textit{The Ten Commandments} (1956) as inspirational to her when she began performing in Toronto. She hoped to convey the feeling of the performers before the Calf. Dancers working in Toronto introduced to the dance forms of the Middle East could not escape the previous history of oriental dance's contextualization within Canadian Orientalism.

In 1974, the \textit{Toronto Star} featured the article, "Little Egypt's Legacy: Grandma thought belly dancing was sinful; It's still more fun than push-ups."\footnote{Paul King, “Little Egypt’s Legacy: Grandma Thought Belly Dancing Was Sinful; It’s Sure More Fun than Push-Ups,” \textit{The Toronto Star}, July 13, 1974, 17–19.} This article’s title surmises the popular, initial contact many had with belly dance, as something exotic, immoral, and possibly mystical. The prejudice and stereotype underpinning the images of Middle Easterners and belly dance presented in fairs, theatre and film earlier that century remained culturally pervasive, so much so that Western dancers would need to begin making a conscious effort to recognize their role in perpetuating Orientalist myth. While dancers of Middle Eastern background, for example, cite home dancing\footnote{Home dancing refers to informal social dance in private settings.} as their first and most important encounter with the form and white North Americans stressed the influence of social dance with friends from the Middle East, both groups could not escape the dominant cultural narrative about the dance’s sexual and exotified ‘nature.’
Conclusion

Oriental dance as performed in North America, and in Toronto specifically, in the first half of the twentieth century was consistently presented alongside, or as a part of larger stereotypical representations of Middle Eastern culture in popular entertainment. While all things oriental were popular entertainment, Middle Eastern immigrants faced sustained and nationally sanctioned discrimination in Canada and America. The racialization of belly dance performances in North America was facilitated by pervasive racism. The dance was presented as dangerous, seductive and degraded, just as many immigrants from the Middle East were. *Danse du ventre*, the central draw of the Midway Plaisance in 1893, shifted into theatres and burlesque shows across the continent as it was appropriated because of its profitability. As American and Canadian performers appropriated or engaged with movements from the Middle East, fusion and hybridization occurred. Cooch dance, eastern-inspired theatrical dance, and a variety of other hybridizations developed, each of which were generally presented as ancient and sexually transgressive. Changing gender and sexuality norms were reflected in both the enthusiasm for witnessing oriental dance performance and the resistance to it on moral grounds. Oriental dance and its stereotypical contextualization in North America also became a space for Westerners to enjoy rebellion against restrictive Victorian sexual norms through the bodies of racialized others, a trend that would continue throughout the century. Some Westerners moved to defend the form based on its supposed spirituality, or its ethnographic merit as a frozen piece of the past, but both of these defences also served to entrench the form as exotic and othered. White dancers found they could experiment with eroticism by taking on “oriental” costuming or movement in performance. They could put on the exotic backwardness of the East in the *danse du ventre* show, and then return to the restrictions of normal life after. Exotic, oriental sexual performances were
a space in which society could enjoy the sexual, as the ‘backward East’ could take the blame for moral failing. While European artists and audiences toyed with the East to explore previously publicly forbidden sensuality, immigrants and artists from the Middle East continued to face immigration restriction and discrimination. The dances of their cultures created hefty profits for American producers and dancers who reinforced the stereotypes that supported their unequal treatment.

This early popularity, contextualization, and commodification of oriental dance at the turn of the twentieth century cemented a popular culture surrounding belly dance that endured. As film took off, live performances became less popular. By the 1930s, live burlesque, cooch and danse du ventre performances faced their twilight in comparison to a booming cinema industry. The Orientalist portrayals of belly dance as dangerously sexual, ancient, and powerful made their way into cinematic representations of the Middle East. This racialized understanding of belly dance as primarily sexual in North America continued to inform ideas about belly dance performances into the postwar period, when a new wave of immigration from the Middle East precipitated a resurgence in live belly dance performance.

Immigration and transnational movement to North America from the Middle East facilitated and stimulated a resurgence in popular demand and access to the public performance of belly dance in post-war Canada and America. This post-war spike in the number of public belly dance performances in North America was enabled by a firmly established fascination with belly dance as something exotic, feminine, sexual, and forbidden. Toronto’s belly dance scene in this period was impacted by changes in Canadian immigration policy which allowed for unprecedented immigration from the Middle East to Canada. Immigrants from the Middle East influenced the ways belly dance was presented. This analysis offers a comparative look at the relationship between immigration policy, immigration patterns, and the development of Middle Eastern dance in Canada, with a focus on Toronto.¹ It also traces transnational circulations of dancers and the impact this had on their Toronto performances. Tension over the form’s relationship to sexual display and its relationship to sexualized Orientalist stereotype in North America heightened over the 1960s and 1970s, as Middle Eastern audiences grew as a result of changing immigration patterns and policy. For many, playing up the form’s racialized presentation of sexuality was fun and profitable, while for others, the need to redefine oriental dance as respectable and distanced from overt sexual display and harem-stereotype was paramount. Increased transnational movement from the Middle East to North America, facilitated by popular Orientalism and liberalizing immigration laws in Canada, allowed for belly

¹ The primary source research supporting this chapter largely stems from two groups of source materials. The first includes print media, including North American magazine and newspaper articles published between 1950 and 1985, and a variety of period publications/ephemera/images related to belly dance in this period. The second set of materials are oral history interviews conducted between 2014–2015 with men and women involved in the belly dance scene, for at least some time in the city of Toronto, between 1960 and 1990 (as dancers, musicians, club owners, etc.).
dance’s successful entrenchment as a hybridized form of live transnational entertainment in Toronto during the post-war period.

**Middle Eastern Immigration to Canada: 1947–1961**

The Canadian government made significant efforts to restrict all non-white immigration during the first half of the twentieth century, making it very difficult for men and women from the Middle East to immigrate to Canada during this period. The immediate postwar Canadian government, under Mackenzie King, defended Canada’s discriminatory immigration policy, arguing it was necessary to maintain “the fundamental character of the Canadian population.” King argued that any large influx of Asian immigrants would cause socio-economic problems in Canada, and would undermine the nation’s established Western-European identity. Thus, immigrants from the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and the U.S. continued to be favoured in policy and acceptance rates. Most non-white immigrants from the Middle East during the first half of the twentieth century who made it to Canada came through family sponsorship.

Greek newcomers were relatively unimpeded by the white Canada policies, although they still often faced significant prejudice. Between 1945 and 1971 approximately 100,000 Greek immigrants chose to make Canada home. In the wake of the Second World War, many fled Greece’s decimated economy and the violence of the subsequent Civil War (1946-1949). Many settled in Toronto. With these newcomers came the social and public performance of *tsifteteli*.

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Immigration levels from other parts of the Middle East increased at a slower rate due to the racial discrimination embedded in Canadian immigration policy. Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, who had a tenuous relationship with legal “whiteness” in the U.S., finally achieved a lifting of limitations on their immigration to Canada beginning in 1949. Canada’s established Syrian and Lebanese communities increasingly pressured the government after the Second World War to lift restrictive immigration policies, like Order-in-Council P.C. 2115, passed in 1930, which had halted all “Asiatic” immigration to Canada (with limited exception made for Asians who were already the wives/children of Canadian citizens).\(^4\) In 1949, the Canadian government responded by legally redefining Syrian, Lebanese and Armenian immigrants as white. From this point on, they would no longer be classified as "Asiatic,” and thus could immigrate freely (in theory). At this time, sponsorship rights were also widened for these groups.\(^5\) Other “Asiatic” groups were not afforded this same acceptance. Other Middle Eastern groups, South, and East Asians continued to fact discrimination and found that sponsorship was their main, route of entry to Canada.\(^6\)

In the period between 1950 and 1959, under these new laws, 3,374 Arab men and women immigrated to Canada.\(^7\) This was a large increase, considering that between 1910 and 1950 only

\(^4\) Aboud, “Re-Reading Arab World-New World Immigration History,” 664.
\(^5\) Syrian, Lebanese and Armenian immigrants could now sponsor fiancés, spouses, children, siblings, nieces, nephews, and parents. Hennebry and Amery, ‘‘Arab’ Migration to Canada: Far from Monolithic,’’ 18.
\(^6\) Canada received a substantial wave of immigrants from the Levant region around the turn of the twentieth century and up until the First World War. Mostly Christian, these Syrian and Lebanese immigrants settled mainly in Montreal, although many also made homes in Ontario and the Maritimes. Although immigration policy by 1912 had become thoroughly discriminatory in an effort to prevent “non-white” immigration, sponsorship was a route for already naturalized or resident immigrants from the first wave of migration to bring their families to Canada. This pattern also occurred in the United States. Aboud, “Re-Reading Arab World-New World Immigration History,” 662.
\(^7\) “Immigration to Canada by Country of Last Permanent Residence, 1956 to 1976: Table A385-416” (Department of Manpower and Immigration, The Government of Canada, 1976 to 1956).
3,085 men and women identified as Arab were permitted immigration to Canada. The total Arab immigration for this forty-year period was matched in only ten years, a quarter of the time, in large part because of this new legislation. During the mid-1950s, sources of Arab world immigration began to diversify, and newcomers coded as “Egyptian” increasingly made Canada home. Many of these newcomers who were labelled Egyptian were members of Egypt’s southern European, Armenian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Jewish communities, and these newcomers were entering Canada through family sponsorship criteria during this decade. The shift in the Canadian government’s legal definition of whiteness opened the door to increased immigration for certain Middle-Eastern ethnic groups, for example, Syrian and Lebanese newcomers. The increase, however, was still nothing in comparison to much larger levels of European immigration.

Even though it was a significant increase from before, during the 1950s, Arab and wider Middle Eastern immigration to Canada was still very limited. Consequently, transnational dance conversations were taking place primarily through media and the temporary transnational movement of professional performers. Newspaper records indicate the most popular performances of belly dance in Canada during the 1950s were those put on by visiting Middle Eastern cinema stars. The development of transportation and media technologies facilitated increased transnational movement and brought Middle Eastern dance and cinema stars to both Canada and the U.S. Among Western and non-aligned nations, national borders were

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8 Note that the use of the term Arab by the media and the Canadian government is not consistent over the period discussed. “Arab” refers to statistics referencing a newcomer’s native language in some instances, to newcomer self-identification, or to the newcomer’s home nation as “Arab.” Sometimes the specific usage is undefined.
increasingly permeable for bodies, images, and ideas.$^{10}$ Cinema, television, newspapers, migration, and travel were essential in the increased transnational hybridization and popularization of belly dance expressions in North America. The earliest post-war live public belly dance performances in Toronto reported in the *Globe*, and the *Star* were those of Samia Gamal and Nejla Ateş.

Samia Gamal (born Zaynab Ibrahim Mahfuz) was an internationally famous Egyptian dance and film star by the early 1950s. One of Egypt’s cinema sweethearts, she was declared Egypt’s national dancer by King Farouk in 1949, and had starred in 37 films by 1953.$^{11}$ In the early 1950s, she left Egypt temporarily for the U.S. after marrying Shepherd King III, a purportedly oil-rich Texan she met while performing in Paris. King III adopted Islam to marry her, taking on the name Abdallah King. Gamal travelled with him to North America and appeared in a variety of North American entertainment spaces. She danced in nightclubs, was photographed for *LIFE* magazine, and made her theatrical debut in the production of the play *White Cargo*, which was mounted in cities across North America.

During her time in North America, Gamal utilized Orientalist fantasy and capitalized on stereotypical roles (likely often the only roles made available to her) for her benefit while also seeking respect for her performances from North American audiences. The performances she gave in the play *White Cargo* had her embodying a character who was not just a dangerously

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sexual woman, but also as a racialized woman. *White Cargo*’s colonial racist narrative embedded her dance further into North American public consciousness as sexual and deviantly attractive.

Published originally in 1912, *White Cargo* started out as a novel: *Hell’s Playground*, penned by New York socialite Ida Vera Simonton. Simonton’s book, which focused on the colonial experience in Gabon, supported and re-entrenched common stereotypes about uncontrollable and dangerous African sexuality. Jeremy Rich’s work indicates she focused the narrative of *Hell’s Playground* on “sexually ravenous tropical women and white male vulnerability.”12 Producer Leon Gordon and director Earl Carroll plagiarized sections of *Hell’s Playground* when they developed their smash-hit play *White Cargo*, which debuted in 1923.13 They presented the central female character Tondelayo as the embodiment of colonial tropes about sexually ravenous and violent African women. American film giant MGM recognized the play’s success and moved to have it made into a film, hiring Gordon to re-adapt the play for film. The colonial imagery of the dangerous black seductress Tondelayo was deemed too provocative for the big screen, so Gordon altered Tondelayo’s race. For its Hollywood debut, Gordon re-wrote Tondelayo’s character as Egyptian-Arab. She needed to be just exotic enough to be dangerous, but close enough to whiteness so as not to upset the censors. This appeased MGM’s desire to lessen the film’s potential controversy, in what would have otherwise been a violation of the racial dictates of the Motion Picture Production Code (Hayes Code). The censorship code strictly prohibited the portrayal of any sexual relationship between black and white characters.14 MGM cast Hedy Lamarr in dark makeup to play the newly Arabized Tondelayo in their 1942

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13 The plagiarism was so evident that Simonton was able to successfully sue. They agreed to a settlement of $500,000 in court. Ibid., 335.
film version of the play. Lamarr in Arab-face was, as MGM had hoped, just exotic enough to be titillating, and just white enough to be acceptable by censors and audiences.

Samia Gamal portrayed the role of Tondelayo in a tour of the play across the U.S. and Canada in the early 1950s. In the spring of 1953, in Toronto for $1.25, audience members at the Royal Alexandra could enjoy Samia’s “Egyptian dancing” live, presented in the narrative as a tool of white male ensnarement.\(^{15}\) She was called “King Farouk’s dancing girl,”\(^ {16}\) in one review, and an advertisement (pictured in Figure 4.0) for her performance in the Toronto Star read, “Egypt’s history shaking dancer Samia Gamal (as the atomic Tondeleyo) in White Cargo.”\(^ {17}\)

In Egypt, the majority of films containing dancers and their stories emerged between 1946 and 1957, and they portrayed professional dancers in an array of characterizations.\(^ {18}\) In Egypt, Gamal had long played devious characters in her role as a dancer, and often dance scenes were presented as a part of the process of seducing or distracting men.\(^ {19}\)

Figure 4.0 An ad for "Egypt's history-shaking dancer" Samia Gamal's upcoming performance in White Cargo. The Toronto Daily Star, February 24, 1953, pg. 24.

But her roles in Egypt were not exclusively so. Scenes of her dance in celebration, fun, and


\(^{16}\) “Thirty Years of White Cargo,” The Globe and Mail, February 28, 1953, 12.


\(^{19}\) Dougherty, “Dance and the Dancer in Egyptian Film.”
flirtation were also common. Dancers in Egyptian film could be complex and well developed characters, certainly not exclusively villains or antagonists. While one film may have portrayed a dancer as a drug-addict, another would highlight a dancer as a dedicated and loving daughter. In some films, the dancer was a troublesome temptress, while in others she was a proud artist dedicated to her family. Writing in 1961, Morroe Berger stated that a professional belly dance entertainer is more passionate and sexual in her performance than are folk presentations of the same form. The sexuality of the professional performer, though, in these films was not considered exotic by Arab audiences in the same way it was by Western ones.

In White Cargo, unlike most of Gamal’s Egyptian films, where most lead actors were Arab, in this Western production (born out of a distinctly colonial narrative) her allure was racialized against the whiteness of the male protagonists. Her character was two-dimensional and defined primarily by stereotypical portrayals of her race and sexuality. In White Cargo, her dancing was not contextualized within an Egyptian or Arab cultural setting. It was a performance indicating racialized sexuality in the context of common North American Orientalist stereotype. Herbert Whittaker’s Globe and Mail review of White Cargo as it appeared at the Royal Alexandra in Toronto in 1953, reveals that the play was well past its expiry date by 1953 and that its perceived redeeming attraction was Gamal and the promise of titillating and exotic dance performance. Whittaker remarked that “every now and then some female of exotic repute seeks to infuse new life into it [White Cargo] by the warmth of her personality and the wiggle of her hips.” Gamal’s dancing was sexualized and exotified by both the narrative of the play and

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20 For more on the complex representations of dancers in Egyptian cinema see ibid.
21 Ibid., 153.
23 van Nieuwkerk, A Trade Like Any Other, 1.
Whittaker’s review. Whittaker described her as a “feminine menace, white of skin, black of heart” who was the audience’s only hope to “arouse our baser passions and leave us panting with expectation.”\(^\text{25}\) Whittaker also remarked further that he spent most of the play excited wondering how easily the King of Egypt “became inflamed.”\(^\text{26}\) He described Gamal’s dance performance in his review of the play meticulously:

> First there is a low seated ripple, then she swings back to the centre of the room. She approaches her white man enticingly. He ducks. She pouts and gyrates down to centre-stage. Everything is in motion now. The hips have a long slow sing to them, with an excelled follow-through. The flowers on her sarong wave about in agitated fashion. Tondeleyo is giving her all.\(^\text{27}\)

Even though Gamal was performing what was often called belly dance or oriental dance in this period, Whittaker avoids this terminology, favouring simply “dance.” In his review, Gamal’s dancing was the highlight of the play. However, his assessment of her acting and of the role of Tondelayo was bleak, and throughout the review, he stressed that she was a dancer and not an actress. In another article, Whittaker reiterates this when he condescendingly praises Gamal’s delivery of her only real line in the play, “I am Tondeleyo.” He argued that she gave it well because she did not inappropriately emphasize any one word, as he believed a trained actress would have after overthinking how she could possibly bring meaning to the line.\(^\text{28}\)

> Despite these reviews, Gamal was pleased with her role in the production of White Cargo and offered no published objections to its colonial/stereotypical racial narrative. She felt achieving a role on stage was artistically gratifying.\(^\text{29}\) However, she did express objection to stereotypical understandings of her performance of raqs sharqi specifically. In interviews, she

\(^{25}\) Ibid.  
\(^{26}\) Ibid.  
\(^{27}\) Ibid.  
consistently sought to complicate the stereotypical representation of *raqs sharqi* most common in North America. While she agreed, her performances were often for the benefit of men, she also described personal enjoyment in her dance and its connection to her Egyptian identity.\(^{30}\) She fondly recalled spending hours in front of the mirror as a child imitating the movements of dancers she saw at Cairo parties and receptions.\(^{31}\) These were Egypt’s dances, she said, and young Zaynab Ibrahim Mahfuz was certainly not alone in mimicking professional dancers as a girl in front of the mirror.\(^{32}\) Joy permeated Gamal’s performances throughout her life. In 1952, photographer Loomis Dean photographed Gamal performing her “ancient art” for a feature article in *LIFE* Magazine.\(^{33}\) Dean’s work (often wrongly attributed to Gjon Mili, who inspired the technique for Dean’s shoot with Samia) captured her joy in performance.\(^{34}\) Many images showed Gamal laughing while undulating, performing hip circles, and other movements. Her infectious joy in these images highlighted the side of public performance that was not about seduction, but instead, emotional expression.

In her interviews, though, Gamal also related that every time her parents caught her dancing in front of the mirror they would spank her. She did not say why, and the implication for an American audience was that the dance was somehow inappropriate for a young girl. This could be possible, but it is far more likely her parents were concerned with vanity, or with quashing any dreams of becoming a professional dancer. Her story of childhood dance practice highlighted *raqs sharqi*’s complex position in Egypt, as both a beloved celebratory requirement

\(^{30}\) Ibid.


\(^{32}\) Numerous interviews reveal that practicing dance for fun, or to prepare for performing it in celebratory or family contexts was not unusual in the Middle East.


\(^{34}\) Ibid., 45.
and a possible source of shame. Gamal’s relating this experience to the press highlighted her personal experience of raqs sharqi’s position in Egypt during this period as simultaneously cherished and policed. She found the form was both loved and policed in North America as well.

Gamal disliked the term belly dance and felt correcting its use could bring greater respect for her performances. In her effort to explain her position as a professional dancer to interviewers, Gamal constantly asked members of the press to avoid the term belly dance, and tried to distance her work from the phrase’s negative North American connotations. She insisted her performances be termed not belly dance, but “Oriental art.” She tried to articulate to journalists preoccupied with harem fantasy that her performance was not just sexual entertainment, but one of her nation’s arts. In her Toronto interview in 1953, Gamal framed her performance as specifically Egyptian dance. Jack Karr entitled his Daily Star piece “Star Samia Dances with Hands,” in response to her description of her performances as Egyptian dance, and not belly dance:

"Where I come from" she said, "there is a beeg deerecance. A belly dancer is like so…” And she waved her hands in great undulating motions in the vicinity of her abdomen. “But I,” she added, “am an Egyptian dancer. I dance the dances of Egypt. IS this way…” and she waved her hands in great undulating motions in the vicinity of her shoulders.

If only there had been a video of this event! From the records in the Star and Globe, it appears she was distinguishing her movement (by gesturing with her hands near her shoulders) from that focused solely on the abdomen. By calling attention to the national character of the dance, she signalled that it differed greatly from both Egyptian/Middle Eastern performances that were

35 Roushdy, Femininity and Dance in Egypt, 2–3.
36 “‘That was a real belly dance, wasn’t it?’ I [Wilson] asked her afterward. ‘Please- an Oriental dance, remember?’ She had told me… that belly dance was not a belly dance… but Oriental art.” Earl Wilson, “Samia Wiggles Message In Oriental Dancing,” Sarasota Herald Tribune, June 28, 1953.
primarily sexual, and from the North American stereotypical ideas of "belly dancer" which focused on the sexuality of lower-abdomen movement. Her movement indicated hers was not the cooch or danse du ventre that had evolved in North America: it was movement she articulated as part of her national artistic identity. The Egyptian state’s antiquity and geography have resulted in a strong sense of regional identity, and pride in Gamal’s performances amongst the populace was strong. The successful end of official colonial control after the 1952 Revolution in Egypt heightened nationalist sentiment as well, and perhaps influenced Gamal’s words on national dance.

Gamal’s insistence on her performance being art, national dance, and different from “belly dance” was largely ignored by the North American public. This is evident in newspaper articles that record responses to her interviews and shows all over the U.S. and in Toronto between 1951 and 1953. In 1953, Gamal opened at the Latin Quarter (a popular nightclub in Miami). Due to her reputation as a belly dancer, Miami police sent someone to keep an eye on the performance. According to Gamal, the only complaint made by the officers was that she wore “too much” clothing during her performance. She responded with “how do you like that? But I do not wear any less.”

Her costuming at the performance, as evident in photos, was the established bra-belt-skirt uniform of the Egyptian cabaret raqs sharqi dancer. This style of costume had slightly more coverage than styles increasingly favoured by some Greek, Turkish, and American performers during the 1950s, who, in many cases, would perform in pasties (adhesive patches, often decorated, designed to cover nipples and areolae), or with completely see-through (or even absent) skirts. While the police comment was certainly meant as a joke, it

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referenced a focus on the female body and its exhibition. Gamal indicated to American audiences she hoped they would see the artistry in her dance along with skin and sex-appeal. Gamal would also appear in MGM’s *Valley of the Kings* in 1954, where ads in the *Toronto Star* touted her as a “temptress” in the “far-off land of the Nile.” Despite her interviews, it was very difficult to shake the popular Orientalist contextualization of *raqs sharqi* in North America.

Turkish-style dancer Nejla Ateş, though, did not mind wearing less and thrived doing it in America during the 1950s. After making a name for herself in Turkey, she made her entertainment debut in North America. Of Turkish and Crimean descent, she was born Naciye Batır in Constanta, Romania, and took on Nejla Ateş as a performance name. Ateş first gained fame in Turkey, and later in Paris and the U.S. for her performance of Turkish-style belly dance. She made her Hollywood debut in the films *King Richard and the Crusaders* (1954) and *Son of Sinbad* (1955). On Broadway, she also became known for her starring role in *Fanny*, which peaked in popularity during the 1950s.39 In *Fanny*, Ateş danced alongside *oud* player Mohammed El Bakkar, performing a “rope dance” and a “slave dance.”40 In shows, she successfully integrated *dans oryantal* with North American harem imagery.

The North American media dubbed Ateş “Turkish Delight,” and she embraced this characterization as she toured North America. When she debuted on the stage of the Royal Alexandra in Toronto for the production of *Fanny* in 1957, *Globe and Mail* journalist Herbert Whittaker remarked that her performance of belly dance was fresh and exciting, concluding “Minsky was never like this.”41 Ateş claimed no teacher for her style of dance. In interviews, she

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said she had “contrived her dance without a lesson after reading in an ancient tome how favourite wives in a harem danced for the Sultan.” This line sold well. Actors and dancers in the U.S. had long crafted their image to achieve maximum interest from the public. Ateş’ tactics were not new. This was show business, and her ancient tome story was not important because of its veracity, but because of the fantasy feeling it evoked amongst American listeners. By considering her travels and analysing her movement in film, a set of varied possible dance influences are revealed. She performed first in Turkey, then in Beirut and Cairo, and despite her claim, clearly developed her style with a variety of influences. Her floor work, use of shimmy and hip articulation were in conversation with the raqs sharqi/dans oryantal of her contemporaries (like Samia Gamal). Turkish delight and harem dreams, though, sold better than a resume of dance influences.

While Ateş may have found inspiration in the concept of Ottoman harem settings, by claiming this as her sole source of inspiration in English interviews, she was strategically positioning herself within an Orientalist performance narrative that would sell well in North America. She drew on stereotype in performance (as did Gamal) in a way that allowed for great fame and success. But where Gamal sought elevation for her form in interviews by stressing its national character and its artistic complexity, Ateş chose to embrace timeless harem imagery in her movement over discussion of national dance, or oryantal as art. Both Ateş and Gamal’s performances in North America during the 1950s indicate North American popular cultural interest in belly dance and the growing role of transnational movement in the development of the North American conception of Middle Eastern dance. Gamal and Ateş’ appeal in both the West

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and East reflects Appadurai’s concepts of mediascapes. Their positioning in global cultural flows of media, and their popularity in North America and the Middle East, effectively reinforced transnational media interconnections in the development of belly dance and its popularity in North America.

**Immigration and Oriental Dance in Montreal and Toronto 1950–1960**

Permanent immigration from the Middle East to Canada was essential in the opening of Canada’s earliest Middle Eastern nightclubs. Montreal, increasingly home to a significant Lebanese and Syrian population in the post-war period, was home to one of Quebec’s earliest Middle Eastern nightclubs, the Sahara Club. Fawzia Amir Rahman, who opened the club, emigrated from Egypt to the U.S. in 1947 and settled in Montreal in ’57. That same year she opened the Sahara Club on Sherbrooke St., where regular *raqs sharqi* performances were centrestage. Amir Rahman was a skilled dancer herself, and could often be found performing there. Like Samia Gamal, Amir Rahman hated when her performance was called belly dance. She too hoped to align her performance with Egyptian identity and to distance her dancing from the stereotypically over-sexed understanding of *raqs sharqi* prevalent in North America. These dancers resisted the consistent pattern of Western cultural domination, appropriation, and misinterpretation of Egyptian heritage and identity. They resisted the persistent desire amongst Westerners to control the meaning of Egyptian histories, arts and culture. To try and achieve an elevated level of respectability for her performance, she insisted her performances were "native folk dance."

46 Hustak, “Sultry Belly Dancer Had Wit and a Great Sense of Style.”
performed in her clubs were the same movements children and families performed in Egyptian homes, as well as at weddings and parties. She wanted her Canadian audience to understand *raqs sharqi* performance as something that was not essentially titillating or shameful.

Amir Rahman was very aware that in belly dance’s original North American introduction, understanding of the form’s non-sexual joy in private or celebratory contexts had been largely lost. In an interview from 2007, reminiscing about her dance career, Rahman stated:

> The name belly dancing makes it sound vulgar, but this is not so. It is a movement of many parts of the body. It is not indecent dancing. It is not like taking your clothes off. There is nothing obscene about it.

All did not share Rahman’s understanding of the dance form in Montreal, and her performances landed her in court more than once for obscenity charges.

Montreal’s Police Department, and evidently Quebec’s legal system were not in support of Amir Rahman’s complex attempt at re-positioning belly dance as respectable in Quebec. She was charged with performing immoral dance in 1960, but was acquitted. She was again charged with obscenity in 1961, but this case too was dismissed. In 1961, Constable Mary Elm finally managed to make a charge stick. She charged Amir Rahman with “giving an indecent performance” after she witnessed Rahman invite a male audience member to participate in her set at the Sahara Club. That same night, three other dancers from another unnamed club were also charged for indecent performance and were committed for trial on the same date as Amir Rahman. In 1963, Rahman was found guilty of performing an “immoral gesture,” because she had trailed her veil over a male audience member’s head during the performance. She was

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
ordered to pay a $200 fine, or face 30 days in prison.\textsuperscript{50} Because of her conviction, Amir Rahman faced a deportation order in 1964. She lost an appeal against the deportation order, but, in the end, it was never enforced, and she remained in Montreal.\textsuperscript{51} Her cases’ publication and traction in news media across Canada spurred interest in belly dance.

Amir Rahman was a foundational figure in Canada’s postwar dance scene and added complexity to public discussion of belly dance through her legal battles. Despite her best efforts in Canada, her conviction and deportation order indicate that public belly dance continued to face both admiration and moral censure in its new Canadian context. It was a struggle for dancers like Amir Rahman to reposition their performances in the North American context as respectable, due to prevailing attitudes about race and sexuality (especially in Quebec at this time). Notwithstanding her numerous legal battles, Amir Rahman remained in Montreal and performed publicly up until 1970.\textsuperscript{52} Amir Rahman went on to be a primary teacher of the influential Montreal dancer and teacher Gamila Asfour, who began training with her in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{53} Rahman’s students and her students’ students would go on to have both direct and indirect contact with the nightclub and belly dance scene that would begin developing in Toronto during the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} “Belly Dancer Loses Her Appeal,” \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, March 12, 1964, 38.
\textsuperscript{52} Hustak, “Sultry Belly Dancer Had Wit and a Great Sense of Style.”
\textsuperscript{54} Various interviews reveal dancers performed in both Toronto and Montreal during this period. For example, Eddy Manneh routinely brought dancers to perform in Montreal and spent a significant amount of time there himself. Brenda Bell spent time performing and learning in Montreal before coming to perform and live in Toronto during the late 1970s. Wagdi Bechara, owner of Cleopatra restaurant, brought dancers from Montreal to perform in his establishment. Eddy Manneh, interview by Anne Vermeyden, February 10, 2015, 5–6; Bell, interview, 5–6; Wagdi Bechara, interview by Anne Vermeyden, February 17, 2015, 3.

Growing and diversifying Middle Eastern populations across Canada impacted how belly dance performances were advertised and presented. Well-established fascination with oriental dance in North America found space to grow alongside the increasing presence of populations from the Middle East in Canada as racist immigration policy was dismantled. In 1962, Ellen Fairclough, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, brought forward new regulations that eliminated official racial discrimination as a major element of Canada's immigration policy. She also spearheaded legislation which removed race as a consideration for entry to Canada. Under Order-in-Council PC 1962-86, unsponsored immigrants who could show that they could support themselves until they had work and that they had the required skill or education, now had a chance to enter Canada no matter their race, colour, or nationality.55 This initial 1962 removal of discrimination in immigration policy was codified further with Order-in-Council PC 1967-1616. This Order-in-Council began the introduction of a points-based immigration system under which immigrants were assessed for entry to Canada with points awarded for education, occupational skills, job prospects, age, proficiency in Canada's official languages, and character. Race was no longer a consideration in any official area of immigration policy.56 This points system was heralded as progressive in a world that was increasingly critical of racial discrimination.57 The

55 Peter Li indicates this liberalization stemmed from Canada’s economic need for skilled immigrants that were not to be found in adequate numbers from European nations. However, the broader literature indicates concern over discrimination and political motivations were also central to this policy change. Freda Hawkins, Ninette Kelley, Michael Trebilcock, and Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos all suggest that these shifts were also a result of changing social norms which condemned racism in Canada. Knowles, Strangers at Our Gates, 187; Peter Li, Destination Canada: Immigration Debates and Issues (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24; Triadafilopoulos, “Dismantling White Canada: Race, Rights and the Origins of the Points System,” 16; Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy, 2nd Revised edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).
57 Ibid.
1967 Immigration Act allowed for three categories of applicants for immigration, including sponsored applications (who were dependents or relatives of Canadians or Permanent Residents), independent applications who would be assessed with the points system, and finally refugees, who would be admitted according to humanitarian concerns. While race was no longer an explicit concern, the system did not attempt to address issues of systemic privilege in any sense. Later scholarship would criticize the policy for being sexist/discriminatory because of the use of “neutral” systems that do not account for the struggle of the most vulnerable, who are often people of colour. Newcomers with means from across the Middle East (or those who came as refugees/humanitarian cases) increasingly made up a larger percentage of Canadian immigration. The primarily Syrian-Lebanese domination of Arab immigration to Canada began to shift. Because of this shift, Canadian immigration offices opened for the first time in the Middle East. For example, in Egypt, the government opened an immigration office in 1963, and in Lebanon, one was opened in 1968.

The subsequent spike in Middle Eastern immigration was substantial. In the 1960s, 27,042 Arab immigrants came to Canada, followed by 36,506 immigrants of Arab origin during the 1970s, and 61,893 during the 1980s. This is a very large increase when compared to the period between 1950-1960 when only approximately 3,000 Arab newcomers entered the country.

58 Hayani, “Arabs in Canada: Assimilation or Integration?,” 385.
60 Hennebry and Amery, “‘Arab’ Migration to Canada: Far from Monolithic,” 20.
61 The census figures for 1951, 1961, 1981 and 1986 were based on “ethnic origin,” while the data for 1971 was based on “mother tongue.” This, combined with the small sample size of the census, especially for such a small ethnic/linguistic community in Canada, according to the analysis of Farid E. Ohan and Ibrahim Hayani, meant that these numbers did not necessarily capture the true size of the Arab population in Canada during these periods. These census numbers also do not account for individuals who may have had multiple ethnic/linguistic identities. Farid E. Ohan and Ibrahim Hayani, The Arabs in Ontario: A Misunderstood Community (Toronto: Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation of Canada, 1993), 34; Hayani, “Arabs in Canada: Assimilation or Integration?,” 284.
as immigrants. Immigration from previously "undesirable" groups of southern European immigrants also increased after the introduction of the points system. Greek immigration increased 84% between 1960 and 1970 over the previous decade.\(^6^2\) By the 1970s, the Danforth neighbourhood in Toronto (along Danforth avenue, East of the Don Valley) was an area of concentrated Greek immigration. Between 40-50,000 men and women of Greek heritage called the Danforth area home by 1979.\(^6^3\) This concentration of Greek newcomers resulted in the area hosting a variety of Greek and Mediterranean restaurants and clubs throughout the 1970s that would host many of Toronto's belly dancers. For Arab immigrants, Ontario was the province of choice. Between 1941 and 1993, at least 1 in 3 Arab Canadians had lived in Ontario.\(^6^4\) Chain migration and access to work ensured many of these newcomers made Toronto and the Greater Toronto area home. Data from 1981-1992 indicates Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area received almost 55% of all Arab migration to Ontario.

The liberalization of immigration policy was not the only reason for this spike in Middle Eastern immigration to Canada. A variety of push factors were also key. These included the violence and turbulence resulting from the creation of Israel in Arab-Israeli Conflict of 1948 and its aftermath, which resulted in refugee movement across the Middle East and into Canada. Egypt's 1952 Revolution and Gamal Abdul Nasser's consolidation of power and nationalization of a variety of elements in the Egyptian economy also spurred emigration. Between 1956 and 1961, 940 immigrants that came to Canada listed Egypt as their last place of permanent


\(^6^3\) Bruce Ward, “The Danforth: Oh, the Changes- Immigrants Move out as the Young Move in,” The Toronto Star, May 6, 1979, A20.

residence. Most of these immigrants were minorities from Egypt, or members of the upper classes, or those who had lost property in Nasser's reforms.

A series of wars with Israel (in 1967, 1973, and 1982), the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1985), the Iranian Revolution (1979), and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) also resulted in refugee movement and emigration from the Middle East. The Six Day War in 1967 specifically spurred emigration which effected belly dance performance in Toronto. Many interviewees in the oral history underpinning this study cited this event as influencing their movement to Canada. For example, Eddy Manneh, the owner of Freddy’s Dance Academy, one of Toronto’s earliest belly dance academies, left Lebanon for Canada in the wake of the Six Day War. Wagdi Bechara, who would come to own the Cleopatra restaurant/club in Toronto during the early 1980s, left Egypt in 1968 as a result of the political situation in the wake of the Six Day War, eventually settling in Toronto to be near his sister after spending a number of years in Portugal. Roula Said, who began performing as a belly dancer professionally in Toronto during the late 1980s, left Palestine with her family in the wake of this same conflict. The spike in immigration and refugee movement to Canada following the Six Day War peaked in 1975 at the start of the Lebanese Civil War, which also contributed to increased Lebanese immigration. During the Lebanese Civil War Canada adopted special measures to help people fleeing the conflict. An emergency visa office was set up in Cyprus to process claims during Lebanon’s Civil War. All of these factors, and many others contributed to the growth of Middle Eastern and Arab populations in Canada.

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65 “Immigration to Canada by Country of Last Permanent Residence, 1956 to 1976: Table A385-416.”
66 Manneh, interview, 1.
67 Bechara, interview, 2.
69 Hennebry and Amery, “‘Arab’ Migration to Canada: Far from Monolithic,” 21.
Belly Dance in Toronto 1960–1980

Increased immigration to Canada from the Middle East was an essential factor in the increased volume of belly dance performance. Alongside this spike in Toronto’s Middle Eastern population, belly dance performance became more common in night-time spots and restaurants. The earliest regular post-war belly dance performances in Toronto clubs and restaurants were presented by newcomers from the Middle East, Montreal, and the U.S. as there were not yet many local Toronto dancers. Local women who entered the scene tended to learn on-the-job from these already established performers. Oral interviews and research in the archives of the Globe and Mail and Toronto Star indicate belly dance performance in Toronto was relatively rare during the 1950s. During the 1960s, however, it began increasing in popularity loosely correlated to a growing Middle Eastern population and the increased popularization of belly dance in Western popular culture.

Belly dance’s spike in postwar popularity also aligns with increased North American political involvement in the Middle East. Belly dance interest was connected to the region’s growing presence in popular imagination as American involvement in the region grew. Even though legally, racism and stereotyping began to face serious challenge in both Canada and the U.S., these stereotypes were still guiding foreign policy towards the Middle East. Middle Eastern stereotyping intensified in response to American political involvement in the Middle East. American involvement with the new state of Israel, followed by conflict over oil and growing popular evangelical interest in the Holy Land fuelled the success of entertainment focusing on the Middle East. Epics like Exodus (1960) and The Ten Commandments (1956) and the popular
resurgence of belly dance performance are linkable to increasing cultural and political intersection between North America and various areas of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{70} Counter-culture also embraced the apparent liberation of such ‘sexual’ dancing. At the same time, American imperial activity in effecting control over oil, or achieving allies and military presence in the region, also contributed to the interest and use of stereotypes about the region. The Middle East became a place that mattered to many Americans and Canadians, and fascination with it in popular entertainment grew. Douglas Little also asserts that this period is when American Orientalism took off in a significant way, as American policymakers increasingly based their decisions upon racial dichotomies and stereotypes.\textsuperscript{71} By portraying Middle Eastern culture as backward and passionate, media and popular culture helped sell the idea that American intervention in the region was necessary to create “peace” amongst the uncivilized peoples residing in the region.

In Canada, Orientalist depictions of the Middle East served to justify American and Canadian interference in the Middle East. Stereotyping against Arabs and Muslims, in particular, remained strong into the 1980s, and well past the end-point of this study.\textsuperscript{72} Canadian and American political and military involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts in this period resulted in the re-entrenchment of many virulent Arab and other Middle Eastern stereotypes in the media.\textsuperscript{73} Furthermore, the inequitable treatment of men and women of colour persisted within Canada.\textsuperscript{74} The old cinema tropes of villainous and sexual Middle Easterners dominated.\textsuperscript{75} As newcomers brought dance traditions with them to North America, their decisions on how to represent

\textsuperscript{70} McAlister, Epic Encounters, 1, 43.
\textsuperscript{71} Douglas Little, American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 10.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 127–28.
\textsuperscript{74} Backhouse, Colour-Coded.
\textsuperscript{75} Shaheen, Reel Bad Arabs.
themselves and these dances were informed by ongoing stereotype and discrimination. Private parties and celebrations had performances geared towards local newcomer communities, but it appears many early hotel nightclub shows seemed to have been shaped to meet white audience expectations, even though movement and music was increasingly informed by newcomers from the Middle East.

In this context, both Canadians and newcomers recognized that harem hijinks sold. Toronto’s Barclay Hotel's Club Oasis, which opened in 1958, was home to "Toronto's Original Oriental Revue" beginning in 1962. The establishment, then owned by Al Siegel, hired belly dancers for the nightclub’s lineup for the first time in early 1962. They were a hit. He kept them on, and the Oriental Revue was born. Early Club Oasis dancers included Afet (listed as originally from Turkey) and the starlet dancers. In 1964, the Oasis also hired Amira Nasser, a dancer from the U.S., to headline at the nightclub's shows. The dancers performed in a variety show line-up with comedians, singers, and local bands. In a 1966 Star article, evidence of Canadian women performing (as opposed to visiting dancers, or talent from the U.S.) emerged: Lilli Cziesla, a Torontonian dancer (born in Heidelberg) was listed as performing in the early 1960s at Oasis as Princess Layana. The 1966 article focused on her double life as a grocery store clerk and professional belly dancer who performed in Toronto and all over Ontario. The article revealed that Cziesla frequently travelled to perform for miners and workers in Northern Ontario as a belly dancer throughout the 1960s. She credited a Turkish dancer at the Oasis with introducing her to belly dance and with being her first teacher. These variety nightclub shows at

hotels catered to mainly Western audiences in Toronto, and predominantly brought American
dancers in to perform during the early 1960s. These American dancers had learned from
immigrants, or descendants of immigrants originally from Turkey, Greece, and, to a lesser extent,
the Arabic-speaking world. With a comedian, Western bands, tunes, and a mix of dancer origin
points and training, the style of movement and the energy was uniquely North American. These
hotel clubs catering primarily to Canadian audiences were different from specifically Middle
Eastern venues that catered to mainly Middle Eastern audiences. Specifically, Middle Eastern
venues would become more popular in Toronto later during the 1970s, alongside increasing
immigrant Middle Eastern populations.

Canadian hotel clubs that picked up on the developing belly dance trend (like the
Barclay) often hired U.S. or Middle Eastern dancers to perform in their shows early in the 1960s,
as there were few professional established belly dancers who were residents of Toronto. Gerry
Barker, a journalist who reported on Club Oasis for a piece on night life in the *Toronto Daily Star*
in 1962, stated, "Current headliner [at Club Oasis] is a Wisconsin-oriented cooch-terper named
Tara and she is accompanied by a short line of girls, comic Larry Day and a singer."\(^79\) "Cooch-
terper" was a terminological throwback to the early twentieth-century cooch performances.\(^80\) The
term was no doubt appropriate because of the burlesque-style variety show style of the
performances. However, Tara Auringer did not perform the hoochy-coochy. Hoochy-coochy was
a catch-all for any style of non-Western dance considered provocative because of the movement
of the abdomen or buttocks. These dances were performed often in burlesque, circus, or
sideshow settings. It was applied to African dance, Middle Eastern dance, and any provocative

mix of these and other forms. Her performances did not occur in these settings, and her
movements reflected a mixture of Middle Eastern influences stemming from Middle Eastern
immigration.81 The Wisconsin State Journal described her performance as authentically
Arabian.82 Authenticity, a subjective concept, has little meaning here, but according to many
American dancers from this period, her movements reflected a heterogeneous mixture of Middle
Eastern influences informed by her artistic vision and her contact with immigrants from the
Middle East.83 After her brief time in Toronto, she returned to Wisconsin and continued to
perform and teach throughout the 1970s.84

Migration and movement from the U.S. to Canada was essential to this early growth of
belly dance in the nightclubs of Toronto. This occurred in part because belly dance’s
popularization post-Second World War occurred first in the United States of America. Clubs and
restaurants featuring belly dancers started to become popular in the 1950s in American urban
centres, for example, the Fez in Los Angeles (1959), Club Zahra in Boston (1952), and The
Casbah area in New York, or Greektown.85 These spots attracted Greek, Arab, Turkish, and
Armenian musicians, and also belly dancers. Musicians fused musical styles for belly dancers
that were, early on, often recent newcomers from the Middle East or women of Middle Eastern
origin in the U.S. But, increasingly throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and certainly by the 1970s,

81 Informal communication.
83 Informal discussion with American dancers who were performing during the 1960s and 1970s in a variety of
areas, including California, the Midwest, Washington DC, and New York reveal that American women who began
belly dancing in the 1950s and 1960s often did so through direct contact with newcomers from the Middle East.
Even if Tara had learned from an American teacher- the style of American belly dance that had blossomed quickly in
this period was directly connected to the heavy influences of newcomers to the U.S. from Greece, Turkey, Armenia,
and Lebanon. It was kept in check by the dominance of these communities in the Middle Eastern nightclub
entertainment scene.
84 AP, “Belly Dancing Wiggles Higher in Popularity,” The Daily Tribune (Wisconsin Rapids), September 8, 1972, 9;
“Nutcracker’s a Holiday Feast,” 33.
85 Paul Eugene Monty, “Serena, Ruth St. Denis, and the Evolution of Belly Dance in America (1876 1976)” (PhD,
New York University, 1986), 233.
the majority of dancers were white American women. By the late 1950s, from Maine to Wisconsin and California, belly dance in supper clubs and nightclub settings had arrived. Paul Monty suggests that while audiences in New York were originally generally Middle Eastern, American interest in belly dance clubs and shows peaked in the late 1950s and into the 1960s due to police suppression of strip club performances. The Middle Eastern clubs, he argues, were first established to cater to local communities of immigrants. Greektown, for example, was primarily home to a mixed community of people from Syria, Lebanon, Greece, and Turkey. It was by catering to these audiences that belly dance shows got their start, and in the early days, dancers were hired from the Middle East, or from within local communities. As the form became more popular, and demand spiked, white women increasingly dominated performance. As there was massive American popularity for belly dance in major urban centres, these American dancers, and musicians with good experience were invited to perform in newly opening Canadian establishments. Dancers from New York were among some of the first to begin performing in the Toronto nightclub and restaurant scene.

Toronto’s Westover Hotel, which also began holding regular belly dance performances in approximately 1961, hosted American dancers who had gotten their start in New York’s Middle Eastern clubs. For example, the Westover presented the 1962 debut of “Nejma Queen of the Harem” and “Johanna, the Darling of the East.” Johanna was based in New York City’s Greektown, the home of a booming Middle Eastern club and restaurant scene. The makeup of the variety shows featuring belly dance at Club Oasis and the Westover were mixed and always

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shifting. Immigration and transnational dance movement through touring artists and media played an essential role in the development of Middle Eastern entertainment in Toronto during the 1960s. Greek, Arabic, and Turkish music and performance elements were often mixed within one show. This was the heterogeneous nature of belly dance's materialization in the Canadian nightclub scene in the 1960s— it emerged out of the movement of men and women from the Middle East to Canada, and from the movement of Americans in contact with Middle Eastern culture to Canada. It flourished as cultural encounter between North America and the Middle East intensified.

The Harem Show and Tensions over Representation

The harem space was central in this entertainment-focused cultural encounter, or cultural imagining. During the 1960s, and into the early 1970s, harem-themed live dance shows in Toronto were very popular. The forbidden harem’s popularity as an entertainment tool was not new and was already booming in the U.S. and Hollywood films. Films like Road to Morocco (1942), Kismet (1944), Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves (1944), Abbot and Costello Lost in a Harem (1944), and Harum Scarum (1965) fuelled harem belly dance show interest. Vincent Price's Son of Sinbad (1955) is also a good example of how belly dance was popularly associated with harem scenes and heterosexual male fantasy. For instance, when Nejla Ateş danced in the market scene of this film, the audience shown was entirely male.\(^9^1\) In the harem-banquet scene, star Sally Forest, in an even more revealing costume than Ateş’ earlier standard cabaret bra-belt set, performed with the clear purpose of seduction in competition with the other women present. The image of joyful, celebratory dance done in a private setting, not centred on sexual display, was not something evident in harem-films. Instead, belly dance was an exotic dance of

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\(^9^1\) Ted Tetzlaff, Son of Sinbad (RKO Pictures, 1955).
seduction. Capitalizing on the harem dream, restaurants and nightclubs in Toronto (and across North America) made use of names like “The Sultan’s Tent” and the “Harem Upstairs Sidedoor” to encourage association of the environs with this imagined place of the enslaved Eastern feminine.\(^{92}\) In 1962, Torontonians could see the shows of “Nejma Queen of the Harem,” and in 1965, the Victoria Hotel at 3363 Yonge St. introduced American dancer Stella Bella as "Canada's most authentic Harem Dancer."\(^{93}\) By 1970, Michael Safi’s “Topless Harem Revue” was headlining at different Toronto establishments, offering, as seen in Figure 4.1, "girls, girls, girls."\(^{94}\)

While many harem presentations were offered by white American dancers, or in Western establishments, certain newcomers from the Middle East also chose to access the harem in their presentations of Middle Eastern dance and entertainment. Michael Safi, who came to Canada from Lebanon, ran a Harem Revue that presented a variety of acts focused on multiple belly dance sets and Middle Eastern music in an imagined harem setting. He toured the Revue around Canada, settling his show in Toronto for a period during the early 1970s at the Blue

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\(^{92}\) These were all clubs and restaurants that existed in Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s.

\(^{93}\) “Ad for Stella Bella Harem Dancer.”

\(^{94}\) “Ad for Michel Safi’s Topless Harem Revue,” 49.
Orchid Club located at 529 Bloor St. West. Michael Safi established a mixed revue starring primarily young Canadian women. He ran it along with his wife Samia and the production’s Master of Ceremonies, a professional comedian, ballroom dancer, choreographer, and costume designer named George Cortez (also of Lebanese origin, who came to Toronto via Montreal).

During the early 1970s, Safi’s Revue performed two shows a night, six days a week, Monday through Saturday, from approximately 9 pm until 1 am. Shows began with an opening act focusing on the playful use of props; in some sets, the performers danced topless while making use of large boas and feathers. One patron recalled active strip-tease the Harem Revue’s sets (with pasties), while Anne Kokot, who performed in the Revue beginning in 1972, stated that the opening performances were simply topless (there was no stripping). Kokot recalled each set in the performance included a variety of costume changes, showcasing different cabaret-style belly dance costumes. These were primarily bra and belt combinations mixed with skirts and a variety of accessories. George Cortez made some, but many were also made and hand-beaded by the dancers themselves. Safi played oud or violin during performances, and his wife Samia sang, sometimes in English, French, Arabic, or Hebrew. For the dancers, finger cymbals were a staple during certain sets. The dancers also routinely performed with veils.

The performances in the Revue were very interactive and focused on audience participation. Dancers routinely danced on top of tables, even performing complex floor work while precariously balanced beside food and drink. Sometimes they would balance on top of

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95 Kokot, interview, 3.
96 The discrepancy between accounts may be indicative of the show’s change over time. Perhaps strip-tease was phased out by the time Kokot began dancing. Or, perhaps rumour mixed with memory. Manneh, interview, 2.
97 Kokot, interview, 3–4.
98 George Sawa, interview by Anne Vermeyden, September 20, 2014, 7; Kokot, interview, 3.
99 Kokot, interview, 6.
glasses or bottles. Leila Jamal, a dancer from Guelph, who occasionally performed in the Harem Revue, was renowned for her ability to perform belly dance atop a single beer bottle. She could also perform gravity-defying back bends while balancing a full beer on her head.\textsuperscript{100} “Egyptian haircuts” and “turbans” were also popular; these were where a dancer would chest-shimmy over a male patron’s hair, or wrap her veil around his head.\textsuperscript{101} Dancers always encouraged patrons to dance with them at some point in the night. As dancers performed, they encouraged body tipping. Body tipping practices include the tucking of bills into a dancer’s costume. This reinforced perception of belly dance as primarily commoditized sexual display.\textsuperscript{102} It also reinforced the imagined harem as a place of play.

Humour and fun were constant companions to the representations of sexuality at the Revue. Elements of burlesque tradition (like Cortez’s use of jokes and commentary during performances) worked to put North American audiences at ease. Cortez’s commentary and burlesque-style jokes kept the Revue’s sets moving along through the night. The burlesque tone of his humour was unsurprising, as he had previously worked as an MC for performances at Viceroy Burlesque Theatre and Starvin’ Marvin’s.\textsuperscript{103} The bawdy jokes kept the sexuality of the performances central, yet disarmed for Western audiences.

The decision to integrate belly dance and Middle Eastern music into a style of show that was accessible to Western audiences was financially rewarding in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Patrons tipped dancers and musicians hundreds of dollars a night. With the show running in Toronto twice a night, six days a week, on top of additional tours and performances across

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 6.
\end{flushleft}
Ontario and Quebec, the members of the Revue were making good money. Anne Rasmussen suggests in her study of the development of the American Middle Eastern nightclub scene that newcomer musicians like Safi encouraged or accessed Orientalist stereotype in performance, not just to earn money, but also to connect with American audiences. It was a strategic decision on more than one level in the entertainment culture of the period.

The decision to connect belly dance with strip-tease, topless performance, and/or burlesque in the Canadian context had a considerable precedent before the Second World War, as indicated in the previous chapter. Some of the early white American and Canadian belly dancers previously performed strip-tease, and America’s earliest professional belly dance school also provided education in strip-tease. In 1964, the Stairway to Stardom which was opened in in New York City by Joe Williams, Edward Dankell, and Dolores Dankell, specialized specifically in strip-tease and belly dance education for professional performers. Dolores Dankell (a famous strip artist whose stage name Miss Dolores Du Vaughn), believed that since “stripgeries” were going out of business across America, and were being replaced with “belly dance palaces” it only made sense to her to start training both interested women and out of work strippers to perform belly dance.

In Toronto, The Harem Revue was far from the only venue or group of live performers combining belly dance with strip-tease and/or burlesque. Belly dance performances in Toronto in the 1970s were sometimes presented alongside strip performances. Also, Nejla Ateş routinely posed and performed in costumes featuring pasties, which had originally developed in the

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104 See previous chapter.
105 Monty, 241.
context of North American burlesque and strip tease as a method of self-censure to keep otherwise topless performances legal. Ateş wore this style of costume on the cover of risqué adult magazine *People Today*’s November 18th, 1953 cover and again on its August 24th, 1955 cover. She was also immortalized in pasties on the cover of Mohammed El-Bakkar’s 1957 Port Said album. Ateş accessed burlesque influences in her transnational articulation of belly dance.108 According to Gypsy Rose Lee, Ateş also utilized burlesque movements and styling in her performances. Rose Lee claimed Ateş stole routine elements directly from her production *Babes in Bagdad*.109 It is important to note that Ateş was not alone in her performance conversation with burlesque costuming. In Turkey and Greece during this period, pasties were quite popular as a costuming choice. Greek dancer Boubouka Papas, for example, headlined on a variety of LP covers wearing pasties and performs in a variety of films in the same costuming. Princess Banu, another popular Turkish dancer during the 1970s also wore pasties and sometimes removed her skirt in sets.110 Anecdotally, certain dancers indicated that at certain clubs featuring belly dance in New York during the 1960s pasties were required costuming elements. Ateş, Papas, and Banu, like Safi and his Harem Revue, were comfortable presenting belly dance forms that were in conversation with burlesque and portrayals of harem fantasy. These artists presented dance that focused on presentations of female sexuality that were racialized in their Orientalist contextualization. This use of harem imagery may have been a move to acculturate their entertainment, a decision that turned out to be quite lucrative.

109 Rose Lee’s accusation is ironic, as many elements of the burlesque she was performing had been lifted from Middle Eastern dancers who began touring North America earlier that century. See *Dancing in Paradise, Burning in Hell*, 193.
However, the topless performances in Safi’s Canadian Harem Revue increasingly had mixed reception as the 1970s wore on, resulting in the decision to end them in 1972. Dancer Anne Kokot recalled it was a fad of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s for dancers to go topless. She felt there was no shame in her body, and concluded, “either you saw something, or you didn’t.” However, around 1972, she and the other girls dancing in the Revue complained to MC George Cortez that they wanted to end the topless number. According to Kokot’s recollection, after she and the other performers began complaining about having to dance topless, Cortez and Safi agreed to cut out that section of the Revue’s performance.

Condemnation from the growing Middle Eastern newcomer community for fusing belly dance with strip-tease and a growing number of professional dancers seeking increased respectability for their chosen profession may also have impacted the Revue’s decision to end the topless shows. Both George Sawa (who came to Toronto from Egypt in 1970) and Eddy Manneh (who visited Canada from Lebanon in 1967) expressed a general condemnation of Safi’s show mixing belly dance with topless performance. They both felt it was inappropriate and even shameful. George Sawa recalled that when he arrived in Toronto in the early 1970s, he was hired as musical accompaniment for a belly dancer who began to strip in front of a primarily Arab audience. He felt sorry for the dancer, who had an incongruous North American understanding of belly dance that differed greatly from that of her audience. He watched as the theatre emptied in a condemnatory response to her performance. The integration of stripping

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111 Kokot, interview, 21.
112 Ibid.
113 Manneh, interview, 2; Sawa, interview, 6–7.
114 Sawa, interview, 7.
and belly dance in North America was nothing new, but recently arrived audiences from the Middle East did not always respond well to this variation on belly dance performance.

Even though many newcomer audiences condemned the association and combination of strip-tease with belly dance, the style of belly dance presentation which focused on explicit sexuality and stereotype did not disappear. A later evolution of Michael Safi’s Harem Revue was the “Harem Belly Dancer Revue” which opened in 1976 at an establishment called The Harem Upstairs Sidedoor. This establishment billed itself in advertising with the line, “Be a sultan for a night amid Mid-Eastern style music and entertainment.”115 The owner of The Harem Upstairs Sidedoor, Al Hogan, was originally from Conception Bay Newfoundland. In an article advertising his new nightclub, he hoped his harem would attract respectable Torontonians to “trade out for an evening of unorthodox fun.” The club’s “quasi-erotic tapestries” were paired with a red decor, a soul singer from Jamaica, and a rock group called Revival that played “sultry renditions of Summertime and Hava Nagillah.”116 A mishmash of cultural productions and colours at this establishment gave Torontonians an othered space for individuals to embrace the exotified erotic.

In 1976, Frank Rasky interviewed two of the Harem Upstairs Sidedoor’s dancers for an article in the Star: Dakashi and Princess Afet Amal. While Dakashi maintained her performance was meant to be sensual rather than sexual, Afet Amal declared that “the idea is to make a lot of sexy moves that turn a lot of men on.”117 Dakahsi, even though she was performing in a situation that evoked harem fantasy, still hoped to position her performance in a way that would increase its respectability. For her, the embarrassment was not because of the stereotype, but because of

116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
the implication in sexual performance. Afet Amal was comfortable with the primacy of sexual performance in this context, while Dakashi hoped to distance herself from it, even though her environs were thoroughly stereotypical and designed to evoke feelings of sexual, othered space.

But, as Toronto’s Middle Eastern audiences grew, so too did demand for less overtly stereotypical entertainment. Increased immigration to Canada from the Middle East was an essential factor in the increased volume of belly dance performance in the 1970s and 1980s. Establishments and dancers who catered to recent newcomers tastes as opposed to primarily Western fantasies emerged. In 1979, Frank Rasky of the Toronto Star wrote "The [oriental dance] enthusiasts are mainly immigrants from the Middle East - more than 40,000 Arab and 80,000 Greek - and they’re a picky bunch of purists about the fine points of their favourite cabaret entertainment." Many of these newcomers were economic migrants with means, young professionals who were well educated, and they were frequenting clubs that were increasingly geared to primarily Middle Eastern audiences. Yasmina Ramzy’s interview corroborates this, as she recalled that a wave of young, professional Arab immigration in the 1970s and early 1980s had a major impact on the club scene in Toronto. She felt that these men and women were in the prime of their lives and they populated Middle Eastern nightclubs and restaurants in order to enjoy the entertainment (including live Arabic music and belly dance shows) they had known back home.

Thus, there was some tension in the city amongst dancers and communities over how belly dance performances should be be presented at clubs. Certain newcomers and Canadians


\[^{119}\] Bechara, interview, 3.

\[^{120}\] Yasmina Ramzy, August 20, 2014, 47.
hoped to profit from embracing North American Orientalist stereotype and by highlighting the sexuality of the form. Many had no issue appealing to Western audiences through the combination of belly dance performance with strip-tease. But, as immigrant audiences grew, many tried to present belly dance that was more congruous with styles being presented in the Middle East at the time, which did not include direct association with burlesque or strip-tease. Others hoped to either try and reflect the complex love-hate relationship with belly dance as it was performed in the Middle East while still striving for the dance’s artistic and moral elevation (by distancing moves from sexuality with a variety of chorographic tactics). Newcomers wanted to enjoy their cultural heritage in performances, but also wanted to resist the racialized and sexual implications that came as a result of the North American club culture, and also, due to some of the sexualized implications of public belly dance performance as they existed “back home.” A mixture of both conservative and liberal attitudes in Toronto meant dancers had to make performance decisions carefully.

Toronto’s Dahlia Obadia was one of these dancers who sought to separate her performance from sexualized representations of belly dance in Canada. Obadia, born in Marrakesh in 1941 to a Moroccan-Jewish family, first experienced *raqs sharqi* as a young girl in private, through her interactions with their family’s maid, Zohra. Very shy, and aware that public belly dance was equated to prostitution in her social circles in Morocco, Obadia did not begin to dance in public until she reached Canada.121 At age 29, in 1967, she heard an ad on the radio for belly dance classes at a local church in Toronto, her new home. She went. Something about her

121 “You just do not do belly dance. It’s not good… that’s the way it was judged by society. In Morocco, a woman danced when she had no family or because she got divorced, or her husband died. She danced if she had no other choice. If I had dared to dance in public there my family would have thought I was a prostitute.” Dahlia Obadia, interview by Anne Vermeyden, October 9, 2014, 3.
new context, she believed perhaps her position as a mother, and her desire for an enjoyable hobby, allowed her to overcome the fear of stigma and attend the class.

After a few classes from her South American instructor, Anna Maria Fuentes, Obadia began performing informally. Her debut was in Fuentes’ home for a group of women, where she wore a costume she had made herself. Through her dance community, Obadia was put in contact with musician George Sawa, who was performing Arabic music in a variety of settings in the city and throughout Ontario. Sawa’s Traditional Arabic Music Ensemble, which coalesced in approximately 1973, gave many concerts with dancers, and Obadia’s performance opportunities grew through contact with Sawa and the Ensemble. During the 1970s and 1980s, she danced at a wide variety of venues including restaurants, weddings, homes, synagogues, and universities. Obadia recalled she was willing to dance in a variety of places, “as long as they let me dance the baladi.” Obadia loved baladi, a localized Egyptian style of belly dance with a heavy, informal flavour. With roots in urban Cairo, it was the style of dance typically performed by families in homes and at weddings. Baladi had a different quality than did the raqs sharqi developed for nightclub entertainment in Cairo over the twentieth century.

Obadia strove to remove overt sexual display from her performance and achieved an element of respectability in Canada. She avoided settings where her performances would be sexualized. She was very selective in where and how she would perform in order to achieve this. She avoided harem shows, cabarets, and certain nightclubs. She credits her connection to George

\[^{122}\text{Ibid., 2.}\]
\[^{123}\text{Sawa, interview, 3.}\]
\[^{124}\text{Obadia, interview, 1.}\]
\[^{125}\text{For more on the unique meaning of baladi in the Egyptian-dance context see Roushdy, Femininity and Dance in Egypt.}\]
Sawa as having made her enjoy performing in Canada, as he helped her attain access to
audiences that did not automatically sexualize her performance.

Respect for belly dance as art, and a desire to separate the form from transgressive sexual
display was a constantly resurfacing concern for dancers and musicians in North America. For
newcomers from the Middle East, this was not just about respectability while performing, but
also, about identity presentation. While Obadia was performing with a group named the Arab
Quartet in 1981 (led by Mohammed Sadek) Obadia and the group were interviewed by the
*Toronto Star*. Sadek explained that Obadia never performed with his group with her stomach
uncovered and that the term “belly dancer” was offensive.\textsuperscript{126} He suggested British soldiers
coined the term by using it for the dances of “cheap” girls. He concluded that it did not
accurately reflect Obadia’s dance or the performance of any dancer who shared the stage with
him. The article states “some customers arrive with ‘harem fantasies’ and are disappointed to
find her dressed, almost head to toe, in a kaftan— the costume traditionally worn during
Egyptian folkloric dancing.”\textsuperscript{127} The decision to costume in this manner was an attempt to
position the dance as respectable by distancing it from sexual display. Obadia’s focus on *baladi*,
on what she described as a sensuous, but not a sexy performance, was an attempt to present
movements void of overt sexual tension. This effort was received well by newcomer audiences.
Articles from the *Star* indicate that her performances were well attended and well-spoken of in
the early 1970s by Middle Eastern audiences especially.

Even Obadia’s religious community responded well to her performances due to her
consistent, careful navigation of sexual stereotypes (both Canadian and Middle Eastern) in public

\textsuperscript{127} Filton, “North York’s Lebanon Is Not the Place for Cheap Thrills,” 16.
performance. During the 1970s, Obadia was asked to perform in her synagogue’s banquet hall by community members. After the show, the audience was thrilled; they gave her a standing ovation. At another synagogue performance, members of the congregation warned their rabbi that they were going to have a dancer and that she was “very decent.” The rabbi responded that he would watch the show, and when it became embarrassing, he would leave. Obadia recalled he watched the entire show and even complimented her afterwards. The movements she performed, and the costuming she chose (often folkloric and one piece, fully covering her body) were both strategic. She deliberately performed in a manner that she was comfortable with and that she knew her community could deem respectable, “decent and spiritual.” This need of Obadia and the variety of communities she danced for (both Arab and Jewish) to separate her performances from cabaret or sexualized representations of raqs sharqi indicate the multiplicity of contextualizations developed in Canada as a result of multiple audiences. Obadia shaped her self-representation by only participating in certain performances. By highlighting the folk nature of her movement, and by choosing costuming elements that distanced her from cabaret performance, Obadia achieved this moderate respectability within her community. The Harem Upstairs Sidedoor and Afet Amal’s goal to excite men was presented in a space designed to titillate white Canadian audiences. The space’s appropriative mix of décor, music, and movement presented an exotic space that contrasted sharply with Obadia’s insistent performance of folklore and baladi in university theatres and Middle Eastern restaurants frequented by recent newcomers to Canada. Dancers worked in very different spaces and approached respectability differently,

\[128\] Obadia, interview, 1.
\[129\] Ibid., 10.
\[130\] Ibid., 1.
each implementing her tactics in this Canadian context to try and achieve respectability and profit.

White Dancers, Respectability and Belly Dance Representation

Certain white dancers engaged in patronizing attitudes towards Middle Eastern communities in the quest to achieve respectability in belly dance performance. In 1983, Jean Bradley, a Canadian woman who left her job as an insurance broker to dance full time, told the Toronto Star that “belly dance” was strictly a shaking of the hips associated with stripping. The real thing, which she termed “Oriental dance,” included folk dancing, even elements of ballet. Her hierarchical distinction between “belly dance” and “Oriental” was very Eurocentric, even patronizing. She stated that in Toronto’s Middle Eastern community “they aren’t happy with Western people doing their dances...and they don’t like it if you modernize them with new moves and steps. And all they want to see is the belly dancing anyway.” She presented herself as one to elevate the dance form and save it from Middle Easterners who did not know the “modern” possibilities of the dance. This “white saviour” sentiment was prevalent in the U.S. as well during this period, as more and more white dancers became professional Middle Eastern dancers.

In reference to feminist/freedom rhetoric, Amira Jarmakani notes the form was something white women could elevate, perfect, and then sell back to “the culture(s) from which it was taken.” Bradley, who studied extensively with Ibrahim Farrah in New York after becoming hooked on belly dance after classes at an Islington Community School, sought the elevation of what she termed “Oriental dance,” and its separation from “belly dance” through modernization (which

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132 Jarmakani, “They Hate Our Freedom, But We Love Their Belly Dance: The Spectacle of the Shimmy in Contemporary U.S. Culture,” 148.
she understood as Westernization). Her stress on ballet and comparisons of oriental dance’s use of veil to Martha Graham’s use of veil indicate that she believed legitimacy was only to be found in distancing the form from sexuality and aligning it with forms of Western staged dance. To navigate discomfort over the sexualisation and Orientalism surrounding the dance form she participated in, she used her position of privilege to speak for (and down to) Toronto’s Middle Eastern communities. Bradley was not alone in this attitude, which was that she knew better than people from the Middle East what was best for the dance form that originated in their cultures. It was a manifestation of larger colonial, neo-colonial and paternalistic attitudes about the Middle East that were widely held during this period. In her move to distance her performance from sexuality she adopted a condescending discourse towards the cultures from where the dances she engaged with originated.

**Transnational Hybridization and Appropriation**

Belly dance in North America during this period continued to be hybridized and syncretized as dancers navigated complex representational choices. Appropriation certainly occurred, where a North American dancer would make use of movement, costuming or style in a manner unsolicited, even unsupported by members of various Middle Eastern communities in Toronto. For example, it appears there was some pushback in Toronto’s Middle Eastern communities against Jean Bradley’s presentations of the dance.\(^{133}\) While some certainly would have termed her activity appropriation, it is evident Bradley also experienced support for her interpretations of Middle Eastern dance, for example, from her Lebanese teacher, Ibrahim Farrah in New York. This situation is indicative of how the concept of appropriation in the mixing and fusing of Middle Eastern dance elements in North America is limiting; assigning ownership and

\(^{133}\) Druckman, “She Unveils Art of Middle Eastern Dance: And Its Definitely Not Belly Dancing,” H14.
control of belly dance movement is difficult, as within various Middle Eastern communities there was no consensus on how belly dance should be best presented in the Canadian context. A variety of activities, including fusing dance forms, taking on Arabic names, pretending to frolick in a harem, and other damaging stereotypical endeavours common in this period were supported and facilitated by some immigrants and condemned by others. The power dynamic, though, in which white dancers experienced consistent privilege, and immigrants faced systemic discrimination, meant that these interactions were always unbalanced. Michael Safi, for example, may have promoted harem fantasy with the Harem Revue, but his encouragement for white Canadians to participate in this orientalist fantasy was his way of navigating and making the best of entrenched stereotype and discrimination.

With this in mind, the concepts of hybridity and syncretization describe how belly dance movement flowed between individuals and groups with varying power positions in North America. These terms take into consideration the conflict over belly dance both in the Middle East and Canada, and the variety of power differentials that coexisted as this form was transferred into Canadian contexts. These terms also recognize that movements which are borrowed from different groups took on new meanings. They were not simply “stolen,” but were absorbed into bodies and reinterpreted by both dancers and audiences.

Brenda Bell, who danced under a variety of stage names including Star Bell and Badia Star exhibited a variety of dance dance hybridizations over her transnational career. She began belly dancing in the mid 1970s, but an experience in Vancouver in 1976 or 1977 started her professional belly dance career. Bell was walking through Greek Town in Vancouver when she

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was drawn to the bouzouki music drifting out of a local club. When she peeked in and saw belly
dancers performing, she felt an instant connection to the dance form. Not too long after, she
made her debut performing at the same club. She recalled it vividly, and with a laugh, she
explained how in her first performance she attempted a Turkish drop (where the dancer drops
directly and abruptly from standing or spinning into a position where her knees are bent so that
her head touches the floor behind her), only to bang her head off the floor. But, she persevered.

In the 1970s Bell studied a variety of folkloric forms and emergent American cabaret and
Turkish-style oryantal style under Catherine Balk (Farideh), one of Jamila Salimpour’s
protégés. She was dancing for Greek, Turkish, and Canadian audiences in Vancouver.

Bell moved to London, England in the late 1970s where she quickly got a job dancing at an establishment called the Cleopatra, which was run by Greek Cypriots. It catered primarily to Greek audiences, and management was supportive of her “doing my own crazy style of belly dancing.” While in London, Bell began exploring the Arabic nightclub scene for the first time. She recalled that while she had been in Vancouver, there had been no Arabic nightclubs, only Greek, Turkish, and Canadian. It was in London that she heard live Arabic music for the first time. “All the bells and whistles went off inside me,” she said. Bell landed an audition at El Nil, a massive Arabic nightclub that hired orchestras directly from Egypt and had four dancers performing nightly. Its main audience were wealthy Middle Eastern expatriates who were living or working in the United Kingdom. The boom in oil directly affected the rise of clubs like El Nil,

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135 A Turkish drop is a movement that is comprised of a rapid set of spins, followed by the dancer’s sudden drop flat on the floor, with knees bent and calves tucked under the body. Alternatively, a dancer can also perform a rapid ninety-degree backbend to the floor, finishing the movement with knees bent and calves tucked under the body. Bell, interview, 13.
136 Ibid., 2.
137 Ibid., 4.
138 Ibid.
and many of the patrons were from Gulf States. Bell was hired on the condition that she change her costuming and dance style to be more Arabic and that she agree to sit with the audiences after her performances.

In Vancouver, Canadian and American dancers favoured costumes made from coins and *assuit* which were relatively modest in comparison to what she saw at El Nil. She recalled, “We wanted to do everything a traditional as possible [on the West coast] ... and there in London, you’ve got girls with their legs all exposed up to the hip, and everything sequins...kitty-cat face appliqués on their belts and bras!” The atmosphere at El Nil was very different from the Greek and Turkish clubs she had known before. Her American cabaret style, with heavy influence from Greek and Turkish sources, as well as the Salimpour style, was not in demand. Egyptian style, Arabic style, along with contemporary Middle Eastern-style costuming was preferred. The “ancient” feeling North American West-coast style costumes evoked was out (as seen in Figure 4.2 below).

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139 Ibid.
140 This was the style taught and developed by Jamila Salimpour, a Sicilian American teacher who began teaching belly dance in California in 1949. Her fusion work with the troupe Bal Anat informed the later development of tribal style belly dance.
The presence of prostitutes in the club and the requirement for her to sit and drink with patrons in an evening gown after performing were also things Bell had not experienced before in Canada. These last two elements made Bell decide that working at El Nil was not for her. However, she was still intrigued by Arabic style music and movement. After London, she went on to dance in Montreal and Morocco before settling for a time in the early 1980s in Toronto. She increasingly sought out Arabic teachers and gained Arabic audiences. As she took on

Figure 4.2 Star Bell in Vancouver, Canada in 1977 showcasing popular West-Coast belly dance costuming style. Image courtesy of Brenda Bell (Star Bell/Badia Star).

141 Bell, interview, 4–7.
teachers from Egypt and Lebanon and began using Arabic music increasingly in performance, she began embodying different hybridizations. Experiences with Turkish, Greek and Arabic music and dance resulted in a very transnational personal style.

During Bell’s time at the Cleopatra restaurant in Toronto during the early 1980s, her performances reference all of these varied earlier influences. In 1982 at the Cleopatra, one of Bell’s recorded performances highlights her skillful use of a variety of transnational influences. Her band in this performance included Michael Safi on violin, Mohamed Sadek on *tabla*, Raymond Sarwa playing the *oud*, and Omar [unknown] on the keyboard. These musicians had come to Canada from various Middle Eastern origin points, to perform in this club, named after an Egyptian Ptolemaic queen which was, at this time, under Lebanese ownership. Bell began her performance of *Alf Leila Wa Leila*, as made famous by Um Kulthum (d. 1975), doing floor work. This was a transnational juxtaposition as during this period floor work was illegal in Egypt, the home of this iconic song. The shimmy work and undulation while on the floor are breathtaking and reminiscent of Turkish, Greek, and American-style performance. But, many Egyptian style elements are also apparent in her deep and internal execution of undulation and her emotional expressivity. Bell’s Toronto performance was a transnational meeting of style and meaning. Star later moved to Egypt and performed there for a period before returning to Toronto. Even in settings like the Cleopatra, where the primary target audience was newcomers from the Middle East, or Middle Eastern Canadians, hybridization across different Middle Eastern styles and with Western sensibilities occurred constantly.

142 Bechara, interview, 3; Ramzy, interview, 17.
143 Um Kulthum has been described as the “Voice of Egypt.” She is arguably the most famous singer in the Arab world, and a variety of her songs and their arrangements became very popular for belly dancers beginning in the 1970s. For more on the significance of her life and work see Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt Umm Kulthūm*, *Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
Dancer Yasmina Ramzy also began to embody different transnational dance expressions in this period. Yasmina Ramzy recalled that her earliest dancing was informed by what she, and

Figure 4.3 Star Bell performing in the dining room of Toronto's Cleopatra in 1982. Image courtesy of Brenda Bell (Star Bell/Badia Star).
many North American dancers imagined the Middle East to be.\textsuperscript{144} Sets were influenced not only by individual creativitiy, but also by American styles which had already been developing on the West and East coasts. Ramzy and other dancers from this period (the late 1970s and early 1980s) recalled typical five-part sets, even in nightclubs designed for Middle Eastern audiences. A set would begin with heavy veil work. A dancer would often enter covered with as many as four different veils, and during the performance’s first \textit{taqsim} (solo improvisation by a single melodic instrument) she would begin removing veils and performing with them, eventually revealing her full custome. The show began after this, and in the show’s second \textit{taqsim} there would typically be extensive floor work. A drum solo would often follow, which would finish with a dramatic Turkish drop followed by a \textit{zaar} (staged North African ritual trance dance) performance as a finale.\textsuperscript{145} This was a very North American set, and Ramzy recalled that when she first saw Egyptian dancer Aida Nour perform in Toronto in 1982, she immediatley knew the style and the feeling was completely different from what was being done by Canadian dancers around 1980.\textsuperscript{146} Ramzy, who was dancing primarily for Arab audiences during the 1980s, decided she wanted to learn and absorb movements from Egyptian performers like Aida Nour. Her relationships with members of Toronto’s Arab communities and her artistic decision to focus on Egyptian style shaped her transnational embodiment and experience. For instance, Ramzy recalled being excited about the performances of Jamila Salimpour, and the Salimpour technique, but when she showed it to her Arab and Egyptian friends, she recalls they informed her that this was not belly dance.\textsuperscript{147} Thus it did not figure strongly in her technique. Ramzy’s positionality and decision to pursue contemporary Egyptian aesthetics began steering her away from the American cabaret.

\textsuperscript{144} Ramzy, interview, 9.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 7–8.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 10–11.
style that had, to this point, been dominant in Toronto. The embodied dance experiences of white dancers like Star Bell and Yasmina Ramzy highlight the complexity of the dance hybridizations that occurred in this period. In Toronto, belly dancers could not simply appropriate movement. Instead, movements were taken, reinterpreted, reformed, hybridized, and syncretized in the context of substantial Orientalist popular culture and increased Middle Eastern immigration. An example of this creation of new movements and modes was the popular “turban” play, where a dancer with veil would playfully dance around a male audience member, wrapping her veil about his head to create a sultan. The playful interaction and the costumed embodying of that exotic, powerful trope of the sultan and harem was a dance development unique to these sorts of hybrid North American contexts. This movement’s meaningfulness was tied to North American stereotypes about the Middle East.
Figure 4.4 Yasmina Ramzy in a red *bedlah*, Toronto, 1989. Image courtesy of Yasmina Ramzy.
By the mid-1980s, the Cleopatra came under the ownership of Wagdi Bechara, a vocalist and drummer, who began his entertainment career in Heliopolis, Egypt during the 1960s. Bechara left Egypt after the devastation of the Six Day War and worked all over the Middle East and Europe before settling in Toronto. It was his dream to own a nightclub and when he took on the Cleopatra, he continued presenting Pan-Arab and Middle Eastern entertainment. Belly dance sets were always accompanied by a live band which played a mixture of Middle Eastern music. Usually, a band at the Cleopatra under Bechara included a singer, tabla, riq, accordion, keyboards, oud, violin or viola, sometimes a guitar, and occasionally qanun.\textsuperscript{148} The music played came from across the Middle East, as musicians had varied backgrounds. The Cleopatra attracted parties from the U.S. regularly. Bechara recalled his club was a hot spot for large Iraqi parties that would come up to Toronto for the weekends from the States. He stated that audiences were primarily Arab and that white Canadians often made up only about 20-25\% of the audiences. Of those white Canadians, he also remembered some groups became dedicated regulars.\textsuperscript{149}

Bechara was astonished by how attracted white Canadian women were to Arabic music and dance. During his ownership of the restaurant and club, he recalled only Canadian women seeking positions as dancers. Dancers of Middle Eastern origin were a small minority of performers in North America. At the nightclub’s height (with seats for 250) there were shows six nights a week, with a rotation of forty dancers.\textsuperscript{150} Each had an Arabic stage name, and they were all white. White dancers in this period have been criticized for appropriating Arabic culture, or for performing in Arab-face by taking on Arabic sounding stage names.\textsuperscript{151} But, Andrea Deagon

\textsuperscript{148} Bechara, interview, 7.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 5–6.
\textsuperscript{151} Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminist, and the U.S. Empire.”
notes that the acquisition of a stage name was often much more complicated than simple appropriation, or Arab-face. During the 1970s and 1980s, the practice was ubiquitous in the North American belly dance scene, and was even required for professional performers by nightclub and restaurant owners. Bechara stated:

> When you’re going to wear that suit, that belly dancing suit, and dance like this, and then your name is Caroline or something; It does not fit... So we have to be like [we have to give you] a Middle Eastern name.

Bechara recalled that if a dancer did not come with a stage name, he would give her one, as he felt it was odd to have a skilled belly dancer performing with an Anglo-Saxon name. White dancers certainly developed exotic identities predicated on adopting elements of racialized difference in performance, but the taking of stage names was more often a process of unequal hybridity than it was outright appropriation. It was a conversation, informed by Orientalist stereotype and newcomer conceptions of how belly dance should be represented to both Middle Eastern and Canadian audiences. As Andrea Deagon notes, from the “emic” (insider) perspective, the taking on of a stage name denoted a variety of connections to the Middle East, “both real and imagined.”

Club owners, musicians, and a belly dancer’s close friends often directed professional dancers’ naming endeavours. Every white nightclub dancer interviewed in this project who began working in the 1970s and 1980s took on a stage name in conversation with newcomer friends, nightclub owners, MC’s, or musicians. Many only took on names due to the demand of club owners and musicians from the Middle East. It was understood as part of business, an element of

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153 Bechara, interview, 9.
154 Ibid.
155 Andrea Deagon, “‘The Beautiful, The Exotic…’ Emic and Etic in The Stage Names of Belly Dancers.”
the dancer package. Anne Kokot, who danced under the name Aziza, was named by George Cortez, who would try out a different name for her every night she performed. Finally, one night, he announced Aziza and Kokot loved it, so she kept the name.156

Brenda Bell, who was going by Star Bell during the 1970s (it was her established hippie name, she recalled), remembers saying to Arabic patrons that she really wanted to pick an Arabic name to perform under. The response she got was: “No! All the Canadian girls pick Arabic names, and you are a star, you keep your name, Star, we like that.” She replied, “Okay, fine. I’ll stay Star, and my last name is Bell, so my name is Star Bell.” But, when Bell began performing in Egypt in 1983, she was told by venues she could not perform under her English name and that an Arabic name was required, so she picked Badia, as she liked the meaning, Oasis.157

Victoria Lammers, another Toronto dancer, was given her stage name, Jamila, on her first night of professional nightclub performance, c. 1976. When the announcer asked for her name at the Cleopatra nightclub before she went on, she told him her legal name, Victoria. He responded: “we can’t use that- you have to have an Arabic name.” It was show business, and the show necessitated performance of Arabness. Lammers told him she didn’t know any Arabic names, so, the musicians working that night came over and began suggesting names. When they suggested Jamila, and told her it meant beautiful, she felt she could live with that.158

Yasmina Ramzy was also named at the Cleopatra after she was told by Wagdi Bechara that her legal name was much too “waspy” (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) to perform under. So, with input from one of her spiritual teachers, she originally took on the name Yasmin. While she

156 Kokot, interview, 14.
157 Bell, interview, 14; Duart Farquharson, “An Exotic Export from Vancouver: Brenda’s Belly Dancing Makes a Big Hit in Cairo,” The Toronto Sun, October 13, 1984.
158 Victoria Lammers, interview by Vermeyden, August 28, 2014, 8.
was working at another nightclub in Toronto, the club’s qanun player, Hamid, originally from Iraq, began introducing her as Yasmina. She liked the sound of the name and adopted it. But, she became increasingly aware that this was one of the most popular belly dance stage names in North America. So, she asked her boyfriend at the time, Hani, what he thought a good last name would be so that she could differentiate herself from other dancers. She recalls, “He said the two most respected [last] names in Egypt [are] Ramsey and Fathe. I thought well, Canadians are just going to say...fatty...so by default, I’ll take Ramsey. And that’s how I got my name.”

The names that were chosen or given to dancers reflected their hybrid dance identities and the transnational positionality of the dancers, white women performing Middle Eastern dance in a country comfortable with Orientalism. These naming experiences were fascinating sites of intercultural bridging and identity reformation. Newcomers who were running these dance shows and entertainment sets required these stage names: The presentation of Arabic or Middle Eastern names for the dancer was understood as essential in this period, even if it was clear the dancer likely had Northern European ethnic origins (as in the case of Kokot and Ramzy, who were fair skinned, blonde and light-eyed). Cohesiveness between the performer’s name and her dance presentation was perceived by Middle Eastern establishment owners, musicians and audiences as important during these shows.

The nightclubs that directed entertainment towards Middle Eastern audiences became fascinating sites of transnational dance hybridization. Recent immigrants working in the entertainment industry helped many young Canadian nightclub dancers gain a greater understanding of Middle Eastern culture and dance. There was consistent contact and bridging occurring through the professional performance of belly dance. White dancers took the position

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159 Ramzy, interview, 17.
of student and the power over deciding what forms of dance representation were correct was primarily in the hands of these dancers’ mentors, and ultimately, success was in the hands of audiences. For example, Yasmina Ramzy became the Cleopatra’s principal dancer while it was under Bechara’s ownership during the mid-1980s.\textsuperscript{160} Bechara and his family became close to Ramzy in their time working together, and they helped Ramzy develop as a dancer through informal teaching. Bechara would often invite her to watch Egyptian films with his family, to help her better understand the Egyptian belly dance aesthetic. Bechara and his family introduced Ramzy to the analysis of contemporary Egyptian star-dancers Soheir Zaki and Nagwa Fouad.\textsuperscript{161} Their family analysis of Zaki and Fouad, with the intention of improving Ramzy’s performances in Toronto influenced Yasmina’s development of a unique, Egyptian-influenced style in this period.

**Transnational Circulations: Canadian Dancers Working in the Middle East**

Numerous white dancers made considerable effort to visit and perform in the Middle East. The move to study and perform in the Middle East was because of demand for dancers in the region and, often, because of encouragement from local Torontonian immigrant communities. As Torontonian dancers moved to dance in the Middle East during the 1980s, another layer of transnational dance circulation developed after these dancers returned to perform in Toronto. Both Brenda Bell (Star Bell, and then after going to Egypt Badia Star) and Yasmina Ramzy worked for a time in the Middle East during the 1980s after their initial successes at various Middle Eastern nightclubs, restaurants, and private events. Brenda Bell had spent time, for example, dancing in Morocco in the late 1970s before dancing in Toronto. After receiving

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{161} Bechara, interview, 10.
encouragement and support amongst the Egyptian community in Toronto in the early 1980s, Bell moved to Egypt to begin performing in 1983. She had already danced for 15 months at the Ramses Hilton by 1984 and was lauded as quite successful in her time in Egypt, dancing at a variety of private events and the Cairo Marriott.\footnote{162} Around the same time, Yasmina Ramzy began performing in the Middle East, first in Amman, Jordan in 1983, and later in Hotel nightclubs and private events in Syria and Egypt. Ramzy also gained notoriety in the Middle East, appearing, for example, on the cover of a Lebanese entertainment magazine.\footnote{163} These dancers who spent time living and performing in the Middle East returned to Canada with embodied (white) experiences of belly dance as it was performed in the locations they had lived. They came to appreciate some of the complex, but very different positioning and meanings of raqs sharqi in the contexts they performed in the Middle East, and brought both this knowledge, and embodied dance and movement knowledge back with them to Canada, as both returned to Toronto to teach and perform later in the 1980s. This circulation of dancers across the globe showcases how belly dance’s stylizations and meanings in Toronto by the late 1980s were thoroughly transnational, with connections to both American cabaret and dance scenes in the Middle East.

\footnote{162} Donald Lamb, “Just Steps from Canada to Cairo Moving in Belly Dance Circles,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, April 17, 1985, VI7; Farquharson, “An Exotic Export from Vancouver: Brenda’s Belly Dancing Makes a Big Hit in Cairo”; Bell, interview.

\footnote{163} Ramzy, interview, 19–20.
Figure 4.5 Yasmina Ramzy on the cover of *Camera Lights Magazine* (Lebanon) c. 1984. Image courtesy of Yasmina Ramzy.
Figure 4.6 Image of Badia Star taken while she was working in Egypt, c. 1984. Image courtesy of Brenda Bell (Star Bell/Badia Star).
Conclusion

During the 1950s, star Middle Eastern oriental dancers like Samia Gamal and Nejla Ateş met the demand for exotic dance performance in North America. While these women performed in contexts defined primarily by East-West binary stereotype, they also attempted to articulate new meanings for their performance to North American audiences. Arjun Appadurai’s concept of shifting ethnoscapes is useful in understanding how Arab newcomers from across the Middle East allowed for transnational shared ideas of Arabness to be deployed in North American dance-entertainment settings. For example, in the cases of Samia Gamal and Fawzia Amir Rahman, imagined connections between Egyptians living in Canada and the idea of shared cultural Egyptiananness underpinned their “Egyptian” styled belly dance performance in Canada.

With the abolition of “white Canada” immigration policies by the late 1960s, and a variety of push factors stemming from conflicts in the Middle East, a wave of newcomers from across the Middle East brought with them demand for and expertise in a variety of belly dance styles. While Michael Safi’s Topless Harem Revue was popular for a span of time during the 1960s and 1970s, a push for the reorientation of belly dance in North America away from focus on sexual exhibition resulted in increasing pressure for dancers to distance performances from such overt displays of sexuality. However, representations of belly dance were not uniform, and the positioning of the form in relationship to respectability and sexuality in Canada and Toronto was contested. Certain dancers from the Middle East hoped Canada could be a place to find respect for belly dance by distancing it from sexuality and aligning it with folklore, while others chose to capitalize on the form’s strong link with sexuality and stereotype in public performance. White Canadians, Americans, and Europeans who began performing these dances professionally during the 1960s and 1970s, participated in this conflict and came to dominate narratives of both
appropriation and hybridization through their choreographic decisions. However, these appropriations and hybridizations in Toronto’s Middle Eastern nightclubs and restaurants occurred in conjunction with guidance and input from growing Middle Eastern audiences, indicating that a simplistic narrative of appropriation does not fully represent the transnational dance developments that occurred during this period.
CHAPTER V: *Belly Dancing, Whiteness, Multiculturalism, and Identity at Metro Toronto International Caravan, 1969-1989*

Toronto’s demographic makeup shifted during the 1960s. Non-white immigrants increasingly made up the city’s populace as racially discriminatory immigration policy was rescinded. In a bid to maintain the cultural dominance of English and French, while encouraging the integration of newcomer groups, official multiculturalism policy was adopted by the federal government in 1971 under Pierre Trudeau. The announcement of the government’s plans to implement a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework resulted in increased government support for pluralist cultural celebrations like Metro Toronto International Caravan. As a platform for intercultural sharing, beginning in 1969, Metro Toronto Caravan began hosting an annual week-long celebration of the many ethnic communities within Toronto. It was home to a variety of music and dance styles from across the globe, including various presentations of Middle Eastern dance. It was quickly joined by a variety of other pluralist celebrations, including Carasauga, Carabram, and many others in the Greater Toronto Area. In pluralist cultural festivals and shows, belly dance performances represented ethnic, cultural, and even political identities. Both community insiders and outsiders participated in pavilion shows at Metro Toronto International Caravan; for instance, the Luxor pavilion was not only home to individuals who identified as Egyptian. Oral history interviews and archival research indicate that many Middle Eastern communities hired or presented white Canadian belly dancers in shows designed to represent their communities for cultural celebrations. This chapter explores why these communities made these representational decisions, as well as the social, cultural, and political implications these decisions had. In part, pavilions may have favoured white performers because of the systematic privileging of white-Canadianness, especially within the “new” multicultural Canada. Belly dance presentations, thus, became spaces of uneven intercultural bridging and
exchange. But, presentations of belly dance were contested, transnational, and transcultural, and presentations by “white” dancers defy neat categorization as appropriative. Therefore, belly dance performances in Toronto’s multicultural celebrations during the 1970s and 1980s were places of identity construction and representation shaped by a variety of historical actors and both local Canadian socio-political context and wider international political realities.

**The Roots of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy**

The movement to celebrate cultural expressions from a variety of immigrant groups did not suddenly begin in Canada with the introduction of federal multiculturalism policy in 1971. This policy and the idea of celebrating pluralism had roots that stretched back to the turn of the twentieth century. Small groups of men and women (primarily in the U.S., but also in Canada) resisted calls for Anglo-nativism or the complete assimilation of newcomers. These pluralist activists, who founded early International Institutes, believed newcomers could enrich North American societies through their “cultural gifts,” like food, dance, and art. These activists called on newcomers to contribute their arts to Canadian or American identity. This movement, according to Franca Iacovetta, also “sought to calm anxiety about immigration through public performance and spectacle.” Many activists believed that if immigrants shared the beauty of their culture, and engaged with the predominant culture in a constructive manner, a stronger society would be forged.

In Canada, the concept of cultural gifts and the idea of a Canadian mosaic was popularized during the early twentieth century in an attempt to manage an unprecedented surge in international immigration. For example, a variety of colourful ethnic costumes, dances, and

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2 Ibid.
other spectacles were increasingly used in popular festivals to inspire national unity, at least on the surface.³ This was evident in Winnipeg’s 1927 Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Canadian Confederation, which included Eastern European communities’ artistic contributions to public civic presentations of Canadian national identity.⁴ These early pluralist celebrations maintained that while continental Europeans could contribute to Canadian society, real Canadian identity was rooted in Britishness. Winnipeg’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations showcased this with a pageant in Assiniboine Park where a tableau vivant showcasing mother Canada (a woman dressed in white furs and crowned in maple leaves) gathered all the races of the world to herself.⁵ Robert Cupido suggests this pageant reaffirmed Canada’s “superior cultural inheritance” while also showing the contributions of non-French and non-English European immigrants to Canada.⁶ Other Diamond Jubilee celebrations across the nation were not all so multicultural,⁷ but this tendency to try and include and subjugate various “ethnic” artistic contributions to public spectacles of Canadian identity resurfaced later, at other national celebrations. In Toronto, the 1939 Canadian National Exhibition’s “grand spectacle” entitled Utopia showcased “Nations and continents mingling as brothers and sisters living and loving, tolerating, creating and sustaining a universe worth of the ideals of the Master of all Creation.”⁸ Utopia culminated with Britannia being flanked by massive lions and various national groups in folk costume singing and performing dances under a 100-foot Union Jack. This celebration of Canadian-British identity and the greater British Empire also exhibited the morale of performative Canadian pluralism;

³ Ibid., 41.
⁵ Ibid., 180.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Toronto’s Diamond Jubilee Celebrations, according to Cupido, focused on a commemoration of a “mythical and pre-industrial [history], populated by daring explorers, intrepid coureurs de bois, noble savages, valiant redcoats and sturdy settlers. Ibid., 174.
various folk dances were used to represent diversity in Canada underneath benevolent British rule. A variety of ethnic, cultural expressions could be a part of the nation so long as they remained under that Union Jack.

Pluralist celebrations of arts and culture were also very popular in the postwar period in a response to a surge of international immigration to Canada. In 1957, the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto was founded with a mandate to support and encourage newcomer integration into Canadian society. It was a multilingual institution that had a social welfare mandate, which was a large part of its operation. It also encouraged the acceptance and celebration of newcomer cultural expressions, so long as they aligned with Anglo-Canadian ideals. The Institute offered newcomers support programs. It also hosted and supported a variety of pluralist cultural celebrations, termed “Ethnic Weeks” and “Canadiana Weeks,” during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. The Institute became increasingly active as ethnic diversity in the city grew alongside liberalizing immigration policy. During the various “Ethnic Weeks” supported by the Institute, local, mainly European, cultural groups showcased art, dance, food, and music for the wider Canadian public. The International Institute also hosted “Old World Bazaars,” where different groups (mainly European) would mingle and showcase regional arts and cuisine. These bazaars were small in scale and attracted approximately 200 people at a time. The Institute hoped these events would help Toronto to become a mini United Nations where cultural celebration would foster greater understanding and cooperation across ethnic divides. These events were predominantly multi-ethnically European and white; men and women of colour were vastly underrepresented in these celebrations. The various identities that

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10 Ibid., 42.
11 Ibid.
were celebrated as contributors to the Canadian mosaic\textsuperscript{12} were designated as “other,” while English and French identities were designated as “Canadian-Canadian.”\textsuperscript{13} According to Iacovetta, Toronto’s early pluralist celebrations, which called for immigrants to retain their distinctive cultural expressions, informed the development of officially multicultural policy in Canada.\textsuperscript{14}

**Development of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy**

The International Institute’s endeavours were in response to mounting social and political tensions in Canada during the 1960s. Major shifts in Canada’s demographics resulted in a growing public concern over what exactly constituted Canadian cultural identity. In this climate, aboriginal groups and civil rights groups lobbied for increased equity and the dismantlement of racist policies. Tension over nationalism in Quebec was also rising.\textsuperscript{15} In response to the pressure for a more inclusive Canada, Ottawa instituted a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963. Its mandate was primarily to develop a way to create equity between English and French Canadians, while also finding a way to include both Canada’s Indigenous peoples and a variety of other ethnicities.\textsuperscript{16} French-English relations and language policy took centre stage in the Commission.\textsuperscript{17} In response to the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Official Languages Act was enacted in 1969. The Commission also influenced


\textsuperscript{13} In Toronto, Franco-Canadian identity was not as prevalent. Iacovetta, “Immigrant Gifts, Canadian Treasures, and Spectacles of Pluralism,” 45.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 35.

\textsuperscript{15} Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot, *Engaging Diversity-Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), 42.


the development of federal Canadian multiculturalism policy that was tabled by the Trudeau government in 1971.\textsuperscript{18} The official objectives of multiculturalism policy outlined by Trudeau in 1971 included a dedication to supporting all Canadian cultures and a dedication to assisting cultural groups in contributing to Canadian society. The government also promised to help members of all cultural groups to gain proficiency in at least one official language (French or English) and to help them overcome barriers to participation in Canadian life and society.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, the policy outlined promoted “creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity.”\textsuperscript{20} This resulted in government support for performative multiculturalism. The commitment to fostering cultural exchange in Canada had a profound impact on the popularization of pluralist cultural celebrations. It normalized white Canadian impulses to explore, engage with, and appropriate newcomer cultural expressions. Although multiculturalism policy was problematic in many ways, many individuals believed cultural sharing, give and take was essential in the development of a peaceful and cohesive Canadian society.

While the new federal policy claimed to champion the equity of all cultural contributions to Canadian identity, it did little to challenge white Franco and Anglo cultural privilege and dominance. The policy was initially largely symbolic. It was enacted within and worked to support the dominant French-English bicultural/bilingual framework by confirming English and French as Canada’s official languages, and by relegating all other linguistic and cultural contributions to the nation as “multicultural.”\textsuperscript{21} Thus, the policy was much more pragmatic than

\textsuperscript{18} Multiculturalism was first adopted as official federal policy in 1971. This is not to be confused with Section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) or the later Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988).
\textsuperscript{19} Li, “The Multiculturalism Debate,” 153.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Fleras and Elliot, Engaging Diversity-Multiculturalism in Canada, 63; Li, “The Multiculturalism Debate,” 151.
it was humanitarian. It was an attempt to simultaneously increase immigrant integration and pacify conflict between French and English interests.\(^2\) Recent analysis has explored even darker motives for the policy’s development; Eva Mackay suggests multiculturalism policy’s original purpose was to obfuscate Canada’s historic foundation on conquest and cultural genocide by perpetuating a myth of a benevolent, pluralist nation.\(^2\) May Chazan et al. in *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada* also argue that the 1971 policy was a destructive tool wielded by white men to “manage race and class on their own terms.”\(^2\) The Canadian state’s assurances that no single culture would be above any other within Canada, despite the elevation of two official languages, did nothing to reorient engrained systems of English and French privilege.

Chazan et al. argue further that multicultural festivals in Canada, which became popular after this policy was tabled, did nothing immediate and concrete to address the reality of inequitable treatment of minorities in Canada.\(^2\) If anything, multicultural celebrations and spectacles served to hide systemic injustice within Canada perpetrated against non-dominant groups. The superficial celebration of difference did not transform society.\(^2\) It encouraged white Canadians to consume the “exotic.” Only subsequent policy developments would begin to address some of this systemic inequity. For example, the Canadian Human Rights Act, passed in 1977, gave individuals, for the first time in Canada, solid legal ground to gain protection from and recourse against discrimination.\(^2\) The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 further

\(^2\) May Chazan et al., eds., *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2011), 11.
\(^2\) Li, “The Multiculturalism Debate,” 151.
\(^2\) Fleras and Elliot, *Engaging Diversity-Multiculturalism in Canada*, 73.
\(^2\) Gauld, “Multiculturalism: The Real Thing?,” 10.
finalized multiculturalism’s place within Canada’s constitution and guaranteed equality (with caveats) for all Canadians.  

During the 1980s, multicultural discourse increasingly took on the issue of “race relations” in an attempt to address the systemic and prevalent prejudice embedded in Canadian systems (law, healthcare, education, etc.). Still, despite policy’s evolution over the 1980s, it remained mainly passive; instead of laying down methods to address systemic inequity through positive action, it only set out ways to penalize discriminatory acts. This slow and problematic adoption and integration of the multicultural ideal, and its lack of translation into meaningful change for Canada’s minorities affected how minority groups sought to represent themselves in festivals like Metro Toronto International Caravan.

**Metro Toronto International Caravan and Multiculturalism in Canada**

Metro Toronto International Caravan, a large multicultural celebration, developed before the declaration of official Canadian multiculturalism policy in 1971. Drawing on slowly growing pluralist sentiments in predominantly Anglo-Saxon Protestant Toronto, the Community Folk Art Council and the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto spearheaded Caravan’s development during the late 1960s. Metro Caravan was developed like an amalgamation of the Institute’s earlier “Ethnic Week” celebrations, where with a ticket (now termed a passport) an individual could share in the cultural celebrations of a variety of groups across the city.  

Church basements, community centres, cultural clubs, and other public spaces became the sites of pavilions named after cities, regions, or sometimes nations. In these spaces, arts, crafts, dance, food, and history were put on display to be shared with visiting passport holders. In 1969, Metro Toronto International Caravan’s opening year, the festival focused on the theme of world travel.

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28 Ibid.
“without leaving home.” It included 29 different pavilions and attracted over 200,000 visitors who each paid $2 for the passport to enter pavilions.\footnote{Anthony C. Smith, “International Caravan,” \textit{The Globe and Mail}, July 5, 1969, 6.}

The vision of Metro Toronto International Caravan’s founders was to encourage unity in a city that was rapidly becoming home to a very diverse population. The hope was that Caravan would be a place to build bridges between ethnic communities. However, this hope for bridging and connection was consistently voiced from a place of Anglo-Saxon Protestant security as the dominant and normative culture in the city. Edmond Boyd’s description of 1969’s first Caravan in the \textit{Globe and Mail} illustrates this:

\begin{quote}
Some of Toronto’s white Anglo-Saxon Protestants may go for months without crossing the border which runs approximately down Spadina Avenue…venturing into the other Toronto where the so-called ethnic communities live. But last weekend they had a direct invitation to sample the sights and smells, to listen to the unfamiliar languages and music and to taste the food and drink of the other half million who share their city but who they probably only now as construction workers and waiters.\footnote{Edmond Boyd, “The Other Toronto,” \textit{The Globe and Mail}, July 3, 1969, 31.}
\end{quote}

Boyd remarked further in this article that Canadian multicultural approaches to citizenship were enlightened in comparison to what he believed was the American demand for newcomers to assimilate.\footnote{Ibid.} He argued in Canada “government money is used to keep alive the cultures of all those countries which have contributed to our nation, not only the two great founding peoples.”\footnote{Ibid.}

In his article, like in the official multiculturalism policy that would be tabled in Ottawa two years later, white English and French identities were implicitly normalized and privileged. “Ethnic” newcomers were invited to share culture for the interest of the dominant group,\footnote{In this period “ethnic” was often used in Canada to describe non-white cultural expression, even though the term ethnic simply describes something that is of or in relation to a specific population (which also could easily include Anglo-Canadian or other “white” identities).} while the French and English remained the “two great founding peoples.”\footnote{Boyd, “The Other Toronto,” 31.} The folkloric and artistic
expressions of groups who were not English or French were multicultural and other.\textsuperscript{36} Newcomer groups’ values, belief systems, and deeper elements of culture were not necessarily celebrated, and these unseen cultural foundations required shaping to fit established liberal English or French Canadian norms. The sharing of easily accessible cultural markers like arts, food, and dance were what would be at the heart of early multicultural policy’s realization in Canada.

While Boyd’s remarks in the \textit{Globe and Mail} reveal a favoring of middle class, white English Canadianness, they also reveal the existence of widespread curiosity about the “others” inhabiting Toronto. There was an impulse towards inclusion and community bridging from a paternalistic standpoint. The tension between the desire to include new immigrants in Canadian life and identity and the desire to maintain English and French cultural hegemony impacted how spectacles, including dance performances, in multicultural festivals like Caravan, were constructed.

\textbf{Belly Dance as a Bridging Point: Transnational Representations at Caravan}

Belly dance’s dual place as a form of entrenched social and professional dance in the Middle East and its growing integration into popular white Canadian culture throughout the 1970s positioned it as a popular form of performance at Metro Toronto International Caravan and other cultural celebrations. In Toronto, belly dance had become embedded in a variety of popular cultural contexts outside of only Middle Eastern communities by the 1970s. It had become a booming fitness fad amongst Americans and Canadians, and adherents of various feminist movements had also laid claim to these dance styles arguing for their universal femininity.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Canadian folklore studies, as implemented through government funding and the national museums of Canada, even by 1979, still maintained Canadian folkloric identity as being primarily English, French, and Aboriginal. Carole Henderson Carpenter, \textit{Many Voices, a Study of Folklore Activities in Canada and Their Role in Canadian Culture}, National Museum of Man Mercury Series (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979).

\textsuperscript{37} Jarmakani, “Belly Dancing for Liberation: A Critical Interpretation of Reclamation Rhetoric in the American Belly Dance Community,” 147.
Belly dance was increasingly known to a large cross-section of Canadians. Cultural groups from the Middle East were, thus, able to share raqs sharqi, oryantal, and tsifeteli with audiences who had some sort of exposure to the dance form. Belly dance was an element of Middle Eastern culture that many people felt was accessible, even if that accessibility was typically enabled by stereotypical and Orientalist popular culture. Belly dance was well established as, what A. J. Racy terms, a form of “familiar otherness.” It was something foreign but still understood by the general public as knowable.  

Belly dance shows appear to have had success in engaging a cross section of Toronto’s public at Metro Toronto International Caravan. Leslie Scrivener described belly dance’s place as a bridging point in 1982:

Two year old Hanjoon Kim from Korea, danced on a table top imitating an undulating Arab dancer. A Lithuanian grandmother saw belly dance for the first time in her 83 years and approved. Welcome to Caravan, Metro’s nine day multi-cultural festival that draws people that hail from every corner of the globe.

Belly dance was understood by Scrivener as a vehicle for cultural connection. The cultural sharing and bridging at this event, ideally, was equitable and joy-filled. Yasmina Ramzy, a white Canadian dancer and choreographer who oversaw the running of the Egyptian pavilion at Caravan in the years following 1995, recalled that Caravan often brought her dance studio Arabesque Academy many new students. When heritage is shared, and outsiders are asked to participate in its formation and expression, the process of exotification and “othering” is in many ways challenged.

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40 Ramzy, interview, 40.
like Caravan may have effected unique cultural outcomes: for instance, a stronger national discourse advocating for the acceptance of immigrants and refugees than is present in the U.S.

However, belly dance productions and performances at some of Caravan’s pavilions during the 1970s, 1980s, and into the 1990s reveal that much of this cultural sharing was being done on uneven ground. The cultural bridging occurring was happening in a context that denied newcomer group’s equity, as the ideal of multiculturalism was underpinned by a systemic privileging of white Anglo and Franco Canadian identities. This becomes evident in the central role white dancers played in presenting and performing belly dance at Metro Toronto International Caravan and other multicultural celebrations throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It is also evident in the way in which even many artists who immigrated to Canada from the Middle East chose to present choreography that would appeal to white Canadian audiences. Processes of acculturation affected hybridization decisions and strategies used by those performing or choreographing multicultural festival belly dance shows.

Belly dance shows were presented at an array of Metro Toronto International Caravan pavilions during the 1970s and 1980s. More “folkloric” shows that did not include belly dance were also very popular. It is also evident certain pavilions purposefully avoided the use of belly dance due to its problematic moral positioning when performed publicly. Various styles were presented by professionals and amateurs alike. During these two decades Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Israeli, and American pavilions hosted professional performances or were the location of

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42 Social stigma against professional belly dancers was evident throughout the Middle East. For more on the reasons communities may have avoided including belly dance in their pavilion presentations, even though it may have been a prevalent cultural practice, see Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this dissertation.
impromptu social dancing.\textsuperscript{44} While pavilion names and organizers changed, organized belly dance performances returned year after year, most often in association with diverse Middle Eastern communities. In 1981, for example, \textit{raqs sharqi} was presented at the Baalbeck pavilion (run by Toronto’s Lebanese community),\textsuperscript{45} the Marrakesh pavilion (a pan-Arabic presentation),\textsuperscript{46} and Egypt’s Luxor pavilion, among others.\textsuperscript{47} Where belly dance or related folklore was presented, in some cases, community members performed or choreographed shows. However, in many instances, it was women who were not ethnically related to the specific community being represented who were the ones performing and sometimes choreographing shows. The experiences of dancers and choreographers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds involved with belly dance presentations at Caravan and other cultural or multicultural celebrations in this period reveal belly dance performances were sites for hybridized identity presentation and cultural exchange. Certain performances of Middle Eastern dance helped pavilions to connect with Canadian audiences and to maximize prestige for the group in a Canadian context that privileged whiteness.

Eddy Manneh, the owner of Eddy’s Dance Academy, and a dominant force in belly dance instruction in Toronto by the late 1970s, ran numerous shows at Caravan’s various Lebanese community-run pavilions. He also had shows at a variety of other cultural and multicultural celebrations, including Carasauga and at the Canadian National Exhibition. Manneh, who had come to Canada permanently from Lebanon in 1975, ran a studio where the

\textsuperscript{45} Alaton, “Caravan Trek Turns up Dancers, Exotic and Limbo,” 14.
\textsuperscript{46} Alaton, “Caravan a Success Again but Nagging Doubts Raised,” 21.
\textsuperscript{47} Alaton, “Caravan Trek Turns up Dancers, Exotic and Limbo,” 14.
majority of his students were white Canadians of “European extraction.”\textsuperscript{48} Many of his choreographies drew on pan-Arab influences. Manneh’s choreographies often included fusions of a variety of styles. For example, in videos of Manneh’s cane choreographies during the 1980s, both Lebanese music and Saidi Egyptian movement elements are mixed and fused by soloists who are billed as alternately performing Bedouin and Lebanese folklore.\textsuperscript{49} Manneh exercised transnational creativity in his development of these folkloric styles for stage in Canada.\textsuperscript{50} His choreographies were lighthearted depictions of Middle Eastern dance that were unencumbered by concern for museum-style “authenticity.” Anthony Shay suggests the concept of authenticity is used to censor and evaluate art.\textsuperscript{51} Manneh resisted museum-style “authenticity” often invoked by self-appointed, often white, gate-keepers, or “ethnic police”\textsuperscript{52} who wished to keep firm previously relatively porous boundaries of cultural difference and expression.

Kathleen Fraser, who studied belly dance under Manneh in Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s, suggests that the lack of rigid regional distinction in some of Manneh’s belly dance and folkloric choreographies was a result of his decision not to engage white Canadian students in the complexities of Middle Eastern folkloric dance forms. Fraser discovered that Manneh’s

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\item \textsuperscript{48} Fraser, “Learning Belly Dance in Toronto: Pyramids, Goddesses and Other Weird Stuff,” 424.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Eddy Manneh, \textit{Cane Dance at Freddy’s Dance Academy}, accessed August 23, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-BZ-sYwBFw; In this televised performance Manneh introduces the performance simply as the “cane” dance, and states it is Bedouin. He also introduces the dancer as a Bedouin girl named Karahman, and concludes she is “part of the hareem,” with a laugh. Eddy Manneh, \textit{Eddy Manneh Youtube}, accessed September 7, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyVXDbiMyWw.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Manneh, interview, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Anthony Shay suggests the concept of authenticity is used to censure and evaluate art. I suggest museum-style “authenticity” is invoked by gate-keepers who wish to keep firm the relatively porous boundaries of cultural difference and expression. Anthony Shay, \textit{Ethno Identity Dance for Sex, Fun and Profit: Staging Popular Dances Around the World} (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 116.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Anthon Shay describes the “ethnic police” as individuals who “charged [themselves] with monitoring “authenticity” in the work of our own groups and, even more, of other people’s performances.” These self-appointed gate-keepers were predominantly white. Their desire to police what they understood as “authenticity” in performances of Westerners stemmed from a place of respect for the Middle Eastern origin points of these dance forms. However, a desire to police “authenticity” even the expressions of ethnically Middle Eastern performers also stemmed from a problematic desire to solidify cultural boundaries and to attain both prestige and control. Shay, \textit{Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms}, 25.
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choreographies included extensive fusion after coming into contact with teachers outside of Manneh's strict realm of educational control. She suggests costumes were “almost never…designed with a particular Middle-Eastern country or region in mind.” She further argues that his folkloric choreographies often simply rehashed belly dance movements and focused more on props than on “authentic” folk-dance. Fraser’s concept of authenticity was unsympathetic to Manneh’s hybrid choreographic choices which were made to appeal to broad audiences in Canada.

Fraser also critiques Manneh’s connection of belly dance to harems in both choreographies and his teaching as exploitative of Orientalist stereotype. In some of Manneh’s shows, and television interviews, and in much of his studio and troupe’s ephemera, he suggested historically a woman could win the favour of a Sultan with the skillful performance of raqs sharqi. While Fraser is certainly correct that these narratives in his belly dance shows would have been understood through the lens of Orientalism by Canadian audiences, and that Manneh crafted the descriptions to appeal to Canadian ideas of the exotic, it is important to recognize that these narratives about belly dance’s use in harem settings have been a part of commonly accepted twentieth-century Middle Eastern narratives about belly dance’s historical development.

54 Ibid., 424–25.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 425.
57 Since I have begun belly dancing in 2011, numerous immigrants from across the Middle East (from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey) have discussed with me the importance belly dance played in Ottoman harem settings. This popular oral historical tradition is widespread and was recounted for example by Eddy Manneh, Nadia Gamal, and Nejla Ateş. This connecting of belly dance performance to historical Ottoman harem-life also recently appeared prominently in the Turkish historical television series, Muhteşem Yüzyıl (Magnificent Century) (2011-2014). The massively popular series presented Hürrem Sultan’s skill in oryantal dans as a key early factor in her ascension to the position of Haseki Sultan of Padishah Suleiman the Magnificent.
racialized or ethnic associations they can take on in Western contexts.\textsuperscript{58} This is evident in Manneh’s interview for the television show \textit{Salam Arabic Magazine}, which aired in Toronto on the channel CFMT (Canada’s First Multilingual Television) in 1985. For the interview, he wore a Western-style suit and discussed a variety of Middle Eastern dance styles, including his extensive work with belly dance in cultural celebrations in Canada.\textsuperscript{59} He described part of belly dance’s recent origins as being entertainment for Turkish soldiers and sultans. This was accepted by the interviewer and served as a foundation for further discussion of the dance form and Manneh’s choreographic work.\textsuperscript{60} In this Arabic language interview, his discussion of the dance’s ancient origins and its prevalence in Turkish settings was an attempt at providing historical context for the development of the dance form. Here exotification in Manneh’s description of belly dance’s performance for Sultans relates primarily to the complex historical relationship between Turkey and Lebanon.

Manneh was also skilled at presenting belly dance in a way that was appealing to English and French audiences who were well-versed in Orientalist stereotype. In his English language television appearances (for example on City TV and Global) during the 1980s, where he often advertised upcoming Caravan or other multicultural festival performances, he only appeared in various styles of traditional Arabic dress.

\textsuperscript{58} Nineteenth-century Orientalism in art had global impact and the imagined harems depicted in famous Western art have likely have affected conceptions of harem life in the twentieth-century Middle East.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Salam Arabic Magazine} (Toronto: Multilingual Television Limited: Canada’s First Multilingual Television, February 9, 1985), C 257: T017439, Archives of Ontario.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
In English interviews, he also liked to reference harem imagery, and would sometimes discuss how he believed the dance form had origins as an ancient form of prayer. He accessed images of ancient Egypt, Phonecia, and Mesopotamia, and freely made use of exotifying language on television and in his studio materials.

But, not all his media appearances embraced stereotypes. Manneh also used these platforms to advocate for the dismantlement of very specific stereotypes about belly dance. In an appearance on the French-language program Arts Plus, Manneh argued for the abandonment of the term danse du ventre, advocating instead for the use of danse orientale and for a more culturally grounded understanding of the dance form. Manneh was certainly discerning when it came to business and recognized that both Orientalist imagery and cultural education was attractive and lucrative in English and French speaking Canada. Manneh positioned his hybrid presentations of belly dance on English and French television, at Caravan, Carasauga, and other festivals to suit Canadian’s already established ideas of belly dance while still staying true to his conception of identity to maximize the marketability of his school and performers.

Manneh’s choreographies at Caravan and other festivals presented hybridized images of Arab dance at Caravan and around the world that were informed by Manneh’s Middle Eastern and his new Canadian context. In many of Manneh’s promotional materials and hand outs he referenced his heritage as a credential, but this also indicated a sense of identity. He encouraged

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61 In an appearance on Breakfast Television in September of 1989, Manneh wore various elements of Middle Eastern dress. He also suggested belly dance’s origins were as a “prayer.” Dan Petkovsek, Breakfast Television (Toronto: City TV, September 8, 1989), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDxTOvVMTmg.


63 Eddy Manneh, Eddy Manneh Youtube: Clips from a Variety of Television Presentations Featuring Manneh and His Dancers from the 1980s and 1990s.

64 Eddy Manneh, “Professor Eddy Manneh from the Middle East Presents a Belly Dancing Workshop and Concert ‘A Desert Fantasy,’” November 26, 1977. Eddy Manneh Personal Collection.
his students and dance company to learn Arabic music and to engage with his personal vision of his own cultural heritage, and then utilized their movements and bodies in representation of his vision of Lebanese, and at times, pan-Arab identity.\textsuperscript{65} But, many of his presentations highlighted exotic appeal in a way that was easily digestible for Canadian audiences. “Desert fantasy” and “mystical Middle East” were common themes. With this hybrid approach, Manneh and his dancers presented belly dance choreography at Caravan for a total of thirty years.\textsuperscript{66} It is interesting to note that Manneh’s choreographic work was not only well-received in Toronto, but also in cultural festivals across the Middle East during the 1980s. During the 1980s, Manneh’s Arabian Sahara Dance Company (made up of primarily white Canadian women) performed in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon. His dancers performed his choreographies at the Baalbeck festival in Lebanon itself.\textsuperscript{67} Fusion in his presentation of folklore did not prevent his acceptance into these festivals. This illustrates the transnational and hybrid flows that characterized the development of performances for Caravan and other cultural celebrations in this period.

Egyptian dance presentations at Caravan's Luxor pavilion during 1981 and 1982 also highlight how belly dance choreography could be a collaborative space of hybrid identity invention and uneven cultural bridging. Belly dance presentations at Luxor pavilion emerged from bodies and relationships that defied borders and strict categorization. Diana Calenti, a white American dancer, and choreographer, spearheaded representations of Egyptian dance at Caravan

\textsuperscript{65} In Manneh’s interview for “Arts Plus” he describes how Canadian women must come to understand Arabic music before they can belly dance well. Manneh, \textit{Eddy Manneh Youtube: Clips from a Variety of Television Presentations Featuring Manneh and His Dancers from the 1980s and 1990s}.
\textsuperscript{66} Manneh, interview, 8.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 6.
in the 1980s which were foundational in her becoming a lead choreographer within Egypt’s state folkloric dance troupe, the Reda Dance Company.

Calenti, who was raised in New York, felt a strong connection to a variety of ethnic identities:

I am a big combination of many things, my father’s background was Welsh, my mother’s background Jewish. I was raised in a very eclectic background, growing up in NYC, where, you know, German, Irish, Turkish, they were all around us, so I had a very, you know, kind of varied background. So, I feel myself all those things.68

While she felt a connection to a variety of backgrounds, her appearance, her class, and American nationality afforded her certain privilege. She attended the New York City School of Ballet and the American Musical and Dramatic Academy.69 She arrived in Toronto with her Italian-Egyptian husband Milad Bessada in 1970 and quickly became interconnected with the Egyptian expatriate community in Toronto. Through these new friendships, she first experienced Arabic music and dance.

After moving to Toronto, she also became involved in the American Women’s Club as its director of entertainment. Calenti decided it would be wonderful to get the club involved in the newly established Metro Toronto International Caravan, and she oversaw the organization of the American pavilion in 1979. The following year, Calenti was involved with the creation of another pavilion, this time with many of her husband’s Francophone friends from Egypt. The group decided to present a French-Crusades themed pavilion. Their idea was to use both French and Middle Eastern cultural elements to make a space that would transport Westerners “over there… to the Middle East.”70 Calenti and the Egyptian expatriate community she was a part of

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68 Diana Calenti, interview by Anne Vermeyden, October 23, 2015, 1.
69 Ibid., 2.
70 Ibid., 3.
presented the Crusades in their pavilion as a fun way to imagine the intersection of European and Middle Eastern arts. Calenti planned on performing *raqs sharqi* for the event. This pavilion constructed an image of the Crusades as romantic and effectively erased the violence and prejudice of the period. This community’s choice of this theme reflected their upper-class origins and comfort with French cultural identity.

In preparation for her upcoming performance in the Crusades-themed pavilion, Calenti studied *raqs sharqi* carefully by dancing with friends and family in the Egyptian community. Her mother-in-law had been especially helpful. She often coached Calenti’s *raqs sharqi* movements at parties and nightclubs. In Calenti’s debut “Turkish” performance at the French-Crusades pavilion, she came out of a basket dancing *raqs sharqi* to Turkish-style tunes played by a Dixie Land Jazz Band. The audiences at Caravan loved it, and Calenti’s position as a choreographer and performer within a certain segment of the Egyptian expatriate community in Toronto was solidified.

The year following her dance debut at the French-Crusade pavilion, Calenti visited Egypt with her husband. Calenti was struck by Egyptian cinema and dance star Soheir Zaki’s performance at a wedding she attended at the Nile Hilton. Calenti recalled being mesmerized by the “real thing.” Zaki’s performance inspired Calenti to work for hours every day trying to recreate her movements. Calenti was attracted to hybridizing Zaki’s movements with elements of ballet and other Western dance forms. She recalled that she felt she, “could go further” by hybridizing the movements with her classical Western dance training. As she practiced

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71 Ibid., 4.
72 Ibid., 3.
73 Ibid., 4.
74 Ibid.
obsessively, Calenti found she increasingly wanted to narrate stories through Egyptian *raqs sharqi* movement in the style of ballet, “so that’s what I did.”

Calenti produced choreography for the Luxor pavilion in 1980 and won Caravan’s first prize for the Egyptian-style choreography she presented. The next year her Egyptian-inspired choreography included a depiction of the coronation of a Pharaoh and the tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Her hybridized movements were not *raqs sharqi* as performed in Egypt (although they were inspired in part by these movements), and they certainly were not belly dance as currently understood by the majority of white Canadians. The highly trained, balletic pointing of toes, leaps, and other movements she incorporated did not come originally from Egyptian dance. On Caravan stages, her shows were removed from the sexualized connotations of a nightclub or cabaret. Her shows became aligned with the respectable representation of nation and ethnicity. In fusing the dance with ballet, the movements took on a hint of Westernized classicization. Calenti’s husband told the *Globe and Mail* that the performances by his wife at the Luxor pavilion were not “belly-dancing; over here, belly-dancing has all sorts of sexual connotations that it does not have there [in Egypt].” Calenti implemented choreographic tactics to disassociate her performance from the sexuality of belly dance. For instance, by presenting her ballet-infused *raqs sharqi* movements in theatrical narratives in the style of a ballet, she achieved increased prestige for her performances and choreographies in Canada, where ballet and Western modes of dance were widely understood as the pinnacle of artistic dance achievement. Additionally, she and her dancers did not perform in the two-piece *bedlah*

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75 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Shay, *Choreographic Politics*, 162.
80 Calenti, interview, 2.
set of raqs sharqi. Instead, she opted for balletic-style costuming, utilizing leotards and skirts, but no glitter, sequins or beaded fringe.\(^81\) All this helped distance her choreography from sexuality and achieve a greater association with Western concepts of dance art. Her work was quickly termed Egyptian ballet or Egyptian contemporary dance and her shows received great admiration both within and outside the Egyptian community. Her effort to fuse raqs sharqi with Western dance traditions echoed ongoing transnational dance fusions that had already been undertaken in Egypt. Egyptian efforts to fuse raqs sharqi with ballet and other Western dance elements had been ongoing long before Calenti had begun choreographing for Caravan. Thus, members of the Egyptian-Canadian community’s decision to embrace her Western-styled staging of Egyptian folkloric dance and raqs sharqi in Canada highlights her place within a larger complex of ongoing transnational cultural flows.

The development of folkloric dance for stage in Egypt, with significant cues from ballet, had already been in the process of development since the late 1950s under the direction of artists like Mahmoud Reda and Egypt’s state folkloric dance troupes.\(^82\) The postcolonial Egyptian state’s pressure on belly dancers to adopt elements of ballet and other Western training in the years after the Revolution also indicates this trend.\(^83\) In Egypt, both a history of colonial presence and postcolonial nationalist sentiment paved the way for the embrace of theatrical dance presentations that drew on Western dance traditions.\(^84\) Thus, acceptance and praise for Calenti’s ballet-raqs sharqi fusion stemmed from already established upper-class Egyptian affinities for

\(^{81}\) Susan Karima, interview by Anne Vermeyden, September 21, 2015, 6–7.
\(^{82}\) Upcoming published journal article in DRJ
\(^{84}\) Shay, Choreographic Politics, 132–33.
the incorporation of Western elements into presentations of Egyptian dance. The Reda Troupe’s massive success in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s prepared the way for this.

While journalist Kamal El Malakh was in Canada covering the Um Kulthum Orchestra’s performances, he witnessed Calenti’s show “Egyptian Odyssey” which was presented alongside the Tutankhamun exhibition held in 1979 at the Art Gallery of Ontario. He praised Calenti’s presentation of Egyptian folklore, history, and future in *Al Ahram*. After her success in Ontario at Caravan and the Exhibition, Calenti travelled the next year to Egypt with the goal of working with Egyptian musicians. She performed on Egyptian television, and soon after was invited to perform at the American University in Cairo’s Newart Hall. After this performance, she was approached by the Ministry of Culture to join on as a choreographer for the Reda Troupe (which by this point had been taken from Mahmoud Reda’s control, and placed under State control, directed and choreographed by a variety of individuals). Her choreographic style resonated with the Reda style and the placement fit. She focused on strengthening the troupe’s balletic technique and brought her interpretations of Egyptian dance to bear on one of Egypt’s premier state folkloric dance troupes. This opportunity was a direct result of her earlier work’s success in Canada, which had been shaped by members of the Egyptian expatriate community. In the Egyptian media, she was often referred to as a ballerina and her Egyptian Folkloric Ballet was highly praised throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Her work fit the Egyptian State’s ideal of cultural nationalist dance representation. It meshed well with Mahmoud Reda’s earlier pioneering efforts to put Egyptian folkloric forms onto stage, and to invent staged danced traditions in representation of the Egyptian nation. The Egyptian-Canadian community and

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85 Calenti, interview, 8.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 6 This is also evident in newspaper clippings from Calenti’s private collection.
Egyptian state’s embrace of her work indicates her performance and choreography cannot be written off as only appropriative. Her work did rely on Orientalist imagery, but this imagery was also embraced by many Egyptians. In many ways, her choreography reflected her multifaceted identity development and integration into the Egyptian-Canadian community through marriage. It showed an acute awareness of how many within Canada’s Egyptian community wanted their nation to be represented in dance. However, this success for her work stemmed in part from her status as a white classically trained dancer. Thus, Calenti’s success was a result of both her artistic vision and the implicit privileging of Western dance in both Canada and Egypt.

**Privileging Whiteness in Multicultural Spaces**

The consistent prevalence of white choreographers, professional and student belly dancers in Canadian multicultural celebrations were, in part, a symptom of a systematic privileging of whiteness. White belly dancers came to dominate North American stages and dancefloors by the 1960s and 1970s for a variety of reasons, including their culturally privileged position within Canadian society. Yasmina Ramzy, who was hired consistently by the Arab community for representation at cultural and multicultural events in Toronto during the 1980s, was convinced that her blondeness often had something to do with it:

> When the Canadian media would come in because of a story about… the Arab community, they would strut me out. Why not hire a belly dancer who’s actually Arabic? But they would hire me. And looking back on it...I didn’t understand what was happening at the time. But at the time it was, the Arab community …thinking, that the Canadians, by seeing me, would accept them more because I looked more like them, I looked more like the [white] Canadians. ... So, they thought if they strut me out as an Arab, when they [white Canadians] saw me, they would be able to embrace the Arab community more.  

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89 Ramzy, interview, 21.
She recalled being confused by how she was viewed or presented as Arab on several occasions. Although she was always part of a larger production involving Arab musicians and community members, “it looked like I was part of this Arabic community center. Or I was representing it.”

Perhaps the groups that hired Ramzy hoped was that her blondness would help their community appear more integrated or normalized in a society that privileged whiteness, despite multicultural rhetoric. During this period, at cultural festivals, audiences generally assumed dancers to be of the ethnicity being represented. Ramzy, in conversation with scholar Meiver de la Cruz, concluded that this community attempt to align with whiteness was likely a factor in decisions made to hire her. A blonde Arab dancer in the public eye would perhaps mitigate popular, negative media images of dark, dangerous Arabs. While the government was calling for the equitable inclusion of all cultural groups in the Canadian mosaic, multiculturalism policy did nothing to alter the privileging of Anglo-whiteness, and thus, many newcomer groups pragmatically, or incidentally, made use of white belly dancers in multicultural spaces.

Another possible reason white dancers were hired so often was the stigma attached to professional *raqs sharqi* in many Middle Eastern communities. In the Middle East, professional dancers faced varying levels of stigmatization, depending on the dancer’s gender, race, class, location and style of performance. In Canada, many in newcomer communities maintained these attitudes towards professional *raqs sharqi* performers—interviewees indicated that many Middle Eastern families did not aspire to have their daughters become professional *raqs sharqi* performers. Social pressure meant few women of Middle Eastern origin living in Canada chose

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90 Ibid., 22.
91 Shay, *Dancing Across Borders: The American Fascination with Exotic Dance Forms*, 34.
92 Ramzy, interview, 23.
93 van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other*; Roushy, *Femininity and Dance in Egypt*; Lorius, “‘Oh Boy, You Salt of the Earth.’”
to deal with the awkward family conversations (and stigma) that becoming a professional *raqs sharqi* dancer entailed.\textsuperscript{94} Depending on a woman’s own social and religious background the stigma associated with public and professional *raqs sharqi* performance varied. Canadian women from outside various Middle Eastern communities did not face these specific emic forms of social censure and stigma in the same way for belly dancing in public.

Another barrier to Middle Eastern women’s professional engagement in belly dance in North America included a fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the Middle East in performance. In the late 1980s, Roula Said, who had recently began dancing professionally in Toronto, recalled talking with two Palestinian women about Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Israeli-Egyptian politics, and the subsequent problematic nature of Egyptian belly dance performance. As the women offered various critiques of belly dance, Roula remembered thinking:

\begin{quote}
Don’t do this to me because I love this!...Please don’t make it [*raqs sharqi*] bad for other reasons. It’s enough that I have to battle, ‘Are you a prostitute?’ ‘Are you the embarrassment of your family?’ How many things do I need to go up against just to do this thing that I really need to do.\textsuperscript{95}
\end{quote}

She faced various levels of censure and stigma from within her family and community because of her decision to dance professionally. White Canadian professional and recreational dancers, although they may have faced some stigma within their families (depending on their background), did not typically face the same barriers to pursuing a professional dance career. This was especially true by the 1970s, once fitness and feminist redemption rhetoric on belly dance had become mainstream. Most white dancers interviewed recalled their families were generally supportive from the outset of their belly dance careers or indicated they became

\textsuperscript{94} This is certainly a generalization, as of course, newcomer families where dance would not be a problem at all existed as well. Obadia, interview; Said, interview.

\textsuperscript{95} Said, interview, 12.
supportive over time after an initial period of condemnation. Also, it was common for white dancers in the 1960s and 1970s to self-identify as counter-culture “hippies” or free spirits, thereby allowing them the ability to embrace any censure or condemnation for their belly dancing. Whiteness, furthermore, gave them a position of advantage—they did not have to deal with the implications of Orientalism once the costume was put away and the music stopped. Many Middle Eastern community groups were hiring white belly dancers to represent them, in part, because white belly dancers had come to dominate the professional scene in Toronto.

**Raqs Sharqi and Arab Identities in Multicultural Spaces**

Despite their prevalence in Toronto, white dancers from outside Middle Eastern communities were not the only ones performing belly dance at Caravan and multicultural festivals. Many within these Middle Eastern communities felt comfortable performing *raqs sharqi*, *oryantal* and *tsifteteli* as folk dance within multicultural festival spaces. This space, which was built to showcase ethnic and regional pride, made many willing to connect performances of *raqs sharqi* and other Middle Eastern styles of dance with their own ethnic and cultural identities. For example, Marrakesh pavilion in 1981 staged the performances of Zeina Hadad, a belly dancer who had grown up in England and Canada, but identified as half-Egyptian. In a quote from her in a *Globe and Mail* article, she stated that her participation in Caravan [as a dancer at the Marrakesh pavilion] gave her a sense of identity. Hadad’s performance of *raqs sharqi* at Marrakesh’s pavilion offered her a place to both construct and present a multifaceted identity.

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96 Kokot, interview, 17; Karima, interview, 15; Lammers, interview, 15.
97 Maria Morca, interview by Anne Vermeyden, February 13, 2015; Calenti, interview.
98 Alaton, “Caravan a Success Again but Nagging Doubts Raised,” 21.
During the 1970s, Roula Said found that raqs sharqi forced her to grapple with her relationship with Arab identity in the context of a multicultural festival. Said, a Palestinian Arab was born in Kuwait City in 1963 and arrived in Canada in 1969. A multicultural festival, possibly Caravan, was the context of one of her earliest belly dance memories in Canada.99 She had a very vivid memory of a woman at the festival who wore a beautiful jalabeya while dancing raqs sharqi with an “insane smile.” Said recalled she “just found it so embarrassing.”100 She continued, “I just remember going ‘whoah’ like ‘we are weird, we, like Arab people…’”101 Said’s exposure to belly dance in the context of a multicultural festival highlighted difference from “mainstream,” or white Canadian culture. This realization of difference through witnessing this woman’s performance prompted embarrassment, as the dancing and the costuming were all markers of difference. Perhaps the stigmatization of dance also impacted this response.

**Caravan and Multiculturalism as a Conflicted Political Space**

Broader sociopolitical conflict sometimes surfaced in conjunction with Caravan belly dance performances. While Caravan’s founders, Zena and Leon Kossar, consistently appealed for the festival to be apolitical, this vision was impossible to achieve. The presentation of ethnic and group identities from across the globe was inherently political. To avoid highlighting international conflict and violence, pavilion organizers utilized a variety of tactics, including the use of smaller unknown towns or cities for pavilion names, so as not to attract Canadians’ attention to areas clearly beset by contemporary military conflict. For example, Issa Khoury, the Lebanese organizer of the Ras a-Khaima (sp) pavilion in 1986 stated that he chose Ras a-Khaima for his pavilion’s name because it was a small city in the United Arab Emirates that was

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99 Said, interview, 11.
100 Ibid., 12.
101 Ibid., 43.
“relatively unknown but typically Middle Eastern.” Khoury decided to distance the pavilion he organized from conflicts in the Middle East because he hoped to present an image of the Middle East that was not focused on violence. He stated, “The Middle East is going through a very turbulent time in history, and if you just read the news, all you hear and see is fighting, but that’s not what the Middle East is all about.” Pauline Greenhill suggests that this maneuvering to present an ideal image of one’s ethnicity to North American audiences resulted in “McMulticulturalism,” in which cultural presentations at multicultural festivals and events erased conflict in order to present ideal and easily digestible cultural elements. But in this case, Khoury’s hope to present Arab identity in Canada as distanced from violence and conflict was not just about presenting simple and easily accessible images of the Middle East; it was also a move to subvert common stereotypes about Arabs-as-violent. Similarly, the Ras a-Khaima pavilion’s inclusion of a belly dancer was a way to make the pavilion attractive, but also a statement about the community’s identity. Khoury and the organizing group embraced belly dance’s place within a version of ideal pan-Arab culture. Maha Sabah was the belly dancer who performed at the Ras-a-Khaima pavilion in 1986. Her dancing at this pavilion was a part of a strategic representation of the Middle East that focused on distancing Arab identity from violent contemporary conflicts in Lebanon, and in the broader Middle East. It was part of a move to stand against a form of Orientalist stereotype common in North American media which increasingly depicted Arabs as inherently violent over the 1970s and 1980s.

103 Ibid.
105 Events including “the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973, the hijacking of planes, the disruptive 1973 Arab oil embargo, along with the rise of Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi and Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini...” all contributed to Western media’s decision to portray Arabs as the “Godless Enemy Other.” Shaheen, Reel Bad Arabs, 34–35.
political realities and common stereotypes both impacted how groups sought to represent themselves in multicultural festivals like Caravan.

Tensions over the Israel-Palestine conflict affected both pavilion naming and pavilion performances at Caravan. In 1979, conflict broke out over the right to name and represent Jerusalem, or El-Quds (sp) in a pavilion at Caravan. The Arab Community Centre in Toronto, which hoped to name its pavilion El-Quds, ended up taking this issue of naming rights to court after conflict with a Jewish community organization. The conflict began when Metro Toronto Caravan rejected the Arab Community Centre’s application for a pavilion named El-Quds. Caravan organizers informed the Arab Community Centre that no group would be allowed to use the name Jerusalem in any language for a pavilion because they were concerned about the possibility of conflict. In response, the Arab Community Centre applied to name their pavilion Bethlehem, Ramallah, or Nablus (all Palestinian cities), but again Caravan rejected their naming application. The Arab Community Centre was frustrated at Caravan’s deliberate move to block its attempts to name its pavilion after a Palestinian town. Previous pavilions had been named Aden, Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, and Kuwait because the Centre had been rotating the naming of its pavilions amongst different groups in Toronto’s Arab community. That year, Arab Community Centre believed it was time to represent Toronto’s approximately 5,000 Palestinian residents, but its efforts to do so were consistently shut down by Caravan organizers.106

After rejecting the Arab Community Centre’s multiple pavilion applications that year, Caravan organizers decided that a Jewish organization, B’nai B’rith, would be allowed to call its pavilion Jerusalem, as long as the group agreed to represent Jewish, Christian and Arab residents of the city. The Arab Community Centre was frustrated at the political decision favouring the

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106 The Arab Community Centre represented approximately 20,000 Arab Canadians who lived in Toronto. “Arabs to Go to Court over Caravan Dispute on Pavilion Name,” The Globe and Mail, March 8, 1979, 2.
Jewish group’s control over the city’s representation, and it requested an injunction that would stop Caravan from giving B’nai B’rith the use of the name Jerusalem for its pavilion. The move failed after a provincial court judge ruled against the Arab Community Centre.\textsuperscript{107} Ontario's Supreme court also dismissed a charge of discrimination brought by the Arab Community Centre against Caravan.\textsuperscript{108} Due to frustration over Caravan’s decision to give control of El-Quds/Jerusalem’s representation to a Jewish group after Caravan had promised no group would be representing the city, the Arab Community Centre decided to hold its own independent ethnic festival. The Arab Community Centre named its independent celebration Al-Quds. The group hoped their separate presentation of cultural heritage would be easily accessed by all Canadians and, unlike Caravan which charged for passports, offered entrance to Al-Quds for free.\textsuperscript{109} There were no indications of belly dance performance at the Al-Quds celebration that year. Perhaps this was a strategic move to distance Arab identity from stereotypical belly dancers or the result of moral ambivalence amongst community members towards the public performance of the form.

Arab-Israeli tension did end up impacting belly dance performances at other Caravan pavilions years later. Conflict over who should embody cultural or regional representation through belly dance surfaced at Caravan. As both Jewish and Arab groups utilized belly dancer performers to represent identity at Caravan, some dancers faced censure because of their public engagement with both groups. For example, Dahlia Obadia, of Moroccan Jewish origin, made the decision to perform belly dance at Caravan’s Israeli Pavilion one year after being asked to perform there. Obadia quickly heard that members of the Arab community, who had previously hired Obadia regularly for belly dance performances, were not pleased she did this. Rumours

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
claiming she was a Zionist had begun spreading after her performance at the Israeli pavilion. Obadia recalled that many Canadian belly dancers who had been dancing in the Arab community also performed at the Israeli pavilion, but she felt she was singled out because of her ethnicity. Obadia, who had lived for a time in Israel before coming to Canada, decided to continue to perform for the Israeli pavilion, “and then, because of that, they [certain members of the Arab community in Toronto] didn’t want to hire me [Obadia] anymore.” She felt that her performances had been a way to honour Arabic music and culture, and to make a positive connection with the Arabic speaking communities in Canada. She had studied for a significant amount of time with Lala Hakim and Ibrahim Farrah, and had previously really enjoyed performing for the Arab community. She was disappointed because she hoped her performance of belly dance for the Arab community was a way she was encouraging bridging between Arab and Jewish communities and felt her performances were a way to honour Arab culture. However, her decision to perform at the Israeli pavilion carried political meaning and was perceived as an act of Israeli appropriation. Despite the existence of positive intentions, her performances as a Jewish woman at the Israeli pavilion appeared to many within Toronto’s Arab community to be an implicit endorsement of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Within Caravan belly dance performances like Obadia’s took on political significance and meaning.

Conclusion

Canada was grappling with the concept of shared national identity through the implementation of multiculturalism policy during the early 1970s. In this context, Metro Toronto International Caravan and other cultural and multicultural celebrations in Toronto became spaces where belly dance was very popular during the 1970s and 1980s. Belly dance, an entertaining form of

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110 Obadia, interview, 5.
111 Ibid.
“familiar otherness,”\textsuperscript{112} was utilized by newcomer groups in these celebrations to facilitate interactions with established Canadian citizens from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and identities. At Metro Toronto International Caravan, pavilion organizers, choreographers, and dancers who facilitated belly dance performances were constructing identities through dance representations. The goal of these celebrations may have been equality and cultural sharing, but completely even and equitable interchange, while an ideal, was not fully realized. In this context, performances exhibited an arrangement of hybridities that were informed by a societal privileging of white English and French identities. Men and women from a variety of backgrounds constructed dance performances designed to present national or ethnic identities that were idealized for this Canadian multicultural context. For example, Egyptian belly dance and Lebanese folklore at Caravan often contained a variety of interesting transnational intersections. Choreographer, instructor, and dancer Eddie Manneh appealed to Canadian audiences in his choreographies by utilizing white dancers and referencing traditional Western tropes about the Middle East. But, he managed to do this while maintaining shows that aligned with his Lebanese identity and resonated internationally with Arab audiences.\textsuperscript{113} Alternatively, Diana Calenti presented hybridizations of Egyptian dance which resonated with Canadian audiences and Egyptian audiences because of her deep engagement with Egyptian communities, her dance training and ability, artistic vision, and her privileged white American identity. Both choreographers drew inspiration from a variety of sources to ideally position the communities they represented. Communities that chose to include belly dance in multicultural festivals or cultural celebrations in Canada during the 1970s and 1980s presented ideal-for-Canada versions of the group in dance. Finally, these Caravan pavilion stages and multicultural celebrations were

\textsuperscript{112} Racy, “Domesticating Otherness,” 224.
\textsuperscript{113} Manneh, interview, 6,8.
political spaces where belly dance could take on meanings informed by contemporary international relations. Thus, performances in this multicultural space were so much more than just entertainment. They were not pristine representations of essential ethnic or national identity. Rather, shows were carefully constructed statements about shared identity, and possibly political affiliation. The presentation of belly dance as a political cultural and identity statement and the uneven use of belly dance to offer bridging between cultural groups in Caravan celebrations was the all the result of the unique Canadian “multicultural” socio-political context.
CHAPTER VI: The Emergence of the Belly Dance Class in Toronto, 1970-1987

By the 1970s and 1980s, a variety of belly dance styles and venues had achieved popularity in Toronto. Middle Eastern, Canadian, and American dancers circulated in and out of clubs, restaurants, private events, and multicultural festivals in different cities and nations. It was during these decades that belly dance transitioned in Toronto from being primarily a form of entertainment to also being a form of popular, structured recreation in studio and class settings. During the 1970s, belly dance became very popular as a form of recreation amongst white Canadian women.1 By 1978, thousands of Torontonian women had taken belly dance classes.2 Belly dance’s popularity as a leisure activity for Canadian women coincided with the blossoming of late twentieth-century gendered fitness culture. According to Virginia Keft-Kennedy, belly dance became a socio-cultural practice for many North Americans during this period.3 Amira Jarmakani also notes that during the 1970s dancers and teachers utilized rhetoric of both fitness and feminism to justify their participation in belly dance, a form previously popularly understood as for men’s enjoyment.4 This search for respectability was not new. In order to achieve respectability for belly dance as a fitness and leisure activity, many Western dancers argued it was an ancient dance aligned with essential femininity that had become corrupted over time. With Keft-Kennedy and Jarmakani’s analysis in mind, this chapter traces how and why belly dance became a popular, even respectable form of recreation for many Canadian women.

In Toronto, professional dancers and choreographers began offering more formalized dance classes in studio and home settings beginning in the 1970s. Instructors presented belly dance in a variety of ways, often suggesting classes were an exotic pathway to fitness, figure control, and empowerment for any woman, not just professional dancers. However, advertising for early belly dance classes in Toronto still reified dominant heteronormative gender roles and Orientalist stereotypes; belly dance’s perceived ability to grant a woman exotic sensuality still helped fill classes and sell how-to books. Actual class experiences varied, and while sometimes dancers experienced meaningful cultural bridging, often these classes became spaces for the reinforcement of traditional stereotypes about gender and the Middle East. Belly dance’s increased integration into feminist and feminist-spirited discourse was not inevitable, and dancers and teachers worked hard to position belly dance as a feminist activity. Belly dance’s refashioning for popular Western female consumption produced a new social form of recreation and fitness leisure unique to its North American context.

**Ideal Female Forms and 1970s Gendered Fitness Culture**

Professional dancers and teachers offering structured belly dance classes did so within the context of an intensifying twentieth-century cultural obsession with the slimming and controlling of women’s bodies. Although thinness had been desirable in the West since the early Christian period, its fashionability became more popular beginning as early as the eighteenth century, with the introduction of corsets. But, by the 1890s, middle class women were increasingly finding it stylish not to wear corsets, even though standardized ready-to-wear clothing lines demanded uniformity in women’s shapes.⁵ Thus, by the start of the twentieth century, Peter N. Stearns argues there was a major turn against “fat” and plumpness as fashion began revealing more of

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the female body. Women tried to maintain slim figures without the aid of corsets by turning to their dietary and exercise habits to control their figures.  

This need to control body’s shape through diet, exercise, and alteration became stronger and stronger as women’s bodies became more exposed in daily life.

With a few notable exceptions, in general, clothing often did not easily hide flaws in a woman’s figure by the late 1960s. Shorter hemlines and more revealing fashions emergent in the 1960s and 1970s made the shape of the body under the clothing just as essential as the fashion itself. Shelly McKenzie’s research on this trend indicates that during the 1960s a woman’s body was increasingly perceived and presented in magazines and advertisements as a “malleable accessory.” While the exact “in” form varied depending on class, race, and region from decade to decade in North America, generally, a slim figure was consistently praised over the twentieth century. In the 1960s and 1970s specifically, the ideal for white women was “shapely, slender and softly curvy.”

During the first half of the century, diet was used as a primary tool to achieve these standards, but beginning in the 1960s, physical movement was increasingly viewed as an essential tool in achieving this ideal body shape. Belly dance’s ability to help a woman keep her body’s shape in check was noted in articles (often written by men) about professional oriental dance performers as early as the beginning of the 1960s. In a 1963 article entitled “Housewife as

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6 Ibid., 11.
9 Pirkko Markula suggests the lean, muscled aesthetic for women did not take off until the mid 1980s, near the end of this study’s focus. Pirkko Markula, “Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin: The Postmodern Aerobicizing Female Bodies,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12, no. 4 (1995): 431.
an Oriental Dancer” published in Rhode Island’s Providence Sunday Journal, journalist John B. Value argued that “the dual life of housewife and [belly dance] nightclub entertainer” is ideal for any woman who “has the beauty and talent and can stand the pace.” He concluded that this lifestyle “would keep your weight down, little mother.” Professional belly dancers were consistently praised for their perfect figures in newspaper publications and media representations across the U.S. and Canada. The linkage between dance, fitness, and body control increased over this decade with Dr. Kenneth Cooper’s massively popular book Aerobics, published in 1968, which encouraged the growth of fitness classes as a method of maintaining health. Both general aerobics and dance aerobics became very popular with women who wanted to control their weight; in this period, dance was increasingly presented as an activity that could aid in both weight loss and fitness for all women, not just professional dancers. Popular dance classes, marketed for their ability to bring fitness and body-control became massively popular during the 1970s. Belly dance, already understood as a body-shaping activity, was appropriated into popular dance-fitness class culture.

Belly Dance, Reputation, and Popularity as Recreation in North America

Belly dance’s boom as a form of fitness and leisure in North America is not surprising given its role as a form of social and celebratory dance across the Middle East. Raqs sharqi, oryantal and tsifleteli have been, and continue to be found throughout the Middle East as forms of social, informal participatory dance; they were not only for professionals. Najwa Adra’s work indicates that belly dance in social settings is not choreographed and that it is enjoyed

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11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
extensively by non-professionals at social gatherings and celebrations.\textsuperscript{14} For example, Najwa Adra describes how \textit{raqs sharqi} often emerges spontaneously at celebrations in contemporary Egypt. She relates that often several guests will begin dancing together at a party or wedding as a part of the celebration. At an event like this, a guest may dance solo for a while and then move in to improvise with a friend. The pair may separate or may join a growing circle of dancers who will mingle and move freely. This non-professional \textit{raqs sharqi} is always social and those watching often encourage the dancers to move with shouts and whistling.\textsuperscript{15} It is performed by men and women and provides a place for self-expression, and a chance to celebrate both community and family. A high value is placed on emotional engagement and interaction. These social performances are improvised and not intentionally seductive, but often fun, and dancers will playfully challenge social norms.\textsuperscript{16} While this is a description of \textit{raqs sharqi} as danced socially in the Arab world, this scene could just as easily emerge in a variety of countries across the Middle East. For most of the twentieth century in the Middle East \textit{raqs sharqi} was not taught in studios by professional dancers or instructors, but instead was transmitted informally at parties, weddings, and through film and television.\textsuperscript{17} Professional paid dancers at weddings, parties, nightclubs, or in films provided people with movement vocabularies towards which to aspire.

\textsuperscript{14} Adra, “Belly Dance an Urban Folk Genre,” 42.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} While belly dance instructional classes were not popular in the Middle East at this time, they did exist. For example, formal classes for professional belly dancers involving balletic training emerged in Egypt during the late 1950s and into the 1960s. In Beirut, Freddy Manneh’s dance school, Freddy’s Dance Academy, which opened in 1955, offered recreational belly dance classes as early as the late 1950s. Eddy Manneh also taught recreational belly dance classes at the Beirut College for Women in the 1960s. Manneh, interview, 14. Elva C. Wells, “Beirut College for Women, Scholarship Fund Letter,” March 11, 1961, Eddy Manneh Personal Collection.
This feeling of celebration, enjoyment, and freedom in movement was reported by all of the dancers interviewed for this project. It also brought them joy. Dahlia Obadia, of Moroccan Jewish descent, had early exposure to raqs sharqi through her family’s maid who taught Obadia and her sisters informally. While her sister would dance for the family, as a youth Dahlia never had the courage to dance outside of her locked bedroom. After coming to Canada, Obadia began taking belly dance classes in Toronto in 1972 at her local YMCA under the tutelage of Anna Maria Fuentes, an instructor of South American descent who had no formal training or background in belly dance. Obadia admired Fuentes’ creativity and feel for the music, and found that dancing in her classes and at home countered feelings of depression she had been suffering from since moving to Canada. "Until I started the dance ... I felt like I didn't exist," she shared in an interview with Suzanne Myers Sawa. The movement and the music were very powerful for the dancers interviewed. Interviewees recalled being compelled to take classes because of the power of Arabic, Greek, or Turkish music, and the reported freedom felt in being able to dance to the music. Dancers also recalled feeling empowered by gaining mastery over their own bodily movement and by accessing sensual expression. Women who participated in these classes also experienced feelings of enjoyment and camaraderie with classmates. Classes offered a structured space for women in North America to regularly enjoy and participate in one of the most widespread social dances of the Middle East.

White North American women, however, did not typically imagine belly dance as a social, celebratory dance form before they began taking classes. They could not escape how belly

19 Ibid., 33; Obadia, interview.
20 Myers Sawa, “The Odyssey of Dahlia Obadia: Morocco, Israel, Canada.”
21 Ramzy, interview; Karima, interview, 4; Bell, interview.
dance had presented in North America as a sexualized, exotic performance done for the titillation of men. Neither could they escape its association with essentialized ideas of femininity and Eastern spirituality. While some narratives about its “acceptability” as a folk dance or as some sort of ancient spiritual dance existed in the West, images of the titillating belly dancer dominated in the early postwar period. Dance instructors in North America who began teaching belly dance engaged in many narratives, including traditional sexual Orientalist narratives, social dance narratives, spiritual narratives, fitness narratives, or even feminist narratives in order to attract students. Its position as exotic and sexy was a major element of its attractiveness to white Canadian students. However, it was these other “reputable” narratives about belly dance’s meaning and purpose would permit white Canadian women to feel comfortable participating in belly dance classes.

Belly dance classes emerged in Toronto differently from how they emerged in, for instance, New York City. In New York, the earliest official belly dance classes in a studio setting were created to train professional dancers. New York’s demand for dancers at clubs, restaurants, and private events was so high in the 1960s that Joe Williams and Delores DuVaughan began a school named Stairway to Stardom for belly dance and strip-tease training to try and meet the demand in 1964. They found they could barely meet the demand for performers, even with the school.\textsuperscript{22} It continued to do so until it was bought by Serena Wilson, who renamed it Serena Studios and focused the school’s education only on belly dance instruction.\textsuperscript{23} Wilson and other American teachers who became popular at the beginning of the 1970s increasingly tried to distance belly dance from strip-tease. Respectability became paramount in being able to market

\textsuperscript{22} Monty, 241.
\textsuperscript{23} Burnam, “Bellydance in America,” 58.
this dance form to middle and upper class American women as a form of leisure. Famous American performers and instructors like Ibrahim Farrah and Jamila Salimpour spearheaded instruction that asserted there was real, quality authentic belly dance to be known, which was separate from over-sexualized cabaret performances. These examples showcase that the way schools and classes for belly dance developed across North America were not uniform. While informal classes and private lessons were occurring in Toronto early on as a way to meet professional dancers’ training needs, official structured classes did not emerge until the 1970s, and these were not focused on professional training. Toronto’s official classes developed in part because of the already present fad for recreational belly dance in the U.S.

**Differing Approaches: Toronto’s Earliest Belly Dance Classes**

An American dancer opened Toronto's first dance studio to offer belly dance classes. Her school was not primarily for working dancers, but for middle-class recreation. Maria Morca, originally of California, began studying dance at age four and was a protégée of the Ruth St. Denis Foundation. She had a strong background in ballet, Afro-jazz, flamenco, and a variety of other dance forms by her late teens. She learned belly dance later in life. A friend of hers named Zanouba, whom she had met while working on a set in Hollywood in 1963, was the one who introduced Morca to Egyptian belly dance. Zanouba was originally from Egypt and was Morca’s first unofficial teacher. She was also instrumental in securing Morca’s first gig as a professional belly dancer at a New Year’s Eve party. Zanouba taught Morca basic belly dance movements and brought her into the dance world in California. Morca was thrust into Los Angeles’ budding

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24 Ibid., 69.
26 Morca, interview, 2–3.
belly dance scene after having only three weeks to make a costume, get comfortable with Arabic music, and practice the five basic belly dance steps she had learned from Zanouba.27

Morca hated her first belly dance performance experience because she was literally assaulted with the form’s sexualized reputation. She recalled, "It all got a little rowdy. One gentleman, one man, put a dollar bill around an ice cube and stuffed it down my bosom... And I hit him. I gave him the karate chop... And I said I would never do this again."28 However, Morca did continue to belly dance. She appeared in numerous television shows and films during that decade. Some of her on-screen belly dance credits include appearances in I Spy, Run for Your Life, and I Dream of Jeannie.29

Morca's fiancée, a Greek producer, immigrated to Toronto in 1970. Morca married him and joined him in Canada. In 1972, she opened the Academy of Dance Arts School on Yonge St. with her business partner Marguerite Yanuziello, a former ballerina.30 Morca tried to establish herself as a flamenco teacher, but she discovered there was little interest for flamenco classes in Toronto at the time. Her “oriental dance” classes were also not very popular. Morca decided she needed to rebrand her “oriental dance” classes in an attempt to increase their popularity. She started advertising them as “belly dancing” classes and her phone began ringing off the hook. She found she could barely accommodate all of the women interested. The Toronto Star offered an explanation for the success of Morca’s classes:

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27 Ibid., 2.
28 Ibid., 3.
29 Ibid., 3–4.
The [belly dance] craze was already hot in the U.S., *Vogue* and *Life* magazines had extolled its exercising virtues, How-To paperbacks were being published on the subject—the once-derided art had become respectable.\(^{31}\)

The already present American fad for belly dance classes and the related growth in published belly dance instructional material and belly dance LPs paved the way for Morca’s successful classes in Toronto. Around this same time, belly dance classes became popular in YMCAs across Canada. There were belly dance classes at YMCAs in the Greater Toronto Area as early as 1972, the same year Morca began teaching oriental dance at her Academy of Dance Arts.\(^{32}\) Belly dance was hot in the 1970s; a 1975 YMCA ad in the *Toronto Star* read, “Resolution for 1976: Bellydance.”\(^{33}\) Many teachers at the YMCAs were students who took classes from Toronto’s major teachers who ran their own schools in this period: Maria Morca, Eddy Manneh, and Diana Calenti. Other instructors at the YMCAs and community centres were usually either self-taught, women with experience dancing professionally, or those who had travelled to train with American instructors. Professional dancers in Toronto also began increasingly teaching out of their homes in this period. Classes proliferated at colleges, community centres, and schools throughout the city. For instance, Eddy Manneh managed to begin teaching, or have his students begin teaching at Seneca, George Brown and Ryerson; by the mid-1970s, Manneh had teachers offering belly dance classes in approximately 14 community schools in Toronto. His classes and many other classes throughout the city often had large wait lists as popular interest in belly dance peaked.\(^{34}\)

Further contributing to belly dance’s popularization as a form of recreation and fitness in Toronto was its appearance as a fitness program on television in the Toronto area. By 1976, belly

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31 Ibid., 19.
32 Karima, interview, 4.
34 Manneh, interview, 3.
dance instruction was televised on channel 11, Hamilton’s CHCH. A program entitled *Enjoy Being Beautiful with Minka* aired daily at 6am, where Minka (Susana Van Bochove, a student at York University at the time)\(^{35}\) taught a new belly dance movement every morning during the half-hour long show. Victoria Lammers, who later began dancing professionally at the Cleopatra in the 1970s, recalled Minka’s televised instruction comprised her only real formal belly dance education. Minka’s show provided Lammers an affordable and easy way to learn belly dance movements at home. Television was a new media for fitness culture, and dance programs like Minka’s joined various aerobics and dance shows marketed at women who spent a lot of time in the home.\(^{36}\) Viewers of Minka’s program purchase music through her program to practice with at home.\(^{37}\) Lammers, who practiced daily, requested the music. Through an event hosted by Minka for all of those who had purchased the show’s music, Lammers met many amateur belly dancers, students, and a few professionals. She was blown away by the beauty, excitement, and popularity of belly dance in Toronto and its surrounding area.

Belly dance’s sexual and deviant reputation in the public eye began achieving redemption as a form of physical fitness. Belly dance was no longer only the dance of scantily-clad nightclub dancers. It was transferred into popular classes where women were told they could have fun while gaining control over their bodies. In the early 1970s, Maria Morca’s Academy of Dance Arts made the papers as a place where women were successfully losing weight while having fun

\(^{37}\) Lammers, interview, 2.
belly dancing. Morca, and many others in this period, presented belly dance as a form of enjoyable gendered fitness, and many North American women perceived the dance form as a way to shape their bodies into the normative ideal of the period. For example, articles on Morca’s studio from 1973 and 1974 respectively focus on how a student lost 10 pounds over a 12 week course and how another student lost 60 pounds over the course of 9 months dancing. Wendy Dickson, who began dancing in 1972, recalled she wanted to take a course “for the exercise,” but stayed on because it was such a good time. In 1974, Morca related to the Star that women, “find that belly-dancing slims the waistline, flattens the tummy, and especially tightens up the legs and thighs. But the main reason they keep doing it, is because they find its fun.”

Belly dance achieved a new morality through its presentation as a fitness activity. In 1973, Morca stated, “We don’t teach belly dancing, we teach belly dancing exercises… some of the husbands might object otherwise.” Popular how-to literature from this period that was easily accessible in both Canadian and American metropolitan centres also focused on belly dance’s physical benefits for women concerned about their health and appearance, both to sell and legitimize the form. For example, the LP The Joy of

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41 Whelan, “At This School, Graduation Means Undulation,” 5.
Belly Dancing, published in 1975 and available at Toronto’s iconic Sam the Record Man, featured an insert written by Vina (Florence H. Haddad), which began:

The aging process begins at approximately 20 years of age. Muscles and ligaments tighten up…Belly dancing helps stretch these ligaments and muscles thus maintaining the body’s suppleness. It strengthens the whole body promoting good circulation which helps to retard the aging process…It is recommended by many doctors as a form of therapy for many physical and mental disorders.42

Not only was belly dance presented as something that made women beautiful in these classes, it was also something healthy. This intersection of beauty and physical benefits made recreational participation in belly dance respectable. However, sexuality, and racialized, or Orientalist presentations of sexuality, were not entirely erased from belly dance’s fitness presentations.

Advertisements in Toronto papers from this period focused on belly dance’s ability to slim the waistline. The body that was being idealized was slender, but feminine in that it was not hard, as in the waifishness of Twiggy, or sort of body that would become trendier into the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, during the 1970s and even into the 1980s it was believed the muscles of the waist and stomach could be toned and trimmed to achieve the idealized hourglass figure found on so many belly dance LP covers. There was a spectrum of idealized female shape in this period, and certainly the “bellydance” ideal body (despite rhetoric about inclusivity) was influenced by both North American and Middle Eastern body ideals. This was especially true to belly dancers who were interested in performing professionally for Middle Eastern audiences in the city. The consideration that slightly more curvature and weight was considered attractive, for instance, amongst Egyptian audiences (at least in comparison to typical white Canadian audiences) resulted in a figure that did not necessarily reflect the ideal body of high fashion, or

perhaps even Hollywood for professional dancers. The body ideal was slim, but not waifish or hard.

Important in the successful transition of belly dance into popular dance classes was the ability of teachers to position it as an exotic gendered fitness activity that would benefit women’s male partners. The form was respectable and virtuous because it helped a woman stay slim and fit, but it was exciting because the movement was perceived as exotic and slightly taboo. A *Toronto Star* article from 1974 stated that belly dance now had a “new and purer appeal for thousands of respectable women who have found it’s a dandy way to exercise, tighten up flab- and maybe raise hubby’s eyebrows a notch or two.”\(^{43}\) It served to reinforce prevalent gendered norms; what was better than a recreational outlet that would allow a woman to “tighten up” and learn some fun moves for her husband’s enjoyment?

During this period, a woman’s shapeliness, achieved through diet and exercise, was presented in advertising and popular media as an essential element in a happy marriage. In ads and films, maintaining a trim figure was presented as a woman’s duty to her husband. Women were told being overweight threatened their marriages. Fitness marketing during the late 1960s and well into the 1970s claimed that if a wife gained weight and did not take care of her appearance, her husband would become disinterested in her and possibly stray.\(^{44}\) The message, that a man would leave his fat spouse, was not only implied, but often outright presented in ads and editorials.\(^{45}\) This narrative which objectified a woman’s body as a meaningful asset in a marriage appeared in discourses attempting to popularize belly dance classes. Eddy Manneh,

\(^{43}\) King, “Little Egypt’s Legacy: Grandma Thought Belly Dancing Was Sinful; It’s Sure More Fun than Push-Ups,” 17.
\(^{44}\) McKenzie, *Getting Physical*, 69.
who ran the Chez Freddy Dance Academy (and its subsequent incarnations and branches), 
stressed a women’s worth in terms of her outer appearance’s impact on men. Manneh felt that he 
was responsible for saving women’s marriages by making them lose weight, achieve slimness, 
and normative beauty through belly dance:

Manneh presented belly dance as something that could save a marriage by making a woman slim 
and attractive. In this statement, he objectified the bodies of his dancers, took credit for their 
attainment of self-confidence, and for the success of their relationships. Women’s bodies, in 
recreational belly dance spaces like Manneh’s classes, were often marketed as objects to be 
moulded for male benefit. Manneh and other belly dance marketers during this period re-
appropriated narratives of female empowerment to reinforce a patriarchal and paternalistic 
discourse.

Many teachers, books, and LPs presented belly dance as a way for women to keep their 
husbands happy, or interested. Özel Türkbaş, a dancer who gained fame in Turkey before coming 
to work and perform in the U.S., published an LP in both the U.S. and Turkey in 1972 entitled 
*How to Make Your Husband a Sultan: Belly Dance with Özel Türkbaş*. Its contents and cover 
reified dominant heterosexual gender roles and utilized the exotic Orientalist western conception 
belly dance to sell belly dance as leisure so that “tonight you can be bellydancing for that

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46 Manneh, interview, 13.
luckiest of men—your sultan.” The direct involvement of heterosexual male presence in imagined Eastern spaces was consistent in North American marketing of recreational belly dance. Narratives about recreational belly dance as a way for women to be healthy and have fun were quickly absorbed, or often, intertwined from their inception, into already existing Orientalist narratives about belly dance’s existence solely for the enjoyment of men.

In Toronto’s earliest recreational belly dance classes, the harem imagery that dominated media and popular performances of belly dance was reflected in some class settings. In 1972, one of the Maria Morca’s early belly dancing classes at her Academy “had become known as the Harem.” In this class, “the Harem girls referred to their husbands and boy friends as the Sultans.” The class’s graduation ceremony was to be a women’s only affair, but the Toronto Star recounted how one dancer smuggled both her husband and his friend into the graduation performance because she wanted him to see her graduate “if only because he’d paid the $60 for the course.” She made a tape with Arabic music, and over it, she recorded a story in her own words, complete with camels, caravans, harem girls, a sultan, and a magnificent palace. When she reached her description of the story’s sultan, her husband emerged in an ankle length robe, sporting a fried-chicken bucket covered in shiny cloth as a hat. His “chief harem guard,” a friend of his, entered next, also dressed in a quick-sewn costume in stereotypical Orientalist fashion. The class and its graduation became a place for these women to play make-believe with the Eastern stereotypes that had dominated popular culture throughout the century. This reinforced

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48 See previous chapter.
50 Ibid., 60.
these images and was an example of how early classes like Morca’s often served to further entrench stereotypes about the Middle East.

While belly dance classes in Toronto were places where instructors reified dominant Orientalist and heteronormative body narratives, this was not always the case. In many instances, instructors tried to offer more nuance in their presentations of belly dance. In their own ways, both of Toronto’s earliest studios tried to introduce more complex presentations of belly dance to students. While instructors made use of, and often reinforced damaging traditional Orientalist imagery, in their own unique ways, each challenged specific stereotypes and offered belly dance education that would take students beyond the Western, Harum Scarum image of the belly dancer popular in this period. Classes, at times, were places for meaningful reflection on stereotypes about the Middle East, gender, and belly dance. Maria Morca’s development as a belly dance instructor and the contents of her 1975 publication of the book Maria Morca’s Belly Dance Work Kit-Basic Course indicated some of this complexity. Morca was approached by Penguin Books to write a book on belly dancing in the early 1970s because “by that time it was really getting very popular.”51 Morca agreed and proposed a book that would present belly dance as a conflicted, but reputable art form, complete with discussion of its various historical and social contexts. Penguin was not interested in this sort of publication and instead wanted to capitalize on the heteronormative presentation of belly dance as something exotic and sexy that would help women get fit and toned. They wanted “more photos of girls in skimpy costumes… [and] more how-to." Morca was reluctant to write a simple how-to book because Marta Schill and Julie Russo Mishkin had just published The Compleat Belly Dancer.52 She also was

51 Morca, interview, 6–7.
uncomfortable focusing on presenting titillating images of dancers at the cost of what she believed was meaningful material; Penguin wanted her to remove chapters discussing the various negative reputations belly dance had in both North America and the Middle East. Morca was frustrated because she felt recognition of belly dance’s “corruption” was important. She and Penguin were unable to achieve a shared vision.

After Penguin dropped the publication, Morca resolved to make her own statement about belly dance through a local publisher in Toronto. She published *Maria Morca’s Bellydance Work Kit- Basic Course* and its accompanying LP in 1975. George Sawa provided guidance for the book’s LP and played *qanun* for the production. Sawa at the time was studying

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53 Morca, interview, 6–7.
ethnomusicology at the University of Toronto, and working towards his doctorate in historical Arabic Musicology in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies. Ebrahim Eleish, originally from Cairo, accompanied Sawa on oud and nay. Dikran Istanbul, who had studied Turkish classical music theory in Istanbul was on violin, while Bashar Darkazalli, trained at the Arab Music Institute of Damascus, Syria, played doumbek. Morca consulted Sawa and the other musicians in the production of the work, and she gave considerable space to discussion of Arabic

Figure 6.1 The cover of *Maria Morca's Belly Dance Work Kit - Basic Course*, published in Toronto in 1975. Maria Morca is pictured dancing with veil in the image. Image courtesy of Maria Morca.

\[54\] Morca, *Maria Morca’s Belly Dance - Work Kit - Basic Course*, 92.
and Middle Eastern music in its chapters. The final publication included detailed images of instruments and various descriptions of Arabic and Middle Eastern musical traditions that related to the performance of various styles of belly dance.

While Morca’s discussion of belly dance’s history and cultural contexts are problematic from a contemporary academic perspective (due to the work’s lack of substantiation with reputable primary and secondary source evidence and its perpetuation of popular Western spiritualist belly dance origin-myth), her engagement with these issues in her book indicate an intense concern for meaningful engagement with the form beyond common stereotypes about sexy harem dances. The expertise of Sawa and the musicians who helped create the LP provided perspectives on Middle Eastern dance that complicated traditional Orientalist narratives about the form. Morca’s relationships with newcomers from the Middle East and her exposure to a multiplicity of attitudes about the dance form influenced her argument that belly dance has not historically been primarily about sexuality. Her assertion that dancers in North America needed to recognize belly dance’s history and position as social dance and as a folk dance in order to increase its respectability in the present-day stemmed from this. In the introduction to her book, she stated:

The Belly Dance. Is it a sexy wiggle? Does it drive men mad with passion? Is it instant physical fitness? Is it an art form? IS it merely something naughty? Each of these questions could be answered by yes, no or maybe.”

Morca recognized that belly dance was often presented in terms of sexuality in a variety of contexts (in the Middle East and North America), but she hoped that this could be changed. “If you want to be sexy, undo some buttons on your shirt,” she suggested. The reader interested in

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55 Ibid., 11.
belly dance for “sex-tease,” according to Morca, had “picked up the wrong book.” Morca condemned contemporary dancers in North America who employed lures and teases in nightclub performances. She argued “playing the sultan” and excessively sexual floor work cheapened belly dance performances. Canada and the U.S. were locales where she felt the form could be redeemed to its imagined pristine, respectable origin point, by distancing it from overt sexuality.

Her discourse on belly dance’s meaning drew on Orientalist North American spiritual and spiritual-feminist understandings of belly dance. She argues within her book that not only did “sex-tease” performers cheapen a respectable art form and folk dance, but they also dishonoured a dance that had ancient origins as religious performance for deities. This spiritualist reclamation of belly dance will be discussed at length later in the chapter. Morca also argued the form in its ideal presentation, linked to this ancient origin point, was holistic self-expression. Her presentations of belly dance’s supposed ancient spiritual roots reified dominant Orientalist ideas about the inherently spiritual Middle East, and drew on contemporary spiritual-feminist discourse about belly dance popular in this period. Belly dance was not originally a sexy-dance for men, the argument went, but was originally a method of engaging with the ancient divine feminine that predated history, and perhaps even all other forms of dance. However limited, Morca’s discussion of belly dance in connection to folkloric dances and Middle Eastern music and history encouraged meaningful cultural engagement.

Eddy Manneh, the second individual to open a dance school with dedicated belly dance classes in Toronto, also tried to achieve increased respectability for Middle Eastern dance in

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56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 51.
58 Ibid., 23.
59 Morca, interview, 8.
Toronto, but his approaches differed from those of Morca. Eddy Manneh was born in Lebanon and began dancing socially from a young age. He studied Psychology at the American University of Beirut and worked as an occupational therapist. Often, he would incorporate dance into his treatments. In 1955, his brother Freddy founded Freddy’s Dance Academy in Beirut. Eddy claims Freddy did this with the intention of bringing choreography to oriental dancers in order to elevate professional and public belly dance in Lebanon, which was then associated with drinking and seduction. When Freddy passed away in 1960, Eddy took over the school. He also taught “Rhythmic classes in Physical Fitness” at the American University of Beirut between 1963 and 1967. Eddy recalled it was a struggle to achieve any interest for the raqs sharqi classes in Lebanon because “they used to have a picture of the [professional] dancer as a prostitute.”

The 1967 War drove Manneh to Canada for a year. While in Toronto, Manneh saw belly dance performed at the Blue Orchid, and a variety of other venues. Manneh was shocked by Canadian belly dance performances that incorporated strip-tease. While professional performers in Lebanon often had sexually promiscuous reputations, strip-tease was socially unacceptable and not associated with public raqs sharqi performance. He returned to Lebanon and continued teaching a variety of dance forms after his brief stay in Canada. In 1975, he returned to Canada, but this time with the intention of staying permanently, in part because during the Lebanese Civil War, Manneh’s Academy in Beirut was riddled with bullet holes and rendered unusable. He stated that he returned to Canada, “determined to, you know, fight. To

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61 Manneh, interview, 1.
63 Manneh, interview, 14.
64 Ibid., 3.
make the dance more appreciated.”

He wanted to remove the vulgarity associated with belly dance in popular culture in North America and Lebanon. He was intent on separating public belly dance performances from strip-tease and assumed sexual availability.

In December of 1975, he opened Chez Freddy Dance Academy at Bloor and Church in Toronto. By 1976, Manneh had two studio locations teaching belly dance. His advertising had a different tone from Morca’s earlier write-ups, which often centred on fitness. Manneh drew on his Lebanese identity in marketing and played up Orientalist stereotype when it was advantageous to him. His decision to utilize imagery of harems, and the ancient, mysterious East in his advertising may have been strategic, as he knew it would appeal to Canadian audiences. Kathleen Fraser recalled a programme for Manneh’s 1981 student production, “El Hareem” an illustration of Manneh’s use of Orientalist imagery in classes and student presentations.

Manneh placed a nineteenth-century Orientalist painting on the pamphlets cover, featuring a black woman fanning an apparent odalisque. Inside, the pamphlet read:

> It is an ancient tradition among Moslem peoples that the wives and concubines of the Pasha should live in utmost seclusion and privacy. This female world of the harem is therefore a place of high passion, as the women vie for the attention of the Pasha—each one by her beauty and charm seeking to become his favourite…Exotic, centuries-old customs, which are deeply woven into the fabric of Middle-Eastern life, each has a place in the expression of the dance.

He utilized in this pamphlet the negative image of the dancer as a sexual object while stating again and again in interviews from this period and later that he hoped to overcome this imagery. He presented dancers as objects in a harem in many student recitals and reinforced the popular

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66 Manneh, interview, 3.
North American idea of the harem-world as a sexual paradise for men. This echoed the harem-play found in Morca’s early classes. While he spoke about making the form respectable, he continued to reinforce norms which objectified women in performance and presented the Middle East as primarily a land of fantasy.

However, unlike Morca, Manneh did not support students who wanted to explore other avenues of Middle Eastern dance education beyond his school. Kathleen Fraser, who began classes with Manneh in the 1970s recalled:

My teacher, Eddy Manneh, despite his Middle-Eastern birth and heritage, seems to have had scant knowledge of the history of the dance beyond a sense of the lives of Egyptian dance stars of the 1940s onward, and showed little feeling for the deepness of folk dance traditions. Further, his fear lest a student learn outside of his circumscribed framework kept us ignorant of the little good information available… he did not allow us to use his collection of dance tapes as study materials, and we saw them briefly and only rarely, at special dance workshops.71

These workshops and classes were not free. Manneh’s desire for financial security and, Fraser suggests, his need to be in a position of control over students, meant he provided very limited education for students which, at times, further perpetuated Orientalist and certain heteronormative stereotypes about belly dance. His utilization of harem and Arabian-fantasy imagery appear to have been the result of commonly accepted oral histories of belly dance’s origins or history within the Levant region, or a common acculturation tactic and strategic positioning of belly dance within North American Orientalist traditions. Pressed on by the desire to acculturate and to be successful in a context beset by prejudice, Manneh accessed this imagery in a bid for success.

71 Ibid., 424.
While he felt belly dance’s earliest origins were pure, spiritual, pre-historic, and emotional, many of his choreographies placed belly dance in a harem. His consistent discussion of harem-dance had the potential of negatively impacting white Canadian students’ already prejudiced perceptions of the Middle East. Manneh found it financially viable to appropriate and perpetuate the Western Orientalist discourse. As Manneh was often unsupportive of students who sought dance-related education outside of his direct control, many students were not exposed to anything far beyond Manneh’s presentations of the dance form’s history.

Manneh, however, was effective in other ways at linking men and women in Canada with modern belly dance as it was occurring in Lebanon and in the wider Middle East. Some of his teaching decisions challenged North American coding of belly dance as essentially and only feminine. For example, one of his earliest classes in Canada was an all-male belly dance class. Manneh, who had just come from Lebanon, recalled classes for men in belly dance becoming very popular in Lebanon; why not in Canada? He suggested that belly dance was useful for both Canadian men and women who could make use of the movements in social dancing at nightclubs. In a time when the media mocked men who participated in feminine-coded leisure and fitness, this was a bold move. Male participation in belly dance was consistently presented in North America as an amusement or joke, but Manneh’s class and his own life stood against this. He related in his interview that he constantly danced, and his numerous Canadian television appearances during the 1970s and 1980s often included him dancing alongside members of his troupes. Manneh encouraged men to participate in belly dance socially in Canada at a time when

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72 Hopper, “Men Swivel into Belly-Dancing,” 1.
the dominant narrative claimed the form was only ever feminine. His own positionality as a male dancer and choreographer rendered him sympathetic to this cause.

Further establishing himself as the source of Middle Eastern dance experience and knowledge, Manneh also brought guest artists in from Lebanon and Egypt to perform for students and to teach. This action also encouraged contemporary transcultural dance education and exchange.\textsuperscript{74} One of these teachers was Lebanese dancer Nadia Gamal, who stayed and taught in Toronto for a period in 1977.\textsuperscript{75} Gamal was interviewed for a piece in the \textit{Toronto Star} where she stated she was visiting North America because she was unhappy with how belly dancing was being done in North America. Like Morca, Gamal was unhappy that girls in North America seemed to love exploring their own bodies, or the costuming, but were not interested in seriously exploring the dance.\textsuperscript{76} She felt she was needed in North America, at Freddy’s Academy, because audiences here needed this education and training. Belly dance for her was not just about the costume and the body, it was also about beautiful joy in artistic dance expression. Gamal did not have any issue with connecting belly dance to ancient harems, she argued it was a harem dance where women performed to try and achieve position. She was more upset by the contemporary refusal of many to accept belly dance as respectable art.

Morca and Manneh both utilized Orientalist narratives about belly dance and its history to encourage students to attend classes. By appealing to ideas of harems, ancient spirituality, and beauty, they were able to secure interest in the dance form. Their presentation of belly dance as fun fitness for North American women ended up reinforcing heteronormative values which

\textsuperscript{74} Manneh sponsored and brought over Nadia Gamal and Nagwa Fouad, among other dancers. “Prof Eddy Manneh & Freddy’s Dance Academy Proudly Presents World Renowned Egyptian Belly Dancer Nagwa Fouad,” \textit{The Toronto Star}, May 12, 1984, H12; Conlogue, “Retelling 1,001 Nights- No, It’s Not Called Belly-Dancing.”

\textsuperscript{75} Conlogue, “Retelling 1,001 Nights- No, It’s Not Called Belly-Dancing,” 12.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
stressed the importance of women’s body shape, and the importance of performative femininity. Still, both instructors also challenged certain stereotypical narratives about belly dance through their recreational classes in their own ways. For example, Morca’s publication and use of her book, and Manneh’s decision to provide belly dance classes for men.

Diana Calenti, the third instructor to open a major belly dance instructional centre in Toronto also both reinforced and challenged stereotypical elements of belly dance representation in classes. She also introduced clear hybridization of belly dance with Western dance styles, like ballet, in a way that Morca and Manneh did not. She presented yet another method of encouraging popular recreational belly dance. Around 1976, this was evident in Diana Calenti’s newly founded Middle Eastern dance studio in Toronto. Calenti was a trained ballet dancer and choreographer who had been informally studying oriental dance through social performance since the late 1960s. Calenti’s Dance Orientale School on Richmond became home to her unique fusion of Middle Eastern and balletic technique. She choreographed ballet-styled narrative pieces and hoped to help her students achieve complete control of their bodies through balletic and other Western dance techniques. At Calenti’s academy, she did not encourage dancers to bare their midriffs, and her performances avoided cabaret feeling, sequins, and skin. The oriental dance performances put on by Calenti’s students almost always had a story line, often in similar fashion to ballet. Also, every class included regimented stretching and practices, again reminiscent of ballet, or other Western dance classes. Calenti hoped to train students who could perform in a way that was unobstructed by cabaret style costuming and its associated sexualisation. Her association of belly dance with the already “respectable” form of ballet was

78 Ibid.; Karima, interview, 7.
79 Karima, interview, 5.
also important in her presentation of the form as respectable. Her attempt at achieving respectability laid in accessing Western classicization, which will be explored at length in her choreographies.

**Recreational Spiritual and Feminist Contextualization**

During the 1970s, these popular belly dance classes also often became the site of conflicting articulations of various spiritual and feminist ideals. The dominant objectifying narrative of belly dance’s usefulness in achieving the ideal feminine body and its usefulness in garnering male attention remained, but increasingly instructors were also describing belly dance as a way to access powerful, ancient, universal, and essentialized femininity. Again, to “redeem” the form from its deviant sexuality, many Western female practitioners argued it was not originally a dance crafted to meet male fantasies in harems, but instead something much older and spiritual that had been corrupted.

This alignment of belly dance with the ideals of certain segments of the various feminist movements was not natural or inevitable. While certain feminists came to believe belly dance was key to feminine empowerment during this period, this was certainly not a unanimous vision. For example, Yasmina Ramzy’s mother who had been active as a feminist, and had introduced her daughter to the work of Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and Gloria Steinem from an early age, was perplexed when Ramzy became a professional belly dancer.\(^8\) Ramzy recalled that her mother seemed to wonder, at first, where she had gone wrong. Ramzy recalled her mother, and many other feminist activists from her mother’s era perceived belly dancers as women who were objectified and exploited. These were women controlled by men, sexual objects who would

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never be valued as equals.\textsuperscript{81} Belly dance was a dance made to exploit women, according to this logic, and subsequently many belly dancers faced patronizing depictions as victims or were even condemned for encouraging the patriarchal objectification of the female body.\textsuperscript{82}

However, certain women active in various feminist movements began to draw on deeply entrenched stereotypes about Middle Eastern spirituality to try and distance belly dance from “exploitive” sexualisation in order to claim belly dance performance as an ancient element of women’s power and liberation. Kathleen Fraser argues that in doing this many North American women began to recreate belly dance in their own image, with the goal of feminine power and equity in mind.\textsuperscript{83} This pattern of positioning belly dance as feminist and spiritual emerged alongside rising interest in feminist activism during the 1960s and 1970s. Early feminist articulations of belly dance’s empowering and spiritual power emerged early on in the United States. It was evident in the work of Ida Craddock at the turn of the twentieth century, who argued belly dance had a role in ancient religious worship and feminine liberation and power.\textsuperscript{84} The Western narrative focusing on belly dance’s spirituality, and specifically its feminine spirituality, was further strengthened in the work of dancer La Meri (1899-1988), an American dancer and choreographer who was the first recorded American woman to study oriental dance in the Middle East. She too came to believe oriental dance had religious meaning. Her reasoning stemmed from her own reading, and her experiences studying dance in Fez, Morocco during the 1930s with a woman of Jewish descent named Fatima who had, earlier in her life, been a

\textsuperscript{81} Dworkin, \textit{Body Panic Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness}, 30.
\textsuperscript{82} Commercialized sex culture was facing widespread critique from feminists beginning in the 1960s who argued it primarily exploited women. The Orientalist depiction of belly dance which highlighted women as men’s harem playthings, they argued, only reinforced systemic violence against women. Carolyn Bronstein, \textit{Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976–1986} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–2.
\textsuperscript{83} Fraser, “Learning Belly Dance in Toronto: Pyramids, Goddesses and Other Weird Stuff,” 429.
\textsuperscript{84} Ida Craddock, New York World, August 13, 1893, pg. 17, quoted in Chappell, \textit{Sexual Outlaw, Erotic Mystic}. 
favoured dancer of Morocco’s Moulay Yusuf. La Meri believed that the form was ritualistic, connected with birth, and that men were not to see the dance in this ritual form. Accounts of oriental dance’s connection to birth in any sort of ritualistic sense are very few and unreliable, but they captured popular Western imagination. The East’s assumed spiritual potency amongst many in North America coloured perceptions of Middle Eastern dance early in its introduction to the continent. But, it was with the repositioning of belly dance in alignment with spiritualized feminism that made space to draw Western women into recreational practice of the form.

Belly dance’s success as a form of recreation amongst American women during the 1970s was made possible through this orientalist feminist “reclamation.” Amira Jarmakani points out that white women undertook a movement in popular belly dance classes and literature to reorient the form with primordial ideas about female power and sexuality. Virginia Keft-Kennedy similarly shows how in belly dance how-to books, which became popular during the 1970s, authors were complicit “with cultural pressures about women’s vigilance in monitoring the body’s contours or appearance, was to explore the pleasures of the belly-dancing body in motion.” She argues that the authors of belly dance how-to books, in complex and contradictory ways, were trying to encourage women to find a place for expression and self-empowerment through this dance by utilizing Orientalist language and imagery; the exotic flexibility, strength, and sexual display could be for men, but it also could be for the woman herself. Keft-Kennedy shows how these how-to book authors both engaged with dominant narratives about belly dance’s role in enhancing feminine attractiveness (and objectification).

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alongside empowering feminist narratives about goddess feminism, self-discovery, and self-enjoyment through dance.\textsuperscript{89} Various overlapping and contested feminist co-options of this style of dance were essential in its proliferation as recreation amongst Western women in North America.

A 1974 article in the \textit{Globe and Mail} picked up from the \textit{New York Times Service} entitled “Degraded ritual: It used to be the belly dance, now it’s the liberated shimmy” began:

Back in the good old days of matriarchy, the Earth Mother Goddess’s favorite form of worship is said to have been the belly dance. And who knows, the Earth Mother may have been gazing down upon the National Organization for Women’s Centre here… she must have been pleased to see all those feminists doing the liberated shimmy."\textsuperscript{90}

Daniela Gioseffi, a poet, playwright, and active feminist advocated for a repositioning of belly dance in popular North American culture. She would later publish an entire book outlining her thesis, entitled \textit{Earth Dancing} in 1980. In 1974, however, this article reveals her ideas showcased in \textit{Earth Dancing} were already well formed. Gioseffi believed belly dance was a vehicle for female liberation. She felt that its current presentation as “ancient harem dance of bondage” needed to be replaced with what she argued was its original, pure form, as an ancient expression of essential femininity and joy.\textsuperscript{91} She suggested belly dance was created “by women for women” in honour of a woman’s reproductive abilities, in conjunction with pre-historical Goddess worship.\textsuperscript{92} She declared, “The belly dance was part of our cultural heritage. It had been perverted by the sexist, patriarchal society into a burlesque of the female body.”\textsuperscript{93} Although she meant all

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} There is no known reliable historical data that can substantiate this claim.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{New York Times Service}, “Degraded Ritual: It Used to Be the Belly Dance, Now It’s the Liberated Shimmy,” W7.
women everywhere in her use of “our cultural heritage,” in effect, the reality was that she was referencing white American women. Women like Gioseffi were advocating a new, spiritual-feminist focus for enjoyment of belly dance. Feminist “reclamation” of belly dance during the 1970s focused on distancing the form from performance for male enjoyment, and often as the 1970s wore on, the shaming and condemnation of women who transgressed into performance of strip-tease or burlesque. This was, in many ways, a white middle and upper class feminist appropriation of belly dance to its own ends. This “elevation” and “reclamation” rhetoric often tied belly dance to the honourable goals of fitness and feminism to try and gain respectability for the form in North American popular culture.  

Amira Jarmakani notes the feminist reclamation of belly dance as an ancient, powerful medium for connecting with pre-historical femininity was to be found in the majority of belly dance literature in North America during the 1970s. This literature shows remarkable connection with goddess feminism, the Goddess movement, and other neo-pagan beliefs which were becoming increasingly popular in the 1960s and 1970s. Various, non-codified beliefs which prized female deities and grounded themselves in narratives about prehistorical matriarchal goddess-worship or ecofeminism gained popularity during what is commonly referred to as the second-wave feminist period. Jarmakani argues that certain feminists’ association of belly dance practice with childbirth and goddess worship, in particular, was a way in which white women deliberately formed a belly dance identity that bypassed, or ignored cultural and racial  

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95 Ibid., 158.
histories and differences.\textsuperscript{97} The only way for \textit{all} women to gain liberation from the patriarchy’s control of the belly dancer as sex-object was to embrace the form’s prehistoric feminine power, where a woman could relish her own power and performance.\textsuperscript{98} This goddess-narrative made belly dance something universal, and not distinctly Middle Eastern. This sort of universal goddess-feminist narrative was very popular in belly dance literature from the 1970s and carried on in popularity throughout the 1980s (and in many areas, to the present day). For example, in Toronto, Yasmina Ramzy, in her opening and advertising of Arabesque Dance Academy in Toronto consistently presented belly dance in connection to concepts of ancient and universal femininity in her choreographic endeavours, although she also made certain to ground this femininity in various cultural and historical contexts. Early advertisements for her school and pamphlets from early performances however still consistently focused on ideas like ancient femininity, womanhood, and sisterhood.\textsuperscript{99} Often narratives about universal sisterhood are engaged to present belly dance as accessible to women who, otherwise, have no cultural connection to belly dance, but this is not always so. While goddess-feminist narratives about belly dance have been used to justify considerable cultural appropriation, they also have been meaningful spiritual practices that have encouraged dancers to meaningfully engage with the histories and cultures of the Middle East, as is the case with the work of Ramzy.

Multiple dancers, both recreational and professional during the 1970s and 1980s, consistently expressed the feeling that belly dance’s femininity and strength was part of its draw. For example, Susan Evans who began taking belly dance classes at a Georgetown YMCA after

\textsuperscript{97} Jarmakani, “Belly Dancing for Liberation: A Critical Interpretation of Reclamation Rhetoric in the American Belly Dance Community,” 158.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 159.
witnessing a class in progress in 1972, described this feeling in her articulation of her first exposure to belly dance. She recalled being drawn to a room by the music. When she saw women performing belly dance in homemade skirts and veils, she was transfixed.\textsuperscript{100} It was not the beauty of the costumes that drew her in she recalled, but the feeling of the movement. “It felt mysterious, it felt very, like, primal…earthy, primal feminine, like you’re expressing yourself.”\textsuperscript{101} In this same period, Maria Morca’s studio was presenting belly dance as something “unquestionably and frankly female.”\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, outside of Manneh’s classes, there were no belly dance classes in Toronto specifically designed to encourage the participation of male students during the 1970s.

As a result of this essentialist depiction of belly dance as inherently female, it is not surprising that some aligned belly dance with women’s liberation and empowerment. Many women utilized language about their classes and within classes that sought to empower women or to present belly dance as a feminist action. Central to Susan Evan’s teaching ethos (once she began instructing her own classes in Georgetown in 1975) was bodily empowerment for women:

> For me, it was about empowerment, empowering yourself. Because as a British woman, I was raised to believe that women should be quiet, pregnant and barefoot in the kitchen, not speak up, we didn’t really have a choice that you were subservient to your husband. And I always felt I was missing out on me, so when I found the dance for me, that was what I wanted to bring to the women. For them, even if they only ever did it in their bedroom or living room. That they could somehow find more who they were as a woman. Their sensuality, their sexuality, their femininity. And the joy as well, of just being free to move and to dance.\textsuperscript{103}

Belly dance classes were where women were given a safe space to “speak up” through their bodies. Evans felt it was a place of freedom that did not force shame on a woman because of her

\textsuperscript{100} Karima, interview, 3.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{102} Whelan, “At This School, Graduation Means Undulation,” 5.
\textsuperscript{103} Karima, interview, 9.
sensuality and sexuality, but instead, encouraged a woman to explore all aspects of herself and take pride in them. For many recreational dancers who performed in safe class spaces, in their living rooms, and amongst other dancers, belly dance was about this concept of universal feminine freedom and acceptance.\textsuperscript{104} The ideal of universal female empowerment expressed in belly dance classes, however, was typically not very intersectional.

\textbf{Recreational Dance’s Growing Dissonance from the Professional Belly Dance Scene}

As recreational belly dance classes grew in popularity and developed their own narratives regarding the meaning and importance of belly dance that had little parallel to the meanings for the form in Middle Eastern communities, a dissonance emerged. Recreational belly dance classes were becoming and producing their own styles of belly dance with meanings presented in ways unique to North American contexts (belly dance as primarily about self-love, feminism, fitness, etc.). White women filled classes as these messages resonated with them. Also, white women, more commonly than other groups in Canada, had the privilege of leisure time and financial stability to pursue these recreational classes and the ideals of freedom and beauty they promised.\textsuperscript{105} Keft-Kennedy notes that in popular how-to books published on belly dance in the late 1960s and early 1970s in North America, authors consistently assumed readers were white, Western women.\textsuperscript{106} Professional dancers who had learned through direct contact with newcomers from the Middle East often felt out of place in the primarily white-female world of recreational classes. Yasmina Ramzy, who opened her studio Arabesque Academy School of Middle Eastern Dance in 1987, felt largely out of touch with the recreational dance world that had evolved in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104] Professional dancers did not have the luxury of dancing only for enjoyment or to increase self-esteem. These dancers had their bodies, costuming, and personal grooming scrutinized.
\item[105] Dworkin, \textit{Body Panic Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness}, 32.
\end{footnotes}
North America, since her dance education and experience had come as a direct result of her time as a nightclub and hotel dancer for Arab audiences in Canada and the Middle East.\textsuperscript{107} Although she accessed universalizing feminist narratives in her advertising, she was also very concerned about maintaining strong transnational and intercultural linkages with local and international artists of Middle Eastern origin. This was likely in part because she had spent the years just prior to this performing belly dance professionally in Jordan and Syria. Very Western narratives of ideal international womanhood were presented alongside a dance education that was grounded in the styles and cultures of Egypt and other areas of the Middle East.

She did this in part because she felt belly dance classes in North America were becoming increasingly isolated from contact with Middle Eastern communities. By the 1980s, belly dance teaching had really become big business for many teachers who appealed to recreational dancers across North American. Ibrahim Farrah and the Salimpours made considerable income by selling choreographies across the country in workshops that would be used by amateur students in non-professional shows and \textit{haflas} aimed at their belly dance communities.\textsuperscript{108} These insulated recreational belly dance communities (primarily populated by white women) performed for one another in these shows, and in many cases, had little contact with men and women from Middle Eastern dance’s origin cultures (often with the exception of instructors).\textsuperscript{109}

Certainly, some classes were sites of appropriation that served to separate dancers from Canada’s Middle Eastern communities. This was especially true of classes taught by instructors with no connection to Middle Eastern communities or instructors. Yasmina Ramzy believed many within groups like this across Canada and the U.S. in the early 1980s were not interested in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{107} Ramzy, interview, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 33.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
learning from the Arab communities; Ramzy felt many were in their “own little world.”\textsuperscript{110} She felt as though the American and Canadian recreational scenes did not embrace her, or other dancers like her, who were “already working for the Arabs.” “We weren’t part of their world… it wasn’t until much, much later that people began to make the association, well, this is Middle Eastern dance, why don’t I start learning it from the Middle East?”\textsuperscript{111} Even this chapter has indicated many recreational dancers were more interested in dress up and reclaiming universal womanhood than they were in engaging with the histories and cultures of the Middle East. The recreational belly dance scene’s ability to insulate Western dancers from direct contact with the “other” while encouraging Orientalist engagement with the imagery of the “other” appeared to have been a part of its draw for many Western women.

Although certain classes and instructors may have encouraged this insularity, it was not the only norm. Many instructors consistently made efforts to connect dancers directly to instructors and settings that encouraged bridging with members of Toronto’s Middle Eastern communities. For example, in the 1970s Susan Evans learned to play finger cymbals with George Sawa because Diana Calenti had asked him to teach her students; Calenti wanted her students to learn how to work with musicians and to understand Middle Eastern music. Even more importantly she felt it was essential that her dancers learn Middle Eastern musicality directly from the musicians (many of whom were immigrants to Canada from the Middle East).\textsuperscript{112} George Sawa worked with many of the belly dance instructors in the city of Toronto, offering his great historical and musical knowledge to hundreds of students over the years. Sawa’s remarkable educational influence on generations of dancers cannot be understated.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{112} Karima, interview, 12.
Many dancers felt as though they were engaging in an activity that could draw them into new communities. For example, Maria Marinos, whose husband was Greek, always felt a desire to join her husband, family, and friends in traditional Greek dances at family gatherings. Her background is unclear, but she had no knowledge of Greek social dancing and was unable to participate. She began to take belly dancing classes “to get some excitement into her life,” but found that her studies allowed her to engage in social dance within her extended Greek family for the first time. Her husband was so proud of her, as after taking belly dance classes Marinos felt comfortable enough to dance in front of her husband’s family, and to now join in on social tsifteteli.\textsuperscript{113} While there was certainly a growing dissonance between dancers who were working within Middle Eastern communities and the recreational classes marketed primarily towards white Canadians, there were still some instances of cultural engagement and bridging occurring within recreational settings. However, the norms of Orientalism and stereotype still tended to dominate recreational class presentations and understandings of belly dance.

Conclusion

Belly dance classes emerged in Toronto during the 1970s, marketed to white Canadian women as a way to keep fit and slender while having some exotic fun. Professional dancers or teachers with backgrounds in both belly dance (and often a variety of other dance forms) spearheaded the opening of classes and studios that specialized in belly dance. These classes were places that alternately challenged and reified both heteronormative gender roles and Orientalist stereotypes. Belly dance’s refashioning for popular Western female consumption produced a new social form of recreation and fitness leisure unique to its North American

\textsuperscript{113} King, “Little Egypt’s Legacy: Grandma Thought Belly Dancing Was Sinful; It’s Sure More Fun than Push-Ups,” 18.
context. Various teachers working in Toronto both perpetuated and challenged a variety of Orientalist stereotypes. As recreational belly dance was geared primarily to white audiences, there was a growing dissonance between the “world” of recreational belly dance and the “world” of professional dancers who worked, often, for primarily Middle Eastern audiences. Many classes became places where belly dance instruction was fused with feminist, feminist-spiritualist, or even goddess narratives about the dance form’s meaning and purpose. While some classes and instructors were insular and served to maintain problematic prejudices amongst white Canadians, others were places that allowed for complex, uneven cultural bridging with members of Toronto’s Middle Eastern communities.
CHAPTER VII: Conclusion

Both archival research and oral history interviews with twelve individuals involved in Toronto’s post-war belly dance scene indicate belly dance became very popular in the period between 1950 and 1989 in Toronto. But, the process in which belly dance became embedded in Toronto’s entertainment and recreational landscape had roots in the nineteenth century, when live Middle Eastern dance performances made their North American debuts. In early fairs and expositions, danse du ventre achieved infamy and popularity. These early North American performances were possible thanks to the transnational movement of dancers from the Middle East to North America. Critics and fans focused on the form’s racialized presentations of sexuality, although some dissenting voices (like Ida Craddock) also attempted to construct Orientalist anthropological or spiritual defenses for the dance form’s respectability. Men and women from the Middle East who performed belly dance in North America were forced to navigate both the stigma placed on dancers within their own communities and in their new discriminatory North American context.

Danse du ventre was popular at the turn of the century. Many North American dancers also began to learn Middle Eastern belly dance movement because it was in great demand. Hybrid dance forms developed, including cooch performance and belly dance strip-tease. Moral outrage on the part of progressive-era reformers only fanned the flames of interest danse du ventre. They could not stop a growing impulse amongst white North American artists and audiences to use the body of the racialized other to push the borders of rigid Victorian gender and sexual norms. Once these images of exotified, sexualized, even spiritualized belly dance were presented in Hollywood films, they became immortalized. Hollywood’s early twentieth-century
and mid-twentieth century renditions of the belly dancer would have a lasting impact on understandings of what belly dance was for many North Americans.

Films including belly dance were popular in the first half of the twentieth century, but by the Second World War, interest in cooch and danse du ventre’s live performance had waned significantly. After the war, however, growing transnational linkages made way for entertainment intersections between the Middle East and North America and for interest in live belly dance performances. Growing American and Canadian political involvement in the Middle East also made way for increased interest in the region. It was during the 1940s that Hollywood began offering up classic Orientalist film featuring belly dance, and in the 1950s that internationally popular belly dance stars Samia Gamal of Egypt and Nejla Ateş of Turkey toured and performed in both Canada and America. These stars negotiated the very sexualized, and at times overtly racist, ways in which their performances were advertised or understood. Gamal and Ateş accessed and used Orientalist fantasy to the benefit of their international acting and dance careers. While Gamal advocated for nationalist respect for her art, Ateş was more comfortable embracing her position as ‘Turkish Delight,’ and the harem-charged imagery that came with it.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a growing demand for belly dance in Toronto, sparked in part the by form’s popularization in major American urban centres, and due to increased numbers of Middle Eastern immigrants to Toronto. Toronto clubs and restaurants featuring belly dance began popping up in the early 1960s. Early shows were often performed by dancers from the Middle East or by American dancers who were hired from the burgeoning Middle Eastern nightclubs scenes found in cities like New York. Quickly, Canadian dancers were also hired on and began learning on-the-job at a variety of Toronto establishments. While many early nightclub shows at hotels targeted primarily white audiences with burlesque-style lineups
featuring belly dancers and strippers, establishments hoping to cater to Middle Eastern audiences also emerged.

The popular North American association of belly dance with burlesque, cooch dance, and strip-tease did not sit well with many Middle Eastern audiences, and these styles quickly fell out of favour during the 1970s. Harem shows and strip-tease performances still existed, but these were generally geared towards Western audiences. Moves by dancers, musicians, and establishments to achieve respectability for belly dance in Toronto resulted in a slow disappearance of strip-tease belly dance performance, and a shift towards what many termed “authenticity” by trying to re-orient performances towards Middle Eastern movement and musical ideals. Still, even “authentic” performances geared for Middle Eastern audiences were consistently informed by transnational circulations and dancers’ positionalities.

The professional belly dance scene by the 1970s and well into the 1980s was dominated by white dancers. The prevalence of white dancers related directly to Canadian government policy and dominant societal values which ensured the continued privileging of whiteness. Early attempts to construct a more equitable and inclusive Canada were unsuccessful at dismantling this hegemony. This was even though the construction of a pluralist Canadian identity founded on the ideal of equity and intercultural connection became increasingly popular during this period, especially after the government’s implementation of official multiculturalism policy in 1971.

The inability of multiculturalism policy to solve Canada’s discrimination issues was evident in belly dance performances at multicultural festivals like Metro Toronto International Caravan. When belly dance shows were given, they were often presented as an accessible dance
that could facilitate cultural bridging. However, while the ideal was equality, the way in which groups chose to present belly dance belied the inequities that were undercutting Canadian society and making the process of cultural interconnection fraught with imbalanced power dynamics. For instance, Anglo-Canadian dancers were key in numerous shows at Lebanese and Egyptian Caravan pavilions during the 1980s. Also during the 1980s, a white American dancer, Diana Calenti, oversaw a variety of (arguably Orientalist) representations of Egyptian dance at Egypt’s Luxor pavilions. But, these Middle Eastern communities actively sought to include white Canadian performers in their shows. Perhaps this was an attempt to access whiteness or to acculturate. In any case, this process of representation indicates the very political meaning belly dance presentations at Metro Toronto International Caravan took on.

During the 1970s and 1980s, belly dance became popular not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a popular form of recreation for a variety of Canadians. Thousands of white Torontonian women enrolled in classes over these decades as belly dance became attractive as a form of fitness for middle and upper class women. In Toronto, many teachers employed heteronormative ideals to present belly dance as a type of gendered fitness that could help women maintain their ideal figures and achieve male interest. Its previously salacious and dangerous sexual appeal was re-branded as acceptable as it was healthy and any titillation was now specifically for the enjoyment of a woman’s husband or boyfriend. She could take her classes, and then perform not for the public at a cabaret, but for the benefit of her own personal “sultan.”1 While many of these classes worked with Orientalist imagery, some early belly dance educators also sought to encourage intercultural bridging and engagement. Maria Morca, who headed the earliest belly dance studio classes in the city of Toronto advocated for a redemption

1 Johnstone, “How the Sultan of West Hill Was Smuggled into the Harem,” 68.
of belly dance from its maligned sexualisation, suggesting it was better understood as folk dance or in connection with ancient religious practice. Eddie Manneh, who opened his academies shortly after Morca, also argued for greater respect for belly dance, again, by connecting it to folklore and an unclear spiritual past. Even though both educators reified many Orientalist stereotypes in their teaching, they also encouraged students to move past superficial engagement with belly dance as the product of an imagined East. Morca and Manneh’s stress on students’ need to learn and understand Arabic music, for example, assisted students in breaking into deeper engagement with origin cultures.

It is as belly dance became popular as a form of recreation that feminist activists also began using belly dance and belly dance classes in messages about women’s empowerment. The already extant Orientalist association of Eastern movement with spirituality and essentialized womanhood aligned well with certain second wave feminist empowerment narratives. In the early 1970s, even the National Organization for Women in the U.S. began hosting belly dance instruction in a bid to achieve a universalized female reclamation of the feminine body and its gendered sensuality. Instructors in Toronto also accessed largely white-middle-class feminist reclamation language in a bid to use belly dance to unite and empower women universally.

In many Toronto classes, a growing disconnect grew between dancers and teachers who worked directly with Middle Eastern audiences and those who remained insulated amongst white middle and upper class communities. Insularity developed in some class settings, as white teachers taught white students with little interest or access to knowledge about the cultural origins of belly dance. However, some belly dance classes still provided a route for meaningful

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cultural bridging. Many performers and hobbyists remained connected to Middle Eastern communities in Toronto or participated in transnational flows themselves by travelling to or living and working in areas across the Middle East. Agency and control over the representation and meaning of belly dance in Toronto was shaped by newcomers from the Middle East, the U.S., Europe, and established Canadian citizens.

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Belly dance’s popularization in Toronto was complicated, uneven, and was often mired in racism and Orientalism; however, it was also a point of meaningful cultural bridging. Immigrants from the Middle East were instrumental in belly dance’s earliest popularization in Toronto, and for its later re-popularization after the Second World War. Nightclubs, restaurants, classes, and festivals were backdrops for the forging of meaningful relationships that brought Canadians and immigrants from a variety of backgrounds together in the enjoyment of this dance form. Dancers and instructors from the Middle East shared part of their cultural heritage with Canadians when they taught and performed. And just as professional white dancers did not always appropriate and stereotype in their work, dancers with Middle Eastern origins did not always produce work void of Orientalism. Representational choices made by all dancers were affected by Canada’s problematic social and political context which privileged whiteness. Thus, the Torontonian and perhaps wider Canadian belly dance scene that developed during this period was influenced by the concurrent growth of contested multicultural national ideals. This meant there was a discourse in place to support the growth of multiple styles of belly dance to flourish in Toronto. This reflected the growing diversity, especially within the city’s Middle Eastern and Mediterranean newcomer communities. Thus, there was no uniform development of one form of
Canadian cabaret belly dance during this period, but instead the blossoming of multiple individual styles influenced by complex transnational encounters.
APPENDIX A: Interview Question Set Base

This was the base set of questions utilized to frame the majority of the oral history interviews.

General Information

1. Date of Birth
2. Place of Birth
3. Date of arrival in Canada
4. Ethnic Identity/Identities
5. Religious identity/identities (please indicate if there has been change over time)
6. Languages spoken
7. Gender
8. Education

Belly Dance Education

9. Where/when did you first see belly dance, and what impact did it have on you?
10. Why did you begin belly dancing?
11. Who was your first teacher? Where/When did you begin to learn?
12. Were any of your subsequent teachers immigrants to Canada? Or visiting from other countries? From where? When did you train with them?
13. Who were some of your most valued teachers, and why?
14. What was the first belly dance "style" you began to learn?
15. Do you remember the first book/books you read on belly dance? How did they impact you?
16. Do you remember the first instructional video you saw on belly dance? Did you use video in your learning?
17. How did your belly dance education impact you financially?

Teaching
18. When and where did you begin teaching belly dance?

19. When was the first time you travelled to teach/offer workshops out of the country?

20. How did teaching impact you financially when you first started? Has it changed over time?

21. What were your central educational goals in your role as a belly dance instructor when you started?

22. Are these goals you have now, different than the ones you had when you first began teaching?

23. What resources did you make use of in your early days as a teacher? (Books? Music? Video?)

24. How have resources changed over time?

Performance

25. Do you remember your first public performance of belly dance?

26. Did you take on a stage name? If so, why?

27. What were the main kinds of "gigs" did you do early in your career (costuming/sets differed, how)? Did the types of gigs you undertook change over time? If so, why?

28. Was belly dance ever your primary form of work? If so, when.

29. When did you first perform outside of Canada?

30. What venues sorts of performances were your favourites, and why? What types of performance did you dislike and why?

31. What are your main audiences for your performances when you first started performing? Have the demographics/types of performances you do changed over time?

32. Have you ever performed belly dance in shows/festivals related to "multiculturalism"? If so, when and where? Do you know if these were government funded at all?

33. Have prices/costs involving belly dance changed over the years? For example, has costuming become more expensive, or cheaper, workshops, classes? Etc.?

Belly Dance Styles
34. When you began dancing, what was your first understanding of the dance form's origins? Have your ideas about belly dance origins/history changed over time?

35. When/how did you first hear about issues of "orientalism" in relationship to belly dance?

36. After being exposed to this concept, or discussions about it, did it impact your performance or participation in oriental dance?

37. When/how did you first hear about issues of "authenticity" in relationship to belly dance?

38. After being exposed to this concept, or discussions about it, did it impact your performance or participation in oriental dance?

39. I have been calling this dance form a few names- belly dance, oriental dance, but there are many other "catch all" terms- Middle Eastern dance, raqs sharqi, dans orientale, etc. When you first started dancing, what term was most popular?

40. Has terminology changed over time in Canada, and why?

41. Have your personal terminology choices changed over time?

42. When you first began dancing, was there a connection between the Canadian oriental dance "scene" and the American "scene?" Has this connection (or lack of connection) changed over time?

43. When you first began dancing was Southern Ontario connected to a global belly dance community? Egypt? Broader M.E? The US? Europe? Did connectedness of this region or of you/your studio grow over time?

44. Was S. Ontario an important place for workshops/festivals? Connected? Disconnected? Examples?

45. Have you ever connected your dance to political activism? (Fundraising for human rights support/lobbying government for action in the ME)

46. Have you ever used dance to support charity organizations/movements? When, why?

47. When did you first receive government funding here in Canada to support your work related to belly dance? (Federal, Provincial, Municipal?)

48. Since that first time, have you had other instances of government funding for belly dance?

The World and Politics

49. When you first began dancing was Southern Ontario connected to a global belly dance community? Egypt? Broader M.E? The US? Europe? Did connectedness of this region or of you/your studio grow over time?

50. Was S. Ontario an important place for workshops/festivals? Connected? Disconnected? Examples?

51. Have you ever connected your dance to political activism? (Fundraising for human rights support/lobbying government for action in the ME)

52. Have you ever used dance to support charity organizations/movements? When, why?
49. How do you think the Canadian government/arts organizations viewed belly dance when you started dancing? Has this changed over time?

50. When did you first hear "multiculturalism" used in relationship to teaching/performing belly dance?

Religion and Belly Dance

51. When you first began dancing, did belly dance have a spiritual meaning for you?

52. How did your dancing relate to your religious beliefs/life when you first began?

53. How did your faith community reacted to your participation in belly dance?

54. Did friends/family/acquaintances/audience members react from a religious/spiritual standpoint to your dance?

55. Have you ever performed in a place of religious meeting, or importance? (In a church, temple, etc.)? If so why/when?

56. Have you ever performed or danced in a religious context? (Church pageant, worship service, zaar ritual)

57. When you first started dancing did you feel that there was a spiritual community in the belly dance world globally, locally? Did you feel a community grow over time, how did this happen, if at all?

Gender

58. When you first started dancing, how did you feel belly dance related to gender? Has your perception changed over time?

59. Have you ever considered yourself a feminist or been politically active regarding issues of gender/sexuality? (When/how)

60. When did you first see a male belly dancer perform? What was your reaction?
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